

Martial Unity 1591

Chapter 1591: Sect Matters

"...What a fascinating story," Senior Ceeran marveled. "To have simultaneously broken through against a Martial Artist with a Martial Path as powerful as yours, that is truly incredible. Historic even."

Rui shrugged. "Regardless, that was how I broke through to the Senior Realm. I spent several years training under some renowned Martial Masters, and now here I am, returning home after Chairman Deacon mysteriously passed away in a large explosion."

Master Ceeran smirked at Rui with a knowing look. "Mysterious indeed. Regardless, it is good that you have managed to return home after all this time. It is just a shame that you returned home to a nation of increasing political turmoil."

The man heaved a sigh. "It has been over a week, but you have already been approached by two of the seven prime princes and princesses competing for the throne. You can be expected to be approached by more, I can assure you that much. None of them are willing to let go of the most prodigious Martial Senior in history. Especially when you have proven your strategic value time and time again."

Rui nodded, having already been warned of this by Headmaster Aronian. "It's not easy for me to ignore the political turmoil because of my ability to influence it. It would have been easier to forget about it had I been weak since thinking about it wouldn't have mattered."

"But you aren't weak, not by any reasonable standard," Master Ceeran smiled softly. "While you aren't the strongest Martial Senior, you are far and away the most strategically valuable. On top of that, there comes a certain amount of prestige from having the most prodigious Martial Senior join your political faction."

Rui nodded, heaving a sigh. "It's not easy making a choice. It is easy cutting away some options, but deciding has been a little difficult."

He turned to Senior Ceeran. "May I inquire who it is that the Ranger Sect and you are supporting?"

"We are throwing our support behind Princess Ranea, the Princess of the Seas," Master Ceeran readily divulged his political affiliation. "Interesting, I would have thought that you would be in favor of Prince

Raijun's hyper-pro-Martial political agendas," Rui remarked, intrigued. "Well, long-range Martial Artists, believe it or not, are most valued in seafare. The reason for this is because any conflicts on sea began an enormous distance away for there is no place to hide, and every vessel on the seas is seen hours away due to the fundamentally open nature of the sea," Master Ceeran remarked. "I see...so the Kandrian Seafare Association and the Ministry of Maritime Affairs each have a personal interest vested in the Ranger Sect," Rui's eyes lit up with interest.

"Indeed, we have found that they, along with the Princess of Seas, are far more appreciative of our services than the Martial Prince and even the rest of the Martial Union," Master Ceeran remarked. "We are able to leverage more from them likewise. The princess of Seas is also among the most sane candidates out of all of the seven, thus we are more at ease trusting her with the Empire."

"That makes sense," Rui noted as his eyes grew deeper in thought. "It wasn't my intention to bring her up, of course," Master Ceeran remarked. "I don't intend to try and rally you to the Ranea Faction. You should consider your personal interests deeply with the philosophies and policies of the various princes and princesses and support one that is best for your interests."

"I am aware of that," Rui nodded. "I have already taken it upon myself to understand everything about them based on reliable sources of information. However, I do still wish to meet most of them personally to gain a more personal understanding of them."

He turned to Master Ceeran. "Could I request you for an audience with Her Highness?"

Master Ceeran's eyes lit up. "Most certainly, I'm sure that Princess Ranea will accept that request."

"Thanks," Rui nodded. "I would like to get a better understanding of her and what it stands for. That was one of the reasons that I wanted to speak with you. The other being..."

"The matter with your Sect, is it?" Master Ceeran raised an eyebrow. Rui nodded. "Leading a Sect is a committal occupation, I presume."

"You have some misunderstandings of how this is going to work, I'm afraid," Master Ceeran shook his head. "A sect only comes after there are enough Martial Artists of similar fields gathering around a single cause. At this moment, you are alone, therefore you don't need to worry about leading a sect for

now. That would only come after you have spread your Martial Art far and wide enough that enough people come under a single semi-formal organization like a sect."

"That makes sense," Rui nodded. "So I should worry about whether I want to in the future?"

Master Ceeran nodded. "You are still young, for now, you only need to plant seeds of your Martial Art that will eventually bloom into Martial Artists with Martial Paths adjacent to your own."

Rui found his words to be quite insightful. "I see, that does indeed make sense. As far as spreading my Martial Art goes..."

"That is a bit more complicated. Your Martial Art is a dynamic all-rounder Martial Art, and I presume that you do not wish to bias it anyway, correct?"

Rui nodded. "Biasing it in any one direction necessarily means that I cannot adapt to something well, which is not an acceptable sacrifice."

"In that case, it is best that you spread elements of your Martial Art that are useful to all fields of Martial Art so that your future Martial Sect will also be equally balanced, resulting in funding and budgeting that is equally well-distributed, which in turn, will allow you maintain the balance in your own Martial Art in the future if and when you do use your future sect as a source of inspiration and insight."

Chapter 1592: Decision

Rui found Master Ceeran's words to be clarifying.

He was not nearly familiar with the nuances of how Martial Sects functioned on a fundamental level.

"So...if I do go ahead with this plan, the conditions I will need to fulfill is to create techniques that ensure that Martial Artists of all fields can adopt elements of adaptive evolution."

"Correct," Master Ceeran nodded. "Once you create a set of such techniques, you need only present them in the annual fiscal budget meeting that will occur in half a year. If they earn the approval of the constituent members, then you will gain some support and will secure yourself a handsome budget that

will be used to promote and spread your Martial Path. However, if you don't care for the little budget politics, then you can spend your own money."

Rui raised an eyebrow with interest. "I can?"

"Indeed, you can specify donations to a certain budget allocation and that money will be used for that," Master Ceeran replied, smirking. "It's actually one of the Martial Union's most convenient way of making money. We get grants, donations, and fundraisers for different budget allocations every year from each sect. Since the Martial Sects are wealthy, they can contribute to their own fields if they wish to. You, too, can do the same. Especially since you've earned a large windfall recently."

The wealth that Rui had earned from the Martial Union was quite substantial and could be used to kick off the dissemination of his Martial Art.

Still, Rui had some doubts. "Once the initial dissemination of my techniques occurs. I won't have any work to do until many years later, correct?"

"Indeed," Master Ceeran nodded. "After all, in order to form a Sect around your Path, you will need to wait for many years enough Martial Apprentices and Martial Squires to have mastered your techniques, and only then you may form a sect centered around them."

"I see," Rui murmured. "In that case, I suppose it isn't excessive work. I was really hesitant since I didn't want to take on unnecessary duties and responsibilities that will frankly just shackle me. But if I don't have to immediately lead a sect then that will be fine."

"You don't have to worry about the leadership of your potential sect in the future either," Master Ceeran remarked. "I am a leader within the Ranger Sect, but I have never spent more than an hour a day on sect-related matter. The reason for this is because our sect hires managers and executives to handle all the troublesome and mundane paperwork and administrative work. The only things I do are train Martial Artists of the lower Realms occasionally when they make contributions in exchange for tutelage, and recruit promising Martial Artists."

He shrugged with a mischievous smirk, earning a nod from Rui.

There was no need to do everything himself. He could indeed delegate the annoying work to qualified employees. The paycheck wouldn't even matter with how much he was capable of earning.

"The decision is yours, but I do believe that you have the power to help a lot of people. You have the power to elevate Martial Art itself, you've already done it once. And I believe that you could do many times over if you truly wanted," Master Ceeran explained with a warm smile. "Of course, if you wish not to. That's fine as well. The Martial Union has never forced Martial Artists to divulge their techniques. We do not ever need to either, especially since we are able to incentivize them to divulge their secrets."

Rui nodded. He believed that this was the case to a certain extent, although he would never reveal the fact that he could trigger the breakthroughs to the Senior and Apprentice Realm.

Regardless, he increasingly made up his mind on the matter regarding his sect and spreading his Martial Art.

While there was certainly some effort that he needed to go through; creating diluted and simplified techniques with elements of his Martial Path, and participating in a lofty annual fiscal budget allocation meeting to lobby for his Martial Path, it was not something that required sustained effort. He needed to tend to it once, and then wait for Martial Artists with elements of adaptive evolution to start popping up all over the place.

And then, and only then, could he reap the rewards should he ever run into a bottleneck where he needed insight and inspiration from those who adopted Martial Art with dominant adaptive evolution elements to show him something that he hadn't seen before.

Of course, there also was the remuneration from the Martial Union and the Ministry of Martial Art for contributing to a future with a greater number of Martial Masters.

He could empower himself, the Kandrian Empire, the Martial Union, and the world of Martial Art with this measure. It was a win-win-win.

As a Martial Artist, he did not want to live in a world where the age of Martial Art ended because technology outgrew it. Although Martial Art was the dominant force, esoteric technology had walked, at most, a few steps behind Martial Art, keeping up with its growth rapidly.

Rui knew perhaps better than anyone in this wide world what science and technology were capable of even without esoteric substances, let alone combined with the sheer magic of esoteric substances. If the Panama Continent ever gained the titanic information technology of Earth, then not even Rui was confident that Martial Art could keep up.

The Hungry Pain technique and the spreading of adaptive evolution were things that would protect and secure the future of Martial Art. Doing so would be beneficial to his development as well, since if Martial Art remained the strongest, then fulfilling his ambition as a Martial Artist would be a lot more achievable.

"So be it, then," A hint of determination entered his voice. "I shall sow the seeds for a Martial Sect centered around adaptive evolution in the future. It shall be known as the Water Sect."

Chapter 1593: Water

"Why water?" Master Ceeran asked with a curious expression.

Rui smiled. "There was a wise martial artist once upon a time, he once said: 'Empty your mind, be formless. Shapeless, like water. If you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup. You put water into a bottle and it becomes the bottle. You put it in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Now, water can flow or it can crash. Be water.'"

Rui smiled wider as he uttered his favorite quote.

"I see...He must have been quite the Martial Artist," Master Ceeran remarked.

"He was the best martial artist of his time," Rui replied with admiration.

"That saying has much in common with your Martial Art," Master Ceeran gained more interest.

"...I probably wouldn't even be a Martial Artist if I never heard those words," Rui replied.

"Interesting," Master Ceeran remarked. "I would love to meet him someday, if possible."

Rui chuckled. "I'm afraid he is not in this world."

"Ah, that's a shame. May he rest in peace," Master Ceeran regrettably mentioned. "Still, it is interesting that the root of your Martial Path is so...humble."

"Hm?" Rui raised an eyebrow, turning to Master Ceeran. "Ah, I did not mean to offend you or the Martial Artist you were referring to. I just didn't expect that your extraordinary and unique Martial Path would be rooted in origins that are, in comparison, not nearly as extraordinary and unique."

"Must a Martial Path be rooted in origins that are only as extraordinary and unique as the Martial Path itself?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"Oh, most certainly," Master Ceeran nodded. "There's no doubt about that. Martial Paths are born from the summation of our mind, body, and self. It is the manifestation of the essence of your being. How can an ordinary person yield an extraordinary Martial Path? How can ordinary life yield an extraordinary Martial Art? They cannot."

Rui's eyes lit up with interest. "So the more unique and extraordinary the life experienced, the more powerful a Martial Path?"

"I'm afraid not," Master Ceeran heaved a sigh. "While all extraordinary Martial Paths come from an extraordinary life, not all extraordinary lives yield extraordinary Martial Paths."

"Ah, that's indeed a shame," Rui heaves a sigh.

"Indeed," The Master solemnly nodded. "The Martial Community of the continent learned this the hard way in the earliest centuries of the Age of Martial Art."

Rui felt a chill crawl up his spine as he realized what that meant. "...What?"

"Martial Art families whose bloodline had produced powerful Martial Artists put their progeny through all kinds of experiences across long period of time in the hopes of yielding a unique and powerful Martial Path."

Rui's expression grew disgusted.

"One abandoned their child in poor conditions, hoping to collect them when they grew up so that they could have a powerful Martial Path," Master Ceeran remarked. "Others put them through some amount of pain and suffering. If it wasn't for the rise of the Panamic Martial Federation, we may very well have ground the Age of Martial Art to a halt then."

"I'm glad it had ended, at least," Rui snorted.

"Coming back to the point. A Martial Path is as extraordinary and unique as yours emerging from a quote from another Martial Artist is somewhat...surprising," He remarked. "I would have expected it to be rooted in something much more fantastical."

Rui smiled wordlessly. His Martial Path was what it was because he had dedicated his life to it in a previous life. Spending a long, long time on Project Water and the VOID algorithm. It was at the age of fifty-nine that he died and was reborn in a new world.

A lifetime of research into Project Water was a good way to make Project Water his Martial Path. This was normally impossible for people since by that time they would bias their Martial Path in favor of any particular direction through a lifetime of dedication. By the time they were done, they were already quite old, and becoming a Martial Artist was almost absolutely impossible at that age.

The only way they could succeed was if they got to start over in a new body by the time that they were done.

Rui did. To this day, he didn't know why or how, but he received a boon that allowed him to crystallize a lifetime of effort into his Martial Path.

That was the reason his Martial Path was the way that it was. But how was he supposed to explain that the origin of his Martial Path was probably more extraordinary than any existing Martial Path in this world?

He couldn't.

Instead, he shrugged, leaving it at that. Master Ceeran would conclude what he would, of course. The Martial Union had a pretty thorough background check on him, but that was it. They couldn't possibly know about his life from another world.

The only person who was aware of the truth was Ieyasu, but he didn't care, and because nobody knew about his mind-reading ability, nobody would believe him either. The former was not something that he was willing to divulge since it was a strategic secret.

They had mutual interests in keeping each other's secret well hidden, thus Rui was hardly worried that he would reveal it. He didn't care about the way that they would rationalize his Martial Art and try and explain why and how it came to be.

"So tell me more about Princess Ranea," Rui remarked, at one point. "What is her vision for the Empire? What will the Empire look like when she's Empress?"

Master Ceeran smiled. "Well, you've already purchased general information on the princes and princesses, so I'm sure that you know the answer to that question."

"I'm still interested in hearing about the perspective of someone who has undoubtedly met her and spoken to her," Rui remarked. "Tell me your personal opinion of her. You don't have to try and be objective, and I'm just interested in hearing the truth."

Chapter 1594: Visionary

Master Ceeran eyes wandered about for a few moments as he thoughtfully considered his answer to Rui's question. "Princess Ranea is a...visionary. Her vision for the future is one of prosperity and hope. It is one that I sincerely hope will unfold, even regardless of my vested interests in it as a long-range Martial Artist. She wishes to enrich trade by reducing tariffs and customs on maritime trade and seafare, doing so will weaken the Royal Treasury considering that the sea industry is second only to the Martial Art industry, but it will significantly enrich the economy according to her. I am not an economist and my understanding of these matters is quite limited, but my personal secretary has informed me that the policies are indeed quite effective."

He turned towards Rui. "She believes that the Maritime sector is much more fundamentally important to the Kandrian Empire than the Martial Art industry. Naturally, she does not intend to disenfranchise Martial Artists. She has no strong opinions and aside from increasing the Martial Union's engagement and cooperation with the Kandrian Seafare Association, she does not have any strong views regarding Martial Art aside from the norm."

"So...under her rule, the maritime sector will likely rise to prominence, more prominence than the Martial Union," Rui noted. "Interesting."

He didn't strictly mind that. He wasn't egotistical about the exaggerated status he had as a Martial Artist. If another industry became more prominent than the Martial Art industry, Rui would welcome that.

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"She plans to expand the Kandrian Empire's shipbuilding capabilities aggressively and has already begun working on that. Building new schools and academies in port towns to educate students in the art of shipbuilding to produce more shipwrights in the long term," Master Ceeran informed Rui. "For the short term, the Ranea Foundation has funded and overseen the development of more harbors and shipyards to facilitate greater maritime activity. She has even announced Project Seaflate, which aims to create entirely new port towns across certain uninhabited or sparsely-habited regions across the Kandrian Empire's coast."

Rui nodded with interest as he recalled that a particular bit of information from the information he purchased from the Beggar's Sect and the Martial Union. "It's quite ambitious. But it will drastically increase the Kandrian Empire's maritime affairs within a remarkably short amount of time after the completion of the project."

He didn't think that she would be on short of funds for such an extravagant project. After all, if he was able to afford the expenses, then a Royal princess certainly ought to be able to afford it as well.

"It serves as a great way of increasing her political capital and ability to persuade the government to crown her Empress in the crowning ceremony," Rui muttered. "Yes, but those aren't her only measures. She has worked side by side with her biggest patron to establish concrete sea routes and ocean current corridors between Kandrian and all other coastal nations in the world!" Master Ceeran told Rui with enthusiasm.

Rui's eyes lit up with surprise. "That's extremely ambitious. Who is her biggest patron?"

"Ah it's someone you should be familiar with, if I'm not mistaken," Master Ceeran remarked. "It is Guildmaster Bradt Patrick of the Shionel Confederation."

Rui's eyes widened with surprise. The information he had purchased did not cover their various associations and individual patrons, but he was nonetheless taken a bit aback.

'Ah, but it makes sense,' Rui realized. "Seafare is an extremely important method of transportation and shipping of goods and services. No wonder the guildmaster has decided to throw his weight behind Princess Ranea. He has probably negotiated an extremely sweet deal with her that allows him to make use of Kandria's seafare and maritime infrastructure free of cost and free of tariffs or duties in exchange for his support. That will drastically lower Bradt Distribution Service's cost and price of seafare shipping."

"Er, something like that, I think," Master Ceeran remarked.

"He has probably also contributed to their ship technology," Rui remarked. "He undoubtedly has among the best there is to offer as far as commercial and cargo vessels go. As expected of him, he's a man who knows how to squeeze the best out of any given situation."

Rui smirked. It was good to see that Guildmaster Bradt was still the excellent merchant that he had known him to be. They hadn't met since the Virodhabhasa Martial Contest nearly five years ago, but it seemed as though the Guildmaster was constantly monopolizing on one opportunity upon another, using that to grow significantly.

It was to be expected of him. Furthermore, with Chairman Deacon dead, he no longer needed to worry about the man competing for the position of guildmaster, although the man's son had indeed taken over the company, just his death alone had hurt the company, causing several partners and associations to break away.

Guildmaster Bradt got the last laugh.

"Heh, I'm glad to see he's doing well."

"He has been visiting the Kandrian Empire frequently if you're wondering," Master Ceeran. "You could probably meet him if you wanted to with your status and prestige."

Rui shook his head. "We're not buddies. Our relationship was strictly and purely business-related. He did make a bit of an investment in me, but it was nothing by his standards. He's a strictly business-oriented man, and the conversation would probably last four minutes before he would excuse himself. If he wants to cash out his favor from me, he knows where to find me, he has undoubtedly heard the news of my return, after all."

Rui didn't think he was going to have Rui do anything at the moment. Although Rui was indeed a powerful Martial Senior, Guildmaster Bradt had powerful Seniors, Masters, and now even a Sage, after his contract with Sage Sariawar.

Knowing him, he was probably waiting for Rui to grow. Best to cash out the favor from him after he became a Martial Master, especially when Rui had demonstrated prodigious growth since then.

Chapter 1595: Submarines

The two of them spoke a bit more about the Princess of the Seas. Rui was surprised to learn that not only did she intend to expand the shipbuilding industry, and the seafare through new port towns, but she also intended to build underwater ships!

"Her Highness calls these artifacts 'submarines', I hear," Master Ceeran remarked.

"That's extremely ambitious!" Rui's eyes widened with surprise.

"She has been cooperating with the Panamic Naval Guild to develop the world's first 'submarine'." Master Ceeran remarked with an intrigued expression. "The details are far beyond me, but Her Highness extremely intelligent so I trust that she's making the rich choices."

Rui, on the other, hand was deep in thought.

Submarines were revolutionary, he knew that this world didn't have them, but if they did, a lot of things would change. He hadn't realized that the Kandrian Empire might become the birthplace of this new means of seafaring.

On the other hand, it made sense that the Kandrian Empire would be the place where it would be born. After all, it was an economic and technological powerhouse. It had the funding, the technology, and the resources to endeavor such a bold ambition and potentially succeed.

"Interesting..." Rui murmured. "You were right, she is a visionary."

He had already garnered a lot of respect for the princess, which was saying something. In comparison to her, Princess Raemina was so unattractive as a prospective ruler that it wasn't even funny.

He could understand why the Sea Princess was able to compete against her influence as a Minister and push back against the Martial Prince as well. She was looking to be quite an attractive candidate for support. It was a pity that their interests did not align. He had nothing to do with the domain of the seas and the coast, and neither did his family. Her ideals and visions of the future did not do anything for them.

'Though not being extreme is also a point in her favor,' Rui noted. 'Prince Raijun and Raemina are so extreme that a civil war will probably ensue if they get their way,' Rui noted. 'Perhaps I should consider supporting Princess Ranea. Though I do look forward to meeting her more than ever now.'

"It's interesting how she has managed to harness the entire seafare industry as a part of her faction," Master Ceeran remarked. "Part of it is undoubtedly the fact that she is said to have spent more of her life living in the Vargard Royal Manor in this very town, developing a deep affection for this sector of our nation."

"I see..." Rui remarked. "It makes sense then."

To think that that would have turned out to be the source of her campaign for the throne.

"You should be prepared," Master Ceeran replied. "Because her vision for the future is not the most favorable for Martial Union, she is the least in need of Martial support. She most likely will not take as much of an effort that Prince Rajun did when he personally invited you to the Royal Manor."

Rui shrugged. "That's fine. Prince Raemina didn't take the greatest amount of effort to try and garner my allegiance, she actually accepted my refusal rather quickly."

"She is arguably the most diametrically opposed to Martial Artists," Master Ceeran snorted. "Just the very notion of the state oppressing us. What a joke!"

Rui was not inclined to disagree. There was no way she would succeed, and even if she succeeded, it would be after a bloody civil war that ruined the nation.

He didn't understand how she couldn't see that.

"I will say, playing this little game is tiring," Master Ceeran heaved a sigh. "It is rather unfortunate that only those of Royal blood can descend the throne. Frankly, there are most likely far more optimal people out there who can do a much better job leading this nation with all of the pros of each prince and princess and none of the cons."

He turned towards Rui. "At the end of the day, these princes and princesses have only ever known luxury their entire life, besides from the Underworld prince perhaps. That makes them fundamentally flawed in ways that no amount of even the most extravagant education can possibly correct."

"If anything, extravagant education would only exacerbate the problem," Rui remarked.

Master Ceeran nodded. "The Republic of Gorteau is one such nation. Although it has its own weakness, I admire how the population is able to control who becomes the leader of the nation. I hope that some day the Kandrian Empire follows its steps."

"That could be considered treasonous speech, you know," Rui smirked.

Master Ceeran snorted. "That bullshit isn't enough to stop someone of my stature. Or yours, even. We are far too important to this nation to be tried for such a farce. Not even the Emperor would hold me accountable. It's not worth losing a Martial Master."

The two of them continued to chat together for a while about a variety of topics. Rui found the man's stories about his time in the past eight years to be quite interesting, especially the time period after Master Ceeran broke through to the Master Realm.

"I broke through to the Master a little after last year's annual fiscal budget allocation meeting, thus this year's meeting will actually be my first time as a constituent of the Assembly. I look forward to securing more resources for my sect," Master Ceeran remarked. "I shall vote in favor of instating you as a constituent so you can levy for your Martial Path, of course."

"I appreciate that," Rui nodded. "However, I have heard that the conditions to actually entering the Assembly are quite stringent. I will have to earn the approval of many Martial Masters in the Martial Union."

"Ah, don't worry about that, Rui," Master Ceeran remarked. "I'm sure that you of all people are capable of earning their support to let you enter, especially since you have already earned their respect as the most prodigious Martial Senior in history."

Chapter 1596: Drive

"That's quite the high esteem," Rui remarked. "I'm not sure if I have the ability to earn their approval."

"Nonsense," Master Ceeran huffed. "You have already earned their approval. The only ones who don't approve of you are jealous!"

Rui winced at the man's strong statements. Rui would never dare to say such a thing, he had far too much respect for every Martial Master. "Rest assured that most Martial Masters are pleased with you just from your contribution of the Hungry Pain technique, you have enriched all future Martial Squires,

something that will undoubtedly benefit all Martial Sects, and thus their leaders as well," Master Ceeran smiled. "While you have been rewarded heftily by the Martial Union, there is no doubt that have managed to gain the debt of the Martial Sects as well. When the time comes, many of them will honor that debt and approve your nomination as a constituent of the fiscal committee."

Rui nodded. "Well, I can only hope that that will be the case."

"You were rewarded with a hundred hours of time from Martial Masters, I believe," Master Ceeran remarked. "If that is the case, then you can use it not only to gain advice from some of the foremost experts in the field but also build a relationship with some of them."

That wasn't a bad idea. The only thing that he was worried about was that they would realize that and see through him. Perhaps he ought to purely with the intention of guidance with Martial Art, and let himself grow acquainted with them naturally. "That's good advice."

"However, your potential has been known for a while now, so I think you won't even have to do that much. There have been people awaiting your return long before you came back because of the potential of the impact you could make on Martial Art, when you returned as the youngest Martial Senior in history, many of us, myself included, were vindicated," Master Ceeran smirked. "On top of that, you have sent ripples across the Martial community of the Kandrian Empire regarding the Hungry Pain technique which has already made a substantial impact. We Martial Masters are not blind to potential, especially when it's brimming right in front of our eyes. It would be the height of foolishness to ignore it. Thus even with pure self-interest in mind, many will support you."

Rui nodded silently.

The two of them conversed for some more time before their conversation finally came to an end. Neither of them had too much free time to squander in idle conversation.

"I shall inform you of Her Highness' response, however, I'm sure she would be quite interested in speaking to you," Master Ceeran remarked. "Fare thee well, my young friend."

Rui had much to think about as he made his way back home after bidding Master Ceeran farewell.

It hadn't even been ten days since he returned, yet he already felt like it had been a while since he came home. The memories he had of the time away from home grew more distant. In the ten days that he had come home, he had already gotten dragged away into a bunch of matters and engagements.

Headmaster Aronian had not been kidding when he said that everybody wanted a piece of the pie that Rui represented. From the Martial Union to the government, to the Martial community and sects, to the princes and princesses.

It was not easy for him to get a break.

Yet part of it was because he was not willing to take too much of a break. While he didn't like it, fact of the matter was that he was in circumstances that affected one of his main interests; his family.

Especially since it grew bigger since he had left it all those years ago. It concerned him because the bigger it was the more liable it was to be affected by the Kandrian Throne War. He didn't want that to happen.

So much so that he was willing to do whatever it took to ward off the threat.

Before he had realized this, his desire to protect his family from the Kandrian Throne War had already replaced the drive to protect them from Chairman Deacon. It drove him to pursue more strength and power atop his main drive; the fulfillment of Project Water. He had expected that once he returned to the Kandrian Empire, his drive would cool off a bit due to one of its constituting desires had been fulfilled, he had not expected it to grow stronger.

Yet here he found himself undertaking long-term measures to prevent stagnation in the distant future. It was not something he would have done had he been more relaxed.

'Still, long-term measures are good, but I also need to consider my short-term and mid-term growth,' Rui mused. The Water Sect of the future would not help with the Kandrian Throne War. The war would have long been settled by the time the sect was set up.

His short-term power and value were what would allow him to influence the Kandrian Throne War in a direction that would be most beneficial to his interests. He had already proven his value, spreading his

Martial Art to improve the breakthrough rate to the Master Realm, and also the Hungry Pain technique that could cause huge boosts in power to the Martial Body.

However, value without the power to defend it was vulnerable. If he did not want to be toyed with by various forces that sought his power, then he would have to deter them with his power.

Rui knew that the fact that he was a high-grade Martial Senior had already deterred others from taking a more aggressive and ruthless approach. What if he had been a normal person with the secret of the Hungry Pain technique without any power to defend himself?

Would Headmaster Aronian have requested him to hold the presentation?

Would the Minister of Martial Art have requested him as humbly as he did?

The answer was no. Power was the foundation of the world, it was also the path forward to fulfilling Project Water, it was time he took another step in gaining more.

Chapter 1597: Paths forward

With a bit of thought, he gained a lot of clarity and conviction on his path forward from that point on. Prior to returning home, one of his drives was returning home. Now that that had been fulfilled, he had managed to relax for a bit.

But alas, it seemed that life was not willing to cut him some slack. Before he even realized it, he had already been dragged into several troublesome matters.

But it also helped him get back a bit of the urge for power he had back when Chairman Deacon was still alive.

When it came to his core long-term double-life ambition of Project Water, as well as his side and temporary drives for power for the Kandrian Throne War, he had several paths forward.

Naturally, he could make good use of the rewards that he had gotten from the Hungry Pain contribution.

He still had hundreds of millions of Martial Credits even after the expenses of the operation that he had undertaken to create an information blackout around Master Uma for Rui Quarrier.

He had the potions to empower his body.

He also had a hundred hours of dedicated tutelage from Martial Masters who had sold their time to the Martial Union. He knew from being trained under Master Reina and Master Zeamer that Martial Masters were quite insightful, there were only gains to be made from their tutelage.

However, more importantly, he needed to focus on the direction that he was going to go down.

There were multiple paths forward to expanding his ability to adaptively evolve.

There was, of course, the primordial seed substance. He had run into this magical substance in the Virodhabhasa Theocracy. It constituted the body of the abyssfeeders and was the reason that the creature's body could adapt and evolve to its environments and targets.

He dreamed of harnessing that ability one day, allowing him to replicate those feats.

The next path forward simply strengthening his foundation. In his assault against the Gereign base of the Carnil Mafia, he found that he was always far behind his opponents in terms of raw physical parameters. Of course, he had won every single one of his fights, but that was after using the various systems of his upgraded VOID algorithm like the pattern recognition system, the Metabody System, and the Hypnomatrix to close the massive gaps between him and his opponent.

He would love it if he did not have to play the 'bridge the gap' game that he constantly found himself playing against other high-grade Martial Seniors. Of course, it was expected that he would find himself in such a situation when considering the fact that they were usually centuries, at bare minimum decades, older than him having honed their Martial Bodies for far, far longer than Rui had.

This gave them an enormous edge over him that was not easy to close.

One more path of pursuit that he was most interested in considering was domain techniques.

He had run into a fascinating new field of Martial Art. A niche field centered around broader and extensive manipulation of the environment. This was a technique that manipulated the environment to such a degree that it essentially created a field within which the user could conjure up a variety of strange effects through their manipulation of the sky and land.

Now Rui was no stranger to harnessing the power of the atmosphere through wind and sound, but this was different. He didn't gain dominion over the atmosphere or over sound and wind.

But the Martial Senior that he fought could literally command the land beneath their feet to attack him!

It was a fascinating technique that resembled magic, rather than Martial Art.

But it opened his eyes to what was possible.

On top of that, it opened new paths for adaptive evolution.

What if he could use a domain technique to adaptively evolve his environment to counter his opponent?

'It could potentially be a game-changer,' Rui realized.

He could think of a variety of applications that would be highly useful in adaptively evolving against his opponent. That was the reason that he was very keen on examining the potential of this new field.

These three were his broader options forward in getting closer to accomplishing Project Water while also gaining the power he needed to be more strategically impactful on the throne war for the sake of the people he cared.

Of the three of them, the hardest was undoubtedly the primordial seed. In the first place, it was not a field of Martial Art, it was just a substance capable of crazy things. He would need to create a new field of Martial Art that employs primordial seed and draws out its full potential.

It was easily the most tedious and time-consuming with the highest chance of failure out of the three.

'In that case, it is best to pick all the low-hanging fruit rather than aim for the highest ones right off that bat,' Rui mused. He could ask the Minister of Martial Art for research information on primordial seed among other things in exchange for fulfilling his request to Rui to spread his Martial Art.

That left strengthening his foundation which he most certainly was willing to do, the potions of the Martial Union were a good way to start, but indulging in more foundational training to build his core.

He was sure there were more extreme training techniques that could help him develop his body even more. He simply needed to find them and empower his body to an even higher degree than he already had, potentially closing some of the distance between himself and his high-grade peers on the physical level.

The domain field would require a much more sophisticated approach since this was much more nuanced and required thought in order to empower adaptive evolution. He was sure that the Martial Union had much to offer, it was definitely worth it to check it out when he had the time.

Chapter 1598: First Session

The next day, Rui got out of bed earlier than he normally did, quickly preparing himself. It wasn't too long before he wore his Martial Art attire before quickly heading out after bidding his family members goodbye.

Today was his first day training the Martial Prince.

He immediately set off for the town of Vargard at high speeds, sailing through the Kandrian Empire.

Prince Raijun's staff had offered to take care of transport both ways, but Rui firmly denied it.

He knew what the Martial Prince was trying to do. He was trying to increase the association between himself and Rui, to increase the difficulty of Rui joining other parties.

That was why Rui firmly insisted that the contract between them occur through the Martial Union as a broker, making it seem much more business-oriented than a personal commitment.

Furthermore, Rui refused to allow the Prince to take charge of the security detail for his family, insisting that he transfer the amount needed to sustain the security detail. He also refused any personnel change in the security detail.

There were multiple reasons for this.

The first reason was to ensure that Prince Raijun did not gain any meaningful leverage over Rui.

Rui was far too sharp to not realize the ramifications of handing over his family's safety to a Royal prince who wanted something out of Rui. That was why he simply had him pay the amount needed for the security to Rui, and Rui would then personally purchase an extension for the commission of the security detail protecting his family.

Hell, he could even get rid of the Martial Union as the broker between himself and the security detail protecting his home, if possible.

But these were all measures to ward off the little trap that Prince Ruijan had set up. All of the remaining six princes and princesses would undoubtedly realize the significance of Rui's refusals of the deal that Prince Ruijan provided and instead take the matters of the protection of his family into his own hands.

It was a message, a message indicating that not only was he not in the same camp as the Ruijan Faction, but also that he did not trust Prince Raijun.

In this manner, he flipped Prince Raijun's cute attempt at implicitly roping him in to instead put greater distance between them.

"I see that the Martial Union was not joking when they said that your political acumen was befitting that of a Senior Ambassador," Prince Raijun smirked mischievously at Rui when the two of them met for the second time after Rui arrived at his manor. "It seems you are truly unwilling to join my faction. Such a shame."

"I did make my stance clear back then," Rui replied calmly. "Naturally, I would not allow myself to get funneled into a path that I am unwilling to go down."

Prince Raijun flashed a knowing smile at Rui. "I heard you met my sister. What do you think of her?"

"I'm sure you already know that I rejected joining Her Highness' Faction," Rui replied.

"Ah you don't have to address her with such a lofty title, Senior Quarrier," Prince Raijun chuckled. "That psycho does not deserve deference from someone like yourself. I told you did I not? I want to create a nation where Martial Artists don't have to bow their heads to people undeserving of such a gesture. That includes mere Martial Apprentices like myself as well as controlling women like her. If not for the fact that only those of royal blood can ascend the throne, for now, I would not have allowed so many esteemed Martial Artists to follow someone like me."

"...I see," Rui simply replied.

Prince Raijun was an interesting character. Although he did hide it well, Rui could sense that he did possess the aristocratic and royal bearing that one would expect from someone of his background.

Although his tone was remarkably line and informal, there were subtle hints in his body language that betrayed it.

His chin never dipped below a certain height. His eyes did not match the deference in his words.

It was an interesting contradiction. Subconsciously, he retained the bearing that was undoubtedly programmed into him by his upbringing. Consciously, he was genuine about his Martial supremacist philosophy.

After all, Rui highly doubted that he could fool all the Martial Masters who had chosen to support him.

Martial Masters were extremely sharp and had an extremely high ability to peer into people and gauge the truth.

The fact that they had decided to become his patrons meant that there was truth to his claims.

Rui shook his head inwardly. He was not a psychoanalyst, he did not care about Prince Raijun beyond ensuring that the man did not become emperor.

"Let us begin, Your Highness," Rui replied. "We do not have much time in the first place. For the first session, I simply wish to know you better as a Martial Artist, not as a prince or a politician. This first session will be merely a learning session for myself so that I can familiarize myself with you."

Prince Raijun smiled. "As you wish, teacher. Allow me to tell you about my Martial P-"

You don't need to," Rui got up, walking towards the training ground beside them. "Tell me with your Martial Art, not your words. That's how Martial Artists communicate."

Prince Raijun smiled enthusiastically. "Then so I shall."

He got on to the training ground, standing ten away from Rui.

The two Martial Master bodyguards stood at the edge of the training ground. They did do anything special, yet their eyes were fixed on Rui, placing immense implicit pressure on him.

Rui could sense that both of them were of the same caliber as Master Zeamer. While such powerful Martial Masters were unicorns in most places in the world, they were far less uncommon in the Kandrian Empire. He would die before he knew it if he did anything that even remotely resembled a threat to the prince's life.

Chapter 1599: Sparring Session

One of the reasons Rui was eager to witness the man's Martial Art was because the Martial Path was a manifestation of the essence of one's being, a path born from the culmination of a person. It inherited their affinities, biases, inclinations, and strengths and weaknesses.

Much about a person could be learned from their Martial Path. His words could be deceitful, but his Martial Art would not. This was especially the case ever since Rui had become a Martial Senior. His senses and instincts had elevated to a much higher level, and his insight into Martial Artists of the Lower Realms grew as a result.

Prince Raijun took a largely neutral stance that didn't place too much emphasis on any one particular domain or field of combat. This suggested a well-balanced Martial Art, which in turn was usually a sign of a well-balanced temperament.

He had long noticed the correlation between temperament and the affinities of Martial Art. It was hard not to. Most offensive Martial Artists he had run into possessed highly active and aggressive temperaments.

Most defensive Martial Artists possessed tempered fortitude.

Most maneuvering-oriented Martial Artists possessed dynamic personalities.

Nothing was absolute, but it meant that the prince most likely had a balanced Martial Art.

Rui walked over to him slowly, gauging his reaction. It wasn't until he reached a meter away from the prince that he finally attacked.

WHOOSH!

Although the attack was quite swift for a Martial Apprentice, to Rui it may as well have been frozen in time.

Rui lightly shifted, moving out of the way. Yet much to his surprise, the prince's attack had already been corrected and redirected toward Rui without even the slightest hint of lag.

POW!

The attack crashed into Rui's hand, stopping it midway.

"Interesting," Rui murmured. That one attack alone had given him a lot of insight into the prince's Martial Art.

"You haven't seen anything yet!" The prince confidently declared as a flurry of blows erupted, flying at Rui. Rui found that ordinary maneuvers were less effective in evading the prince's attacks one after the other. Every time Rui shifted, the attack rapidly followed suit, altering its trajectory midair with remarkably agility and fluidity, forcing him to block.

Of course, he could still effortlessly evade him with a fraction of his opponent's speed if he truly wanted, but that wasn't the point. He was trying to show-off, he was trying to be a good sparring trainer and gauge the prince's capabilities.

POW POW POW!

Rui blocked several strikes from the prince before gently throwing an attack at the prince to test his defensive reactions.

WHOOSH!

The prince rapidly shot out of the way at the last moment throwing his fist at Rui Yet when he tried to evade, the attack shifted instantly, crashing into Rui's palm once more.

Yet his eyes widened when he found his balance crumbling as Rui twisted his fist.

CLASP

"Then, let us test your grappling," Rui wrestled him to the ground in the blink of an eye. Yet he could only be impressed as the prince held his ground, fighting back against Rui's attempt to wrangle over him and choke him out. Yet Rui could sense his discomfort and unfamiliarity. This man was firmly a striker, without a doubt.

"You're neither particularly good at grappling nor good at avoiding. Anybody more competent than you at it will defeat you most of the time," Rui found himself behind the prince as his arm carefully wrapped around the prince's neck.

Rui felt particularly nervous as he felt a directed wave of pressure from the two Martial Masters who looked to be on the verge of activating their Martial Minds.

In this position, it would be trivially easy for Rui to kill the prince, which is why they were on extremely high alert. Yet he delicately restricted his strength as much as possible while still exerting just enough to pressure the prince.

TAP TAP

Rui immediately let go when he felt two taps on his arm, indicating his submission.

"Huff...You're as tough as an ox!" The prince heaved a sigh. "I wasn't even able to come close to overpowering your grip."

"It wasn't that I was strong," Rui replied. "The fact of the matter is that rear choke holds give the choker far too much leverage over the most vital part of the human body. It is almost impossible to break out of a rear choke hold, and the best way to fight it is to ensure that it doesn't happen in the first place. That is why it is important to never allow your opponent to get your back."

While it was true that Martial Art and martial arts were different, there were some fundamental commonalities that the two of them shared. Rear choke holds were game-enders in both the UFC and MMA, as well as Martial Art combat of Gaia.

"You're right," The prince heaved a sigh, standing up. "It is indeed an area where I have to improve."

"Let's go again," Rui replied. "This time I will test your combat against an aggressive offensive Martial Art."

"Bring it on then," The prince smiled confidently.

The sparring session ensued as Rui tested the prince's combat prowess against various kinds of opponents. He did a good job replicating different styles, having fought against many Martial Artists, he recalled their patterns, replicating them on the spot.

This made the prince feel like he was fighting a different Martial Artist each time. The Martial Masters carefully overseeing the training session grew curious at Rui's ability to alter his combat approach to such a degree.

Normally, even against low-level opponents, it wasn't easy to replicate the experience of fighting against different Martial Artists with different Martial Paths.

It became evident to that the existing intelligence on Rui Quarrier was insufficient and incomplete. They had already updated their knowledge on his compatibilities.

Rui Quarrier was able to steal the essence of a Martial Art during combat, perhaps that had something to do with his ability to adaptively evolve to them. Too much was unknown about the source of the prodigious Martial Artist's strength.

Chapter 1600: Unrefined

It wasn't long before Rui had completed his sparring session with his latest mentee. "You're truly amazing," Prince Raijun heaved a sigh. "How are you so versatile?"

"It's a consequence of the nature of my Martial Art," Rui replied with a composed tone. "More importantly, I have gained some insights I wish to speak to you about."

The prince eagerly nodded.

"Firstly, your Martial Path is dynamic redirection, correct?"

"Correct," The prince nodded.

Rui had figured it out from the very first strike. The man possessed an incredibly high ability to control and manipulate momentum. His own, as well as that of his opponent. This allowed him to alter the direction of his attack mid-strike nigh instantly, and redirect them towards his opponent.

"Your fundamentals are quite solid," Rui remarked clinically. "Your control over the flow of power is quite exquisite even, you're a fine sparrer."

Prince Raijun frowned. That was an odd choice of words.

"Sparrer?"

"I mean what I said," Rui replied. "It would be difficult to call you a fine Martial Artist because you are unfortunately not a fine Martial Artist."

The Martial Prince narrowed his eyes, yet he was completely composed and calm. "Please elaborate."

"I think I have discovered the reason that you have stagnated," Rui replied, continued. "While your Martial Path is decently above average as far as its grade goes and your foundations, and body are all quite solid, there are issues. I can even say that you're doing a very good job with your approach to individuality, I can sense that your Martial Art is decently attuned to you and your body."

"Then..."

"You really have just one main issue," Rui replied. "Your Martial Art is highly unrefined."

Prince Raijun stared at Rui, listening to his words intently. "Individuality is necessary for attunement," Rui replied. "And attunement is necessary because it is only because a Martial Art and the techniques,

principles, and patterns, that constitute it, are attuned to your mind and body that they are able to squeeze every last drop of potential and power from within the body and employ most efficiently and effectively possible, producing results that are far superhuman."

Prince Raijun nodded, curious about where Rui was going with this. "The issue is that the individuality you imbue into your Martial Art that increases its attunement is never refined," Rui calmly informed him. "Refinement, or lack thereof in this case is in reference to the umpteen number of micro-flaws in the techniques, principles, and patterns of your Martial Art, that reduce its attunement to your Martial Art."

"Micro-flaws...?" Prince Raijun murmured, absorbed into Rui's words.

"Indeed. Slight deviations, slightly mis-optimized shifts that are not the most suited for your body," Rui replied. "One or two don't make a difference, but when there are many, they can greatly reduce your combat prowess. It is also difficult to consciously and actively detect them. It is also the reason that you haven't yet reached the Squire Realm."

The prince widened his eyes in surprise at Rui's words. "But...the Martial Masters I have consulted have told me that my individuality hasn't reached the threshold to survive the Squire evolution breakthrough process. That's why I have been working hard to imbue my Martial Art with as much individuality as possible, but progress seems nearly impossible. I get stronger, but I don't feel like I've made too much progress down my Martial Path."

"The Martial Masters certainly did not lie," Rui reassured. "The issue is that the core problem goes far beyond that. Their analysis was, well, shallow, for a lack of a better word."

Prince Raijun stared at Rui with surprise. "Shallow? Martial Masters?"

Rui nodded. "Indeed."

"I don't understand," Prince Raijun shook his head with a little frustration. "What exactly is happening, why can't I reach the threshold of Squire candidacy?"

"The truth is nuanced," Rui replied. "Bare with me. I promise it will make sense. First, let us begin with the Apprentice Realm, what is the source of power of the Apprentice Realm?"

This question alone was more complex than anyone would suspect.

"...The Apprentice Realm harnesses the untapped cognitive potential of the brain, allowing the user to use that additional kinetic and dynamic battle cognition to employ physical power in a manner that is exponentially more efficient and effective than normal humans," The prince carefully replied.

"Correct, this process doesn't stop after you break through to the Apprentice Realm," Rui replied. "The more of your individuality you imbue into your Martial Art, the more attuned it is to your mind and body. The more attuned it is to your mind, the more untapped cognitive potential it draws out from it. That is why the more individuality you add to your brain, the stronger it grows until it eventually crosses the threshold where your consciousness can survive the simultaneous destruction and regeneration of the brain that happens in the Squire evolution breakthrough process."

The prince nodded, having been educated about this a long time ago.

"Thus, individuality is at the root of it all," Rui concluded. "But what if the individuality is unrefined?"

Prince Raijun's eyes widened as he realized what Rui getting at.

"If the individuality is unrefined, then the attunement with mind and body that the Martial Art gains from said unrefined individuality is greatly reduced," Rui replied. "You can think of it mathematically even. If X amount of refined individuality gives you X amount of attunement, then X amount of unrefined individuality will give you 0.5X. Depending on how unrefined it is, it can even yield only 0.1X, or 0.1X, or even 0.0000001X. That is why your attunement is lacking even though your efforts are high."

This revelation shook Prince Raijun.

Over the years, many Martial Masters and even a Martial Sage had rarely gone beyond telling him he lacked individuality, and when they did, their explanations grew more abstract and vague, often becoming rather metaphorical puzzling.

They often said things like 'Porous rock breaks easily while solid rock doesn't' or 'Weak is a sword whose metal isn't beaten ten thousand times when forged.'

This was the first time he had heard such a clear-cut, precise, and concise explanation of exactly what the problem was.