

Martial Unity 1581

Chapter 1581: Blackout

By the time he returned home, he felt psychologically tired, even if his body and mind were brimming with energy. The presentation hadn't been very long, but it drained his energy a lot, simply the subconscious pressure that it put on him with its sheer importance and the importance of the people evaluating it drained him quite a bit.

"Looks like my baby is quite tired," Lashara patted his head gently. "Get some rest. You've been running around doing all sorts of things even though you just came home."

"A lot that I can't ignore has been happening," Rui heaved a sigh. "I also need to go shopping to purchase some good formal suits."

He hadn't forgotten the invitation to the reception being held by the Raemina Foundation. Given that it was much more formal than the meeting that he had just concluded with the Martial Prince, he would need to be much more prepared.

"Take Alice with you, she loves shopping and I'm sure she'll be able to pick some wonderful suits for you," Lashara replied gently.

"Will do, mom," Rui heaved a sigh.

The following days were more relaxed. He and Julian did indeed take Alice with them to go shopping. Rui hadn't worn formal attire for so long that he had lost all fashion sense about what would be suitable and what wouldn't.

He took them all to a premium luxury fashion store in the heart of the Town of Hajin. An experience that was new to both Alice and Julian. Once they realized just who Rui was, the staff of the shop immediately tended to them, taking measurements before narrowing down on style and other minutiae.

That day, both Rui and Julian came close to death.

"Hmmmmm, this is not bad," Alice muttered. "But it doesn't match your hair."

"This is too colorful."

"This is too bland."

"The color scheme on this doesn't fit."

One by one she made them go through nearly every single one of the products that the store had, ensuring that there wasn't any stone left unturned.

"This!" She nodded enthusiastically. "This is it."

She sharply scrutinized Rui who wore a formal Martial attire with a more modern style. While the clothes were well appreciated, Rui himself stood looking like his soul had been sucked out.

That day, he swore to never bring her along ever again. They quickly finished up their business at the fashion store.

And yet, even then, his to-do list was not complete.

"Hm, where are you going?" Alice asked.

"I have some business in town, I'll be back later," Rui informed them.

"Don't be too late," Julian advised him.

Rui waved them goodbye as he set out, eventually reaching a large and vast corporate complex.

[Lambarageau Xavier Legal Services]

This was the law guild that the Beggar's Sect relied on to sell information through in the Kandrian Empire.

"Purpose of visit?"

"Same as last time."

The guards immediately opened the gates, letting him in. It wasn't too long before he found himself at the wide and luxurious office of Maiun Kayla, a Senior Partner at the law guild.

"Senior Quarrier," She smiled courteously, getting to shake his hand. "It's a pleasure to meet you again so soon. To what do I owe the pleasure of this meeting?"

"I have a commission to make," Rui replied. "Of course," She smiled. "We are always willing to service an esteemed regular customer. How can we help you?"

"I'm not here to purchase information this time," Rui remarked. "I want to employ your counter-intelligence service this time."

The Beggar's Sect not only possessed the ability to gather information extremely well, but also sabotage its gathering. Most people were not aware of the extent of the latter, but it was just as strong as the former.

"The details?" She asked, intrigued.

"I want a complete information blackout around the target regarding Rui Quarrier," Rui replied calmly.

The elderly woman stared at him for a moment. "It behooves me to inform you that that is an extravagant service, Senior Quarrier. The target?"

"Master Uma of the Virodhabhasa Faith," Rui replied.

She didn't appear to be quite surprised. There was no reason to be considering that she was aware of the circumstances between him and her. The Beggar's Sect was far too well-connected. The only issue was that she didn't understand the nature of the reason for the conflict between them.

Of course, that wasn't relevant to the request.

"More power individuals tend to be better connected, making it much harder to create an information blackout regarding a particular topic around a particular subject," She replied. "The exact price of such an extravagant measure will require some time, but I can assure you that it will take many years of missions and operations before you can successfully repay the commission payment for this commission."

A small grin cracked at the edge of Rui's mouth. 'Looks like the Martial Union did a good job hiding the details of the Hungry Pain technique evaluation from the Beggar's Sect.'

"I won't be needing to repay it with commissions. I recently gained an enormous paycheck you see, hundreds of millions of Martial Credits. I presume that should be more than enough," Rui replied.

Mrs Kayla did not reveal anything from her reaction, but Rui could sense that she was surprised by this revelation. "That is indeed very well more than enough to cover the commission price, most likely," She replied. "We will, of course, require a credit statement from the Martial Union to verify your claim."

Rui immediately pulled out a folded sheet that the Surgeon had given him, passing it over to the Senior Partner.

She carefully studied the seal of the Martial Union in particular, nodding. "...Very well, we shall have the price of this commission quickly compiled as soon as possible. This is a complicated matter, so it will take a little while before we are able to compute the difficulty and expenses of such a commission," She replied. "We shall provide you with a bill and a blank transfer statement for you to fill in at the soonest."

Rui smiled. "Pleasure doing business with you, as always."

Chapter 1582: Arrived

The Beggar's Sect worked fast.

Alice provided him with the summary of the bill rather rapidly, allowing him to examine the total price of the commission.

"A hundred and twelve million Martial credits are merely the initial set-up costs," Rui murmured. "She was right..."

This would indeed take him years to pay with his own Martial services, through ordinary missions anyway. Thankfully, he didn't need to go through the tedious effort of completing tons of missions for this commission. The costs for the entire operation were essentially centered around either converting or replacing the entirety of Master Uma's staff in the Church Town of Ghregol, an external religious city-state of the Virodhabhasa Theocracy that was on the other side of the Beast Domain compared to the Kandrian Empire.

The distance between them was relieving, given the extremely lacking communication technology of human civilization on the Panama Continent. It meant that she had essentially had a very small chance of running into Rui searching for Senior Falken. The only concern was if the news of the youngest Martial Senior reached her and she decided that she needed to see a picture of him for whatever reason.

That was why he had taken this measure.

Thankfully, because she oversaw her own little church city as Master Deivon did, it was easier to infiltrate her staff and completely take over all the information that she received.

Because her pursuit of Rui was not legitimate, she could not rely on state resources to find him, she had to rely on resources and manpower that were more in her direct control. That meant that the Beggar's Sect didn't need to do more than just infiltrate her town and its administration and departments.

That was the initial cost of Rui's commission, merely setting everything up in place was quite expensive, since some of these individuals were very difficult to replace or convert into their agents.

The bill specified the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of their inner agents into all positions of her information access and supply, allowing them to manipulate the information that she would get. The set-up cost was merely the initial cost of the establishment of the intelligence sabotage team. There was a necessary monthly cost to keep the entire operation afloat so that they could continually do their job.

Each month required a much less exorbitant amount to merely fund the existing team, thankfully Rui didn't need to worry about it with the windfall that he had recently made. With this, he had ensured that the Master Uma threat was something he could deal with at a later date.

"Huff..." Rui heaved a sigh once he finished the paperwork in regard to that. With that out of the way, he could move on to handling other matters that needed his attention.

The custom suits and attire that Rui and Julian had ordered were soon done, right before the reception held by the Raemina Faction. A day later, the event too had arrived. "This fits extremely well," Rui donned his formal Martial Art attire. "Quite impractical for a Martial Artist, but they did nail it with the fit, I admit."

"This is why you should listen to your big sister," Alice smiled proudly.

Lashara, on the other hand, beamed at her two adoptive sons. "You're both so handsome."

The orphanage marveled at their attire and well-groomed visage. Rui tried combing his hair the way it had been groomed for him when he had been carted off to meet the Marital Prince, ultimately failing to meet the standards of professional beauticians.

Still, they were both more than presentable by the time the Royal Carriage of the Raemina Foundation rolled up to the Quarrier Orphanage.

The invitation that they had received had confirmed that everything would be taken care of by the Raemina Foundation, including travel.

A butler stepped out of the carriage, bowing down to the two of them as they walked out the door. "Many greetings, esteemed guests. Please allow us to take you to the reception hall."

Rui and Julian quickly boarded the carriage after being seen off by those who had been present, before quickly setting out. Just like with Prince Raijun, the carriages immediately took off into the air before heading towards the Town of Vargard at the center of the Kandrian Empire.

"Incredible technology, don't you think?" Julian admired the sight outside of the window, steadying himself carefully.

"Indeed," Rui on the other hand was much more nonchalant. This was hardly novel to a man who had sky-walked countless times since becoming a Martial Squire.

Rui, as always, admired the sheer capability of esoteric technology that produced miracles despite the poor state of the understanding that science had of this world. Yet the speed at which the carriage whizzed through the air did not leave too much time for either of them to admire the view as they would have liked.

I wasn't too long until the two of them had arrived at the Town of Vargard.

Instantly, the air had changed. The Town of Vargard, being the capital of the nation that also housed the Royal Palace and the Royal Emperor was the largest and the wealthiest town in the entirety of the nation, spanning a whopping fifty kilometers in diameter.

Not even the Town of Hajin, which was quite large and wealthy in its own right, could compare. Just entering the town was such that neither Rui nor Julian looked too out of place despite their exorbitantly priced custom-tailored attires.

It was a town with the highest proportion of the upper middle and upper class of the Kandrian Empire. The structure that immediately caught their eyes was the reception hall that they would be attending, a glowing marvel of architecture and lighting that gave it an ethereal magnificence.

"Welcome to the Royal Hall," The butler gestured to the entrance. Around them, other guests had also already arrived, flowing into the Royal estate bit by bit, each more dignified than the last.

"Here goes nothing," Rui remarked as the two of them headed in.

Chapter 1583: Minister

They joined the flowing stream of guests that walked across the Royal Estate heading down the path to the Royal Hall. Rui's senses washed across the people walking in. Interestingly enough, only a small minority of guests were Martial Artists, the remaining were civilians.

Close to half of them were accompanied by bodyguards from the Kandrian Security Force, ranging from normal human bodyguards all the way to Martial Senior bodyguards. This was telling as the Kandrian Security Force was tasked with the duty of protecting important governmental officials.

Julian was not qualified to have one even as the deputy director of a division within the Ministry of Research and Development.

Those weren't the only security measures in place, he saw many armed figures patrolling the borders. They possessed strange artifacts in their hands that even exuded a little bit of a threat to Rui's instincts.

Whatever they were, they were powerful. Princess Raemina seemed much less reliant on the power of Martial Art compared to some of the other princes and princesses.

Still, as Rui sensed around the moving crowd, it became increasingly clear that Princess Raemina had managed to gain much interest from the executive government. He found that to be rather disappointing, but he had already prepared himself for popularity for her communist philosophy ever since he learned about her being one of the seven prime candidates for the throne.

"Welcome to the Royal Hall," A set of maids and butlers chanted and bowed in harmony, welcoming them in.

The Royal Hall was incredibly wide and spacious, accommodating many people in it. Inside were a number of Martial Masters that secured the safety of the Royal Hall. This was still a rather strange sight for Rui who had gotten used to Martial Masters being infrequent and few during his time away.

Here in the Kandrian Empire, Martial Masters were far more common and were much less significant. For an event as important as this with as many important guests as there were here, it was fitting that

Martial Masters were deployed to ensure the safety of all the guests. Trying to get past them was going to be extraordinarily difficult.

"Ah, we're glad that you could make it, Doctor Quarrier, Senior Quarrier," A familiar measured voice called out to them.

The two of them recognized the voice of Marin Vilmentine, an important executive in the Raemina Administration and Foundation.

"We're pleased to be here, Miss Vilmentine," Rui smiled courteously. "Might I add that that dress suits you quite well?"

Rui had read a book on formal etiquette in the upper echelons of society. Apparently, complimenting the aesthetics of women in such events was customary etiquette. While etiquette was something that he didn't care about, he was grateful this time because he had no idea how he ought to act in such an event.

"Thank you," She smiled at his words. "Her Highness will be soon here once all the guests have arrived. Please do make yourselves comfortable until then. I'm sure there are many people who are eager to speak to you."

She was not kidding. Rui could feel the attention of many of the guests. Perhaps it was because of his eye-drawing facial features that allowed them to recognize him quite quickly.

"Look, is that...?"

"It's Rui Quarrier..."

"So that's the youngest..."

He could hear whispers and murmurs quite clearly, but he knew he was expected to ignore them.

Despite the many people that had taken notice, very few were willing to approach him.

"I have heard much about you, Senior Quarrier," A strong voice remarked. "You cannot imagine how much I've looked forward to meeting you since your return to the Kandrian Empire."

The murmurs in the hall died down as Rui turned around facing a man with a heavy presence that demanded attention.

Rui grew more intrigued as he experienced a bit of pressure from the otherwise normal human. It was different from the peril that Martial Masters possessed, it was a fainter pressure, yet it helped him understand that whoever this man was, he was not ordinary.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr..."

"Ah, how careless of me," His tone grew mildly regretful. "I haven't introduced myself. I am Varay Nerman, the Minister of Martial Art."

Rui's eyes widened as he understood the significance of the man standing before him. This was the head of the Ministry of Martial Art of the executive government, a man chosen by the Royal Emperor himself.

Of course, Rui should have already understood the significance of the man's identity based on the high-grade Martial Seniors that stood behind him. The man carried an air and bearing of confidence and elite competence.

"It's a pleasure to meet the Martial Minister, it is thanks to the competence of leaders within the Martial Art sector like yourself that the Kandrian Empire remains a powerhouse across the Panama Continent," Rui shook hands with the man, smiling modestly.

"The pleasure is all mine, I assure you," The minister graciously replied with a rich voice. "As for impact, I wager that you have contributed more to Martial Art than I have, Senior Quarrier, would you not agree?"

The man gave Rui a knowing glance.

Immediately, Rui knew that this man was aware of the Hungry Pain technique. He wasn't even surprised. He did recall what Headmaster Aronian told him about the Hungry Pain technique being leased to the Executive Government and the Royal Army. The Martial Union obtained great monetary remuneration and other benefits from the government and the army in return for servicing them with the Hungry Pain technique, without actually ever divulging the technique of course.

Thus, there was no doubt that the Ministry of Martial Art was well aware that the Martial Union had made a massive breakthrough in regard to the Squire evolution breakthrough. There was also no doubt that the Ministry had done its best to crack the secrets of the breakthrough technique but ultimately had failed.

The Martial Union had done its absolutely damndest to ensure that nobody learned anything about the Hungry Pain technique. When an organization as powerful as the union went all out in securing an objective, there were few things that stood in the way.

In other words, the man before Rui was negatively affected by Rui's contribution.

Chapter 1584: Merger

The well-groomed man had purposely uttered those words to convey all of that to Rui without actually saying it.

"Relax Senior Quarrier," He smiled. "While it is true that our paths have indirectly crossed in, perhaps, not the most ideal circumstances, it is also true that I have a great amount of respect and admiration for you. Our ministry had predicted that it would at least take another two generations for a Martial Squire to break the record for the youngest breakthrough to the Senior Realm. Your very existence defies our predictions, pleasantly of course."

His smile deepened, gaining a hint of smugness. "You can rest assured that I most certainly will raise my head particularly high during the next convention in the Panamic Martial Federation."

Rui was surprised, he expected a much colder approach from the man. "I am glad to have been of service," Rui carefully said. He couldn't hint at the existence of the Hungry Pain technique in such an

environment. "As members of the Martial Art sector, we have an obligation to contribute to the welfare of Martial Art. I was merely doing my part."

"You have done more than you can imagine, Senior Quarrier," The Minister's tone was rich with graciousness. "It is truly fascinating how one Martial Senior is able to develop as many powerful and revolutionary techniques as frequently and easily as you are able to. It is no wonder that the many Martial Sects that extend to my ministry have mourned your stance regarding Martial Sects quite clear."

Rui's eyes lit up with surprise. "I was not aware that the Martial Sects of the empire extend to the Ministry of Martial Art."

"Why would they not?" The Martial Minister slowly began walking towards the nearest balcony. "Martial Sects fundamentally strive for the development and growth of their respective fields through any feasible measure. The Martial Union has its own budget for growth and development, and so does the Ministry of Martial Art. In fact, the Ministry has an even larger budget for Martial Art as far as the pure monetary amount goes. Regrettably, we are still not as effective at the growth of Martial Art as the Martial Union. Nonetheless, the Martial Sects still compete over the annual fiscal budget allocation as they do in the Martial Union."

"I see," Rui murmured. "It is a shame too," The Minister heaved a sigh. "If one were to combine the monetary funding from the mind-boggling astronomical wealth of the Royal Treasury with the sheer effectiveness and efficiency of the Martial Union's application that yields much higher return-on-investments, the Kandrian Empire would truly rise among the other powerhouses Sage-level nations, barring the Britannian Empire of course."

Rui narrowed his eyes as he caught onto the political inclination of the Minister of Martial Art. "Pardon me if this question is wrong or intrusive, Minister, but are you a proponent of the Merger Movement?"

The Merger Faction had been introduced to Rui many years ago by Senior Colonel Geringar. It was a political faction that advocated for the merging of the two largest power blocs in the Kandrian Empire, the government and the Martial Union. The reason was similar to the Martial Supremacist faction's, but it did not believe in simply handing the reigns to the entire nation to the Martial Union. Rather it believed in a carefully integrated system with many checks and balances within the new hybrid ruling entity.

"How sharp of you, Senior Quarrier," The Minister of Martial Art smiled with a strange mystique. "You are correct, I am indeed a Merger. The Kandrian Empire has entered a historic period of time where a

chance to change everything has appeared. Thus I, too, am rather eager to make full use of this opportunity."

"By joining the Raemina Faction?" Rui raised an eyebrow with skepticism. "Of the seven princes and princesses, Her Highness is the only one whose policies are most amenable to the Merger Faction," The Minister defended himself from the implicit accusation. "As the Minister of Martial Art, I am able to make a small but meaningful difference in the outcome of this cold war, as are you."

The two of them had already ended up in an isolated balcony. Rui noted the anti-sensory field that prevented their conversation from being leaked to others. Considering that their conversation thus far has been quite light, Rui could infer that the minister had yet to actually get to what he approached Rui for.

"I first took note of you long ago when you reached the finals of the Kandrian Martial Contest. I had known you were special at first glance." The Minister remarked. "Back then, a Martial Master had informed you of the inhuman vigor of your mind as well as signs of a nascent Martial Mind prototype. It is extremely rare for a Martial Artist to have developed the power of thought at such a young age and developed it to an extent that far exceeded the power of the body. Back then, I had marked you as one of the young growing talents to keep an eye out for."

He turned to Rui with piercing eyes. "My judgment was accurate, it was validated when you won us the final war of the Serevian Dungeon Wars, and then went on to kill a Martial Squire as a Martial Apprentice. We had already developed an extensive profile on the potency of your Martial Art."

He turned back, glancing at the town of Vargard stretching out in the distance. "It was a shame that the Martial Union refused to take greater initiative to actively help you develop your Martial Art and Martial Path. It is their policy that younger ones should be allowed to forge their own path if they wish to. Had I been able to, I would have made an effort to help you grow and to spread your Martial Art. I wasn't able to then, but since you've matured remarkably since then, the Martial Union will no longer interfere."

He turned to Rui, arriving at the crux of the reason he approached. "As the Minister of Martial Art, allow me to aid you in the creation of your own Martial Sect."

Rui stared at him, meeting his intense piercing eyes. The weight and the presence that this man commanded pushed down on the air, making it grow taut.

"You're the third person to have said something along those lines in the past week," Rui replied, turning forward, and gazing into the distance. "I am not unfamiliar with the reasons behind it, but I find it curious that important and powerful people have been interested in a Martial Sect centered around adaptive evolution."

"Your Martial Art is more important than you profess," The Minister replied. "If we are able to spread even elements of it across the Kandrian Empire and Martial Art as a whole, we can empower Martial Art in ways you would not have imagined impossible."

"Well, if I wouldn't have imagined it possible, then I wouldn't have reason to support it, would I?" Rui replied pedantically.

"Hear me out, young man," The Minister grew more serious. "We have reason to believe that your Martial Art can improve the probability of the breakthrough to the Master Realm in the future."

Rui narrowed his eyes, turning to the minister silently. He had already deduced the reason for this belief from just the man's words alone.

Still, he wasn't inclined to be cooperative over a matter that he had no personal interest in.

"This is a consensus that Chamber of Masters and I have come to agree upon," The man remarked. "The state of Martial Art is such that Martial Seniors struggle to break through to the Master Realm because the potential of thought is a power that is not only alien to most of them but even opposite to the potential of the body in many ways. The affinities of Martial Artists are more often than not slanted overwhelmingly towards the body than the mind. There are very few truly defiant exceptions."

He turned to Rui. "Exceptions like yourself. We believe that we can improve the rate of breakthroughs to the Master Realm eventually if we spread diluted elements of your Martial Art in the lower Realms with a lowered barrier of entry. Doing this will increase the familiarity and affinity of Martial Artists for the Master Realm, allowing them to break through with much less difficulty."

"Is the breakthrough to the Master Realm that much harder than the breakthrough prior?" Rui wondered. "Most certainly," The Minister confirmed. "It is the most difficult breakthrough barring that of the Transcendent Realm."

Rui grew interested and apprehensive by what he heard. Master Reina had already informed that his breakthrough to the Master Realm was going to be particularly difficult due to how powerful his mind and thoughts were.

It wasn't going to be easy, but the gains were going to be extremely worth it.

"So if I'm to understand you correctly..." Rui began. "You wish to familiarize Martial Artists with the power of thought by spreading diluted and simplified elements of my Martial Art, to increase their affinity for thought and make the process of breaking through to the Master Realm easier?"

"Precisely," The Minister remarked. "We were first alerted to the possibility of this plan when Master Deriol Ceeran broke through to the Master Realm last year. He had informed us that you had imparted to the Ranger Sect a technique that harnessed the power of thought that was unlike anything he had ever seen in his entire life. He told us about how you helped him master what was otherwise impossible for him. After you left, he worked on it, adapting it to his needs, imbuing it with his individuality, and eventually forming the rest of his Martial Mind atop it and broke through to the Master Realm in combat."

Rui's eyes widened.

No wonder Master Ceeran had been particularly driven to see Rui again!

The Pathfinder technique that he had given the man had been of extraordinary help to him, allowing him to actually worm his way to the Master Realm when he had been struggling previously.

"Naturally, we conducted our investigations on you, examining past data, and found his already credible claim to be supported based on our profile on you. Since then, the idea to spread elements of your Martial Art has gained a decent amount of support."

"No wonder..." Rui murmured. It had been a little over a week since he returned, yet the Martial Union had already expressed a lot of very unusual interest in his Martial Art and particularly the idea of creating his own Sect.

He recalled when Master Iskan randomly brought up the idea of creating his own sect after his presentation ended. In hindsight, that was not spontaneous at all. That was most likely an intended suggestion from the Fire Sect that he represented. The Surgeon too had been quite supportive of him forming his own Sect despite him being merely a Martial Senior. He even went as far as to offer to raise a motion to allow Rui to be a voting constituent in the annual fiscal budget allocation meeting.

Everything clicked into place with the revelation that the Minister revealed to him.

Rui breathed deeply as he glanced back at the Minister of Martial Art who faced Rui head-on in his proposal. "So the idea is that you'll aid me in the creation of my own sect to secure more resources for the spreading of my Martial Art?"

"Precisely so."

"And what exactly do I get for all of this labor?" Rui raised an eyebrow. "I assure you that I alone am the only one who is capable of creating the diluted and simplified elements of my Martial Art that you intend to spread. What do I gain from all this effort? It may be for the good of Martial Art, but as you are aware, I have already done more than my fair share of doing for Martial Art."

He implicitly reminded the Minister of the Hungry Pain technique. There was a limit to Rui's generosity, as far as he was concerned, they should be grateful for the fact that he went out of his way to submit the Hungry Pain technique to them.

Chapter 1586: Impaired Foresight

"Well, for one, there are benefits to the very act of spreading your Martial Art," The Martial Minister informed Rui. "There is a reason that all these Martial Masters and Martial Sages create sects."

"Yes, I'm aware," Rui heaved a sigh, not pleased to go through this conversation. "They are able to gain inspiration and insights from the gains made by other Martial Artists making use of their field, allowing

them to break past bottlenecks. But I have broken through to the Senior Realm even before I entered my physical prime. My actual prime age is going to last for a long time, my rate of growth is not slowing down any time soon."

The Minister of Martial Art heaved a soft sigh. "Your statements betray your outlook of the future, I'm afraid. It is true that your prime will last abnormally long compared to all Martial Artists in the past and present due to your prodigious speed at reaching the Senior Realm. However, you are still thinking with the psychology of a human."

Rui narrowed his eyes at those words.

"Of course, I am not admonishing you. In fact, it is expected. Most Martial Artists don't fully grasp the consequences of breaking through to the Squire Realm. Although their lifespan increases, their psychology does not instantly change to suit that, for obvious reasons," The Minister of Martial Art explained.

It made sense when Rui actually thought about it. It was not possible for a person's psychology to change drastically without extraordinary experiences. And while the Squire evolution breakthrough was certainly extraordinarily painful, it did not alter their outlook of the future on a subconscious level.

After all, they had lived with a psychology cultivated by living a certain lifespan their entire life. Changing something that had been shaped a certain way their entire life was extremely difficult.

"In your particular case, your absurdly rapid growth has played a part in making you short-sighted regarding the rest of your life. Tell me, how many times have you considered the next three centuries of life? And I mean truly having sat down, and pondered how you are going to spend those three lifetimes back-to-back?" The Martial Minister pushed on, sensing an opening. "I say this with the best of wishes and regards for your wonderful homely family, but you will far outlive them. There will come a day when all of them are dead and you will only look and physically feel like you're in your early or mid-thirties. Have you wondered what you will do then, what life would be like then?"

Unfortunately, for Rui, that question cut deep.

He was right, almost completely right. Rui knew it, too.

Subconsciously, he avoided thinking about these questions even though they popped into his head every once in a while ever since he learned that Martial Artists live longer. The prospects of living for centuries were, as much as Rui would never admit it out loud, a little scary.

It was true that his only vision of the future was limited to the next fifty years at most.

"Yet one day, you too will exit your prime and slow down in regards to your rate of growth. This is the very nature of human growth and aging. You will also one day hit a bottleneck due to plateaued growth and an ever-so-slowly declining condition. It will be too late to start that day, Senior Quarrier. This is a long-

term investment, it will bear fruits years or even decades after you begin," The Martial Minister gently explained. "The day you do hit a bottleneck and do come to need it, you may very well curse your younger self for not having taken this measure."

That was a bold statement to make, it could even be viewed as inappropriate, and discourteous, but the Martial Minister had correctly identified that Rui didn't care much about courtesy.

His words held truth, and that was enough for Rui to consider them very seriously.

"Besides, once you create a handful of foundational basic and simplified techniques from an element of your Martial Art, a good portion of your work is already done," The Minister of Martial Art told him. "Although it most certainly will not be easy, we will provide you with the necessary capital to win over constituents of the fiscal budget allocation meeting to allow you to partake in it. Once that's done, you will simply need to partake in the meeting, lobby, and secure as much of a budget for spreading your Martial Art as you can, the Martial Union will do the rest."

Rui turned, glancing at the man. "You said that there was support for spreading my Martial Art, correct? Why would I need to lobby for a budget if both the Martial Union and the Ministry of Martial Art believe that my Martial Art ought to be spread?"

"The reason for that is that while the others may see merit in spreading elements of your Martial Art, they will still fight to secure as much of the annual budget for their Martial Art when the time comes. Nobody will look out for you, you will have to fight for yourself."

"So they agree that my Martial Art ought to be spread, but none of them will actually do anything about it and instead will selfishly fight for resources themselves when the time comes?" Rui furrowed his eyebrows.

"Correct," The man noted, having a sigh. "Martial Artists are only human. In fact, it can be said that they are the most human of all. Martial Artists are comprised of the top one percent of most driven and desiring humans in this world. Greed for power is an absolute given and it normally overwhelms any other consideration."

Rui turned away from him. "The most human of all eh?"

He didn't take offense at that. In a sense, he could even concur with it. Martial Artists were indeed more human in their worldly vices than normal humans were.

Chapter 1587: Refusal

"Are there any other benefits?" Rui asked.

"The Ministry of Martial Art and the Martial Union have nearly everything that a Martial Artist could possibly need and want," The Minister replied. "You will be rewarded for your contributions, of course, and we will be flexible with you."

"..." Rui stroked his smooth-shaven chin. It was true that he had something he could use. "Would it be possible to get all the research material that the Ministry of Research and Development has on Primordial Seed?" Rui asked inquisitively.

The Minister adopted a perplexed expression. "That is rather an unexpected request. It requires a different ministry than the one that I head will complicate it a bit, but yes, we could theoretically procure the substances for you. Is that your demand?"

"...We'll see," Rui heaved a sigh.

Although it was true that he wanted to harness the power of the Primordial Seed, unfortunately, there were much greater priorities at the moment. The path to the Master Realm was harder for him than it was for perhaps anybody else. He didn't have the luxury to focus on anything else except that. On top of that, his foundations were already lacking significantly, he did want to compensate for them and bring them up to speed so that he wasn't so abysmally outclassed in raw physical parameters.

"I haven't made my decision yet," Rui heaved a sigh. "I'll get back to you on this."

"Of course, feel free to contact me," The man smiled, handing over a card to Rui. "Take your time thinking it over. For now, we must return to the reception, for Her Highness has arrived."

Rui glanced back as his senses picked up on the arrival of a figure that parted the entire crowd with her presence.

With long flowing golden hair and eyes, she seemed to possess an ethereal yet inhuman beauty. She wore a single elegant white gown dress that complimented her aesthetics. Yet looking at her only made him feel unsafe. Her eyes were widened and her smile felt fixed. It gave him the impression of an element of inhuman volatility that he didn't want to be anywhere near. Compared to Prince Raijun, he didn't have a good first impression of her.

She slowly waded through the crowd, meeting and greeting her various guests as they flocked to her. They all bowed in deference to the kin of the Royal Family and the Minister of Finance before she engaged them in a short conversation with a soft voice that tickled the ears.

It wasn't long before she ran into Rui and Julian, who had reunited after he bade the Minister farewell.

"My...if it isn't the two prodigious geniuses from the Quarrier Orphanage," She smiled at them with a voice that had the soft tingle of a small ringing bell. "Your Highness," Both Rui and Julian bowed deeply. "It is an honor to meet you."

"Raise your heads," She spoke with a gentle yet unmistakably commanding tone, gazing deeply into their eyes. "I am pleased by your presence."

"We are honored by the invitation, Your Highness," Rui smiled perfunctorily.

She turned towards him gazing deeply into his eyes with firm interest. "Senior Quarrier. I was intrigued by the word of the return of the infamous Voider as the youngest Martial Senior in history. Your contributions to the trade influx in the Kandrian Empire during the debacle of the Shionel Dungeon have risen above even many Martial Masters. I have personally witnessed the impact that you have had on the powerful economy of the Kandrian Empire as Minister of Finance. You are a model Martial Artist, one that all others should aspire to be."

"You honor and flatter me, Your Highness," Rui replied, maintaining a perfunctory smile. "I have merely done my best and aided this great Empire to the best of my abilities."

"Indeed, that is so," She remarked, never once breaking eye contact or blinking. "I believe my executive has conveyed my interest in your ability and competence, as well as your extraordinary intellect and remarkable knowledge, not to mention your highly optimistic potential. I truly do believe that earning your support is worth any price within reason. Tell me, what is it you desire? Wealth? Authority? Prestige and glory? Territory? Resources? Women? Ah..."

Her smile deepened. "...I believe that you are devoted to your family, is that correct?"

Rui felt chills crawling up his spine at the mere mention of his family. He wished she would never evoke them ever, it sounded like a threat through and through no matter what she said.

"I can provide them with luxury unlike anything that they have ever known or seen in their life," She smiled. "I can open up a whole new world for them and you if you stand by my side."

The crucial moment had arrived.

Rui bowed again once more. "Your Highness, you deeply honor me with your offer. That is why it regrets me to refuse your offer. While I deeply appreciate the esteem that you have credited me with, I cannot join your faction."

He remained bowing, waiting for her response.

"I see..." Her voice rang softly in his ears. "So that is your response to my invitation."

Rui felt a faint pressure mounting up on him.

For a moment, he felt the urge to kill her right then and there. Of course, he was aware of the absurdity of that urge, the Martial Master bodyguards behind were not for show.

"If that is the decision you've made..." She smiled. "Then I respect it. Your decisiveness is impressive. It is unfortunate that I was not able to earn the allegiance of the most prodigious Martial Senior in history, but alas."

She glanced down at Rui. "You may raise your head, of course, it appears that my brother has gained a fine teacher."

Rui rose, smiling. "I am undeserving of your graciousness, Your Highness."

She turned to Julian. "And what about you, doctor? Have you come to a decision regarding my offer?"

"I have decided to accept it, if you'll have me, Your Highness," Julian smiled.

"Ah, I am pleased to hear that indeed. Marin will induct you into my Foundation and brief you on everything else," Princess Raemina smiled.

Chapter 1588: Dance

She quickly moved on from them to the other guests, engaging them in conversations one by one. Rui was grateful that she didn't fixate on him too much, gracefully accepting his refusal and moving on.

She purposefully mentioned the fact that he had accepted being Prince Ruijan's tutor. It appeared that word had indeed spread, and it did impact how others looked at him. He heaved a sigh, relieved that he had gotten past this part without any issue.

Prince Ruijan had been correct to a certain extent, the other princes and princesses who weren't strictly associated with Martial Art in any way were not willing to go nearly as far as to change his mind and have him in their faction.

It was true that Prince Ruijan had tried much harder when he spoke to Rui.

"Now then..." He heaved a sigh. "I suppose I can just enjoy the rest of this reception without any trouble."

Yet he was wrong.

It wasn't long before an orchestra began playing music. Couples began dancing together center stage while asked each other out to dance.

Time slowed down in Rui's vision as he sensed the gaze of many ladies coming his direction. His mind flashed through his Mind Palace as he recalled a rule from the etiquette book that he had read.

It was considered highly rude for a man to refuse an offer to dance from a lady. 'Damn...' He cursed. 'I don't know how to dance.'

He quickly analyzed the movements of the couples that were dancing, memorizing them quickly.

By the time, the first lady walked over towards him, he had just barely managed to memorize the routine.

"Senior Quarrier, I am the Varnika Nerman, the daughter of the Minister of Martial Art," She smiled at him, performing a brief curtsy. "Would you care to join me for a dance?"

Her petite hand reached out to him.

She appeared to be in her mid-twenties, a few years younger than him. Rui instantly understood that this particular offer was also a gesture of friendship from the Minister of Martial Art rather than purely personal interest from the young woman.

"Why certainly, miss Varnika," Rui smiled, accepting her hand as he ignored the amused smile from Julian.

He managed to perfectly mimic the movements of the dance, carefully sashaying with the woman. "You dance well for your first time, Senior Quarrier," She lightly commented. "Was it that obvious?"

"Not at all, actually. Your movements are perfect, but your unfamiliarity and discomfort are quite visible," She commented as she pulled closer to him and their hips met. "It is an honor to make the acquaintance of the youngest Martial Senior in history."

"You flatter me with those undeserving words, my lady."

Her expression grew disapproving. "You are far too humble, Senior Quarrier."

"Not at a-"

"Pardon me, but I was not complimenting your modesty," She cut him off, much to his surprise. "For someone of your power, talent, stature, potential, and value...you are far too humble. People in this world should know their place, and it appears that you don't know yours."

Rui's eyes lit up in surprise as she boldly told him to know his place right to his face. It was actually refreshing, but it contradicted the rules of etiquette book that he memorized in an effort to not do anything that could be construed as an intentional offense.

"You may come from a humble background, but your current status in our great empire is far greater than that. You ought to have an ego that matches your current power and status," She directly told him. "Yet you still act like you are an ordinary unremarkable Martial Artist. Your attitude reflects a lack of value for your power. Your humility is an insult to your power. Anybody else in your position would have an ego that befits your current power and value because they would understand just how superior they are to plebeians."

Rui had never ever heard of such a personal philosophy in his entire life or lives. Not being egotistical about one's power was an insult to it? It was almost incomprehensible. He wasn't even sure how to dissect that, especially when he needed to maintain a perfunctory smile while also calculating his next movements for the dance since he had no muscle memory for it.

"Humility is an insult to power, you say?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"Indeed. Power affords you an ego. Not making use of power is not only an insult, it is evil. You are strong yet you live out your day like you aren't, that is the greatest insult to power," She firmly told him. "It is also an insult to everybody who desires and needs power. It is no different from emptying water into a drain in front of a thirsty person."

Incomprehensible, but also fascinating. It was fascinating that there were people who genuinely believed such things. "So what would you have me do? How would you have me act and live?"

"For one, you can straighten your back more. You can pump your chest more, and raise your chin. Your current physical demeanor is more fit for a Martial Squire than it is for someone of your stature," She informed him. "Socially, you need to act your power out more. You must not tolerate disrespect from other men, you must be more willing to employ your power to take women of lower status than you as you pl-"

"Ok, that's enough," Rui felt a headache coming on.

Was this how people in high society thought? That power alone allowed anybody to act anyway and get away with anything?

That was wrong. Rui did not think it was appropriate to allow such a thing to happen. He didn't care who or why, but abuse of others simply because of the ability to was highly inappropriate. When he studied her expression, he could see that she truly believed every word she uttered.

It only strengthened his conviction to stay away from this class of society, he had no interest in mingling with.

Chapter 1589: Invitation

Much to his gratitude, the rest of the event went rather smoothly. It wasn't too long before it ended and both Rui and Julian found themselves on a carriage back home.

Julian heaved a tired sigh. "That was more tiring than I had expected."

Rui nodded absentmindedly. He had much to think about.

The first was the offer that the Minister of Martial Art had offered him. The Minister had not made the compensation that he would get from them entirely clear, but it was also clear that they were willing to go quite far for this particular request.

In essence, it had the potential to make the same impact as the Hungry Pain technique did on Martial Art. Increasing the success rate of the breakthrough to the Master Realm was a huge deal.

He was in a position that very few Martial Artists in history found themselves to be in. There were not that many Martial Artists whose Martial Paths were so individualistic and powerful that they could be universalized to leave a mark across all of Martial Art.

Their names were forever remembered in Martial Art.

The first breathing-oriented Martial Artist changed Martial Art forever. Today, breathing techniques have become one of the most foundational techniques and aspects of techniques. Entirely new fields were born purely because breathing techniques made them possible.

Rui's Martial Path had the potential to make the same impact on Martial Art.

The Minister of Martial Art had made a convincing argument for why Rui too should be concerned with spreading his Martial Art. It would be too late to begin after he ran into a bottleneck, too late for immediate results, but by making this investment today, he could ensure he had a ready supply of inspiration and insight based on the progress with adaptive evolution that other Martial Artists made over longer periods of time.

Rui knew the despair of bottlenecks better than anybody. In his previous life, he had died being unable to break through a bottleneck in his research into increasing the viability of the VOID algorithm. He had desperately tried everything he could, compromising his health in the process of trying to make progress, before ultimately failing and dying.

He did not ever want to experience anything like that in his entire life. It was easily one of the worst experiences that he had ever had.

If he could resolve it with some humble effort early on in his life then he could understand the merits of doing so.

He had initially been quite against creating a sect, partly because he had grown intoxicated by the endless growth and progress that he had made since becoming a Martial Artist. It had been nearly fifteen years since he had discovered his Martial Path, and since then he had been on a non-stop roll of growing stronger and growing stronger faster as time passed.

Perhaps that was why an illusion of being unstoppable had subconsciously taken root in his mind.

It was fine to be confident, what wasn't nearly alright was being arrogant.

Still, he wasn't sure about the commitment and whether he would be able to keep it up. He was unable to come to a decision then and there.

BZZT BZZT!

His communication device vibrated, drawing his attention before he opened it up.

His eyes lit up as he found a message from Master Ceeran, sending him an invitation to a Martial training center for the next day.

He recalled that it had been Master Ceeran who had informed the Martial Union and the Ministry of Martial Art about how well Rui's Martial Art had harnessed the power of thought and how even a chunk of it had been enough to serve as the foundation of Master Ceeran's Martial Mind.

"Hm, it's worth hearing about his experiences to the Master Realm,"

Especially given that he was going through the same journey himself at the moment.

And so he did.

Julina and Rui returned home, mentally exhausted before going to sleep immediately.

The next day, Rui immediately headed out after breakfast, setting off at top speed high up in the atmosphere towards the eastern coast of the Kandrian Empire.

Master Ceeran had resided in the town of Farund, a port town on the coast of the country through which much maritime trade and seafare occurred. The maritime sector of the Kandrian Empire was quite developed and enriched with trade.

The reason for this was that the east and west coasts of the Panama Continent were not exactly on opposite sides of the planet, they were closer through sea than through land.

While seventy percent of the world's surface was covered in water just like it had been on Earth, a third of all that water was in inland oceans inside the continent, while the remaining two-thirds was in the Great Nam Ocean.

This meant that there was a tremendous amount of trade that occurred through the Great Nam Ocean that connected the Kandrian Empire with the rest of the coasts of the world.

Many sea routes and trade corridors across the Great Nam Ocean had long been established and funneled an immense amount of trade flux to and from the Kandrian Empire.

It was precisely for this reason that Princess Ranea, who had earned the political allegiance of the Kandrian Seafare Association and the Ministry of Maritime Affairs, was able to compete against the Martial Prince who had earned the support of a hefty chunk of the mighty Martial Union.

He put such thoughts out of his head when he eventually reached the location that Master Ceeran had given him.

Much to his surprise, it was a ten thousand-acre plot of land with large expansive target ranges of all kinds. Inside, many Martial Artists from the Lower Realms made use of these various facilities, training their techniques hard.

"Purpose of visit?" The two Martial Squire guards at the inquired.

"Invitation," Rui showed them the message he got from Master Ceeran, immediately gaining entry into the expansive facility.

Chapter 1590: Gratitude

Inside the training center were non-martial Artists who trained out in the open in the ground up-front. Rui was quite surprised to see many adolescent boys and girls and even young adults training their foundations in large open grounds.

Martial Apprentice instructors oversaw the training of the various Martial Artists up-front.

He sharply pieced together clues from the scene before him with everything else in the place as his eyes lit up with amazement.

"Rui," A voice called out to him. Master Ceeran slowly stepped down from the air, arriving before him with a relaxed smile on his face. "I'm glad you came."

All the people around them paused their work as they bowed deeply, offering the respect that a Martial Master possessed.

"Of course, I would," Rui smiled. "I had been wanting to speak to you anyway. This is place...is it an estate of the Ranger Sect?"

"Indeed," Master Ceeran confirmed. "The students that you see here are those that failed to make it into the Martial Academy."

"I figured," Rui glanced back at them. "Although they may have not been able to make it into the Martial Academy, that does not mean that they are without merit or potential, is that correct?"

"That is precisely so," Master Ceeran noted. "We take them into the Ranger Sect and offer them another opportunity to pursue their aspirations to become Martial Artists."

"I see..." Rui murmured. "It is good to know that aspirants who don't make it into the Martial Academy still have hope. I assume that the premise is that they'll join the Ranger Sect."

"They already have," Master Ceeran remarked. "What do you if one of the Martial Paths of those who broke through doesn't align with the sect?" Rui wondered.

"We allow them to leave the sect and enter another that is more fitting to their Martial Path, though they don't need to join another sect if they don't wish to," Master Ceeran remarked. "They usually do, though. Because they didn't make it in the Martial Academy, they usually are much behind those of the Academy in their foundation and training."

"This sounds like the norm among Martial Sects. Do the other sects also let go of newly broken-through Martial Apprentices so that they can join the appropriate sect?" Rui wondered.

"Of course," Master Ceeran nodded. "There is an unwritten mutual understanding between all sects that new Martial Apprentices must be allowed to go any sect of their choice. Not only is it our duty to guide the young, but it would also be a net negative for Martial Art if we prevented them from leaving due to some dark desire to prevent the other sects from growing. We Martial Sects are quite competitive, but there are lines we absolutely do not cross."

"I see, it is best if Martial Artists of the nation do not fall to sabotaging each other in such an underhanded manner."

"Just so," Master Ceeran smiled. "Come, let us head inside. I have much to speak to you with."

The two Martial Artists disappeared in the eyes of everybody around them, leaving them stunned. They arrived at a spacious building, heading into an office-like space with a wide array of books and scrolls, taking seats opposite each other.

"Now then," Master Ceeran heaved a sigh. "We can finally converse without distraction. You have no idea how long I've been looking forward to this. Let me begin by saying this: I would not be a Martial Master if not for you. The Pathfinder technique that you gave me and helped me master became the foundation for my Martial Mind, allowing me to complete my journey to the Master Realm in a little under a decade from that point on. I do not know just how many decades or even centuries it would have taken me to break through to the Master Realm."

He smiled warmly at Rui. "So thank you for helping me."

Rui shook his head. "I didn't do much. I just helped you master a single technique, I can hardly take credit for your breakthrough to the Master Realm."

"But it is true that I would not be a Martial Master if it wasn't for you, regardless of how little you think your role was. That much is undeniable," Master Ceeran pointed out.

Rui shrugged lightly, accepting that bit of credit. "I heard that you proposed that people could benefit from my Martial Art from the Minister of Martial Art."

"I did," Master Ceeran replied. "It is my earnest opinion that Martial Art can benefit from your Martial Path. Your path harnesses thought in a manner unlike anything I've ever seen. Even a fraction of it would bring about a greater balance between the affinity for body and mind in the world of Martial Art."

He stared at Rui with a serious expression. "Of course, you don't have to if you don't care to. Though there are benefits to doing so."

"I am very well aware," Rui heaved a sigh. There was a moment of silence.

"Well, let us put that matter aside for now," Master Ceeran smiled. "I am intrigued to know about your time away from the Kandrian Empire. It isn't every day that a Martial Squire shatters that record for the youngest breakthrough to the Senior Realm. You must have a fascinating story to tell."

Rui smiled. "Everybody is always so curious to know. It isn't that big of a deal, honestly. I just got into a fight with somebody and managed to break through."

"Hahaha, surely that isn't all there is to it. The breakthrough to the Senior Realm can only occur when your Martial drive is challenged. And you are driven by ambition, so whoever you fought must have been truly incredible."

Rui smirked. "That he is. I suppose I can tell you that story."

The two of them conversed with each other, catching up after a long time. They had built a bond of friendship while they were on Vilun Island together all those years ago, thus there wasn't much of a gap despite all the years apart.