

Martial Unity 1611

Chapter 1611: Counter-Proposal

"I...think there certainly is merit in the idea that breathing is as fundamental to martial Art as offense and defense themselves are," Rui carefully chose his words. "As you said, all life breathes, it is necessary. A large majority of Martial Artists have some breathing technique or the other in their Martial Art, that is also true. It certainly is as, or similarly, popular as offense, defense, or maneuvering. These are good arguments in favor of recognizing it as a fundamental field of combat."

He paused for a moment, before continuing. "However, I believe there are arguments that are against it as well that are more so philosophical in nature. Offense, defense, and maneuvering can be said to be conceptually important to combat itself. Offense is to hurt, and defense is to avoid being hurt, maneuvering is to move, an action that is fundamental to the prior two fields and the transitions between them. In comparison..."

He met her gaze firmly. "...Breathing may be fundamental to our life as a phenomenon, but it is not fundamental to the concept of combat in the manner that the concepts of offense, defense, and maneuvering are. Thus, I see merits on both sides over this issue."

He concluded himself.

She smiled. "You instantly managed to construct and dissect the nuances of the two main differing points of view on this topic that have long clashed with each other, on the spot. You are as bright as they say."

"You flatter me, Master," Rui replied with a ton of modesty. "However, we of the Breathing Sect strongly disagree that both these positions are equally meritorious. Much underlies combat, and much is necessary for it. We often ignore them, taking them for granted, it isn't granted," She continued. "For instance, life itself is even more fundamental to combat than offense, defense, and maneuvering are. After all, dead Martial Artists cannot fight. Martial Artists can fight without defense, although they will die very quickly, but they cannot fight without life in their bodies and minds. And, as we discussed, breathing is fundamental to life, most certainly human life. Thus, breathing several orders more fundamental to combat than even the trinity of combat."

"I see..." Rui remarked, not commenting. He felt that her logic was a tad bit pedantic and overly favorable to breathing.

Yes, it was true that breathing was fundamental to the phenomenon of most life, which as a concept was quite fundamental to combat, however, that logic could be applied to many things.

Consumption was also equally fundamental to the concept of life. Thus, using this line of logic, it could be argued that eating ought to be a fundamental field of combat similar to breathing.

The same could be said for several other fundamental processes to the human body, including thought. Would that make thought techniques, techniques that pretty much nobody except Martial Masters and Seniors used, a fundamental field?

Rui wasn't inclined to think so. Regardless, he wasn't too interested in having a philosophical debate with the elderly Master when their disagreements were both fundamental and definitional, neither of which were likely to be solved with a discussion.

"The Breathing Sect has been lobbying for the recognition of Breathing techniques as a fundamental field of combat for centuries now," She explained softly. "Progress has been slow, but steady. Her Transcendence, the Breathless Beauty, introduced the field of Martial Breathing more than four centuries ago and has spread it to every corner of the world ever since. What was once a small movement has now become a powerhouse international faction led by a Martial Transcendent, nearly a dozen Martial Sages, and more than a hundred Martial Masters like myself. We operate across the entire continent, lobbying to bring justice to breathing, we have come closer to success than ever before. After all, the sheer utility and power of breathing techniques cannot be denied."

She turned to Rui. "You must be wondering why I abruptly began our conversation with this topic."

"Well, yes..." It would be strange not to, rather.

"I would like for you to support us, Rui Quarrier," She replied. "Your Martial Art, according to our intelligence network, consists of many breathing techniques that are extremely vital in facilitating your powerful 'adaptive evolution'. I'm not asking you to believe what we believe philosophically, I am asking you to support our cause for your own benefits. The more breathing becomes recognized, the greater the resources that will be expended into developing it, resulting in greater techniques in all regards, greater training artifacts and methodologies. This will benefit you because you will be able to update your breathing techniques with superior ones."

She paused for a moment, giving him a knowing look. "You are currently the most valued Martial Senior in East Panama. Any group that gains your support and allegiance will gain a rather substantial amount of prestige to have earned a prodigious Martial Artist who will surely leave his mark on all of Martial Art. Supporting us benefits both of us. Naturally, the Breathing Sect is very much prepared to go to great lengths to make it worth your time."

Rui had already sharply deduced her intentions when she brought up lobbying efforts earlier. "Tell me, Rui Quarrier," She calmly addressed him. "Do you accept the premise of our cooperation? If it is merely a matter of price, then rest assured that we are willing to go far."

Rui shook his head. "I have enough and more wealth. I am open to cooperating with you. However, I have a counter-proposal."

He grew more serious. "The next fiscal committee meeting of the Martial Union is in several months. A motion to induct me as a constituent of the committee will be brought up by some Master, I wish for you to vote in favor of the motion. Not only that..."

He had arrived at his actual objective. "In exchange for my support, I want the Breathing Sect's wholehearted support for the budget allocated to the dissemination of my Martial Path."

Chapter 1612: Backer

Master Vericita raised an eyebrow softly, giving Rui a knowing look. "I am not unaware of the suggestions and ideas regarding your Martial Art that were born from Master Ceeran's revelations regarding it. I do not know how true they are. The Breathing Sect cannot simply throw its support behind something that isn't substantiated with merit."

"Is a Martial Master's word not enough?" Rui raised an eyebrow. "Master Ceeran informed me that there was additional verification conducted on his claims."

"It's a matter of standards. The Martial Union can afford to invest capital and even take minor gambles fiscally. But Martial Sects are different. We have a reputation to maintain when it comes to supporting a motion. We need a higher standard of certainty. We also need to be sure that it is what you say it is."

"I intend to present it to a variety of Martial Masters before the committee meeting happens," Rui replied. "If it satisfies you, then I presume I have your support?"

"Most certainly young man," Master Vericita smiled. "I, and my fellow Martial Masters of the Breathing Sect, will naturally be voting in favor of the motion to instate you as a member of the fiscal committee."

"Then I suppose we have ourselves an agreement," Rui remarked with satisfaction. "I didn't expect to lobby support in our meeting, but I'm glad that I was able to."

"It was long coming, young man," She remarked. "As I mentioned, I have known about you for a long time, ever since you defeated one of my descendants, heir to the Nepomniachtchi Family, as an Apprentice many years ago."

Rui furrowed his eyebrow in confusion for a moment until it clicked. His eyes widened "Ian Nepomniachtchi?"

This was the Martial Apprentice that he had faced in the semi-finals of the Kandrian Martial Contest held between the sixteen Martial Academies. He was a dynamic all-rounder with breathing techniques that were quite powerful and allowed him to manipulate his physical configuration like the Metabody System.

Rui had managed to defeat him with great effort, overcoming him in their battle. Since then, he knew that the Martial Artist bore a grudge against Rui.

Rui hadn't thought about the man in so many years that the memory was buried deep in the dark depths. If not for Master Vericita bringing him up, Rui may have forgotten about the man altogether. He glanced back at the Martial Master with a wary expression. He could only hope that this wouldn't affect their agreement to cooperate.

"Rest assured that such a trivial matter is far from enough to sour our relationship," She calmly reassured him. "Martial Artists lose. This is an unchangeable fact. My descendant lost because he was weaker. You won because you're stronger. Only a fool would blame you for winning. Ian had behaved in a manner that is not befitting that of a scion of the prestigious family born from my blood, indicating that he was lacking."

Rui heaved a soft sigh. "I am relieved by your graciousness, Your Mastery."

"I am hardly being gracious as much as fair and truthful," She heaved a soft sigh. "My descendant was born with prodigious talent, breaking through to the Apprentice Realm several years younger than even what would normally be considered gifted; at the age of twelve as a child. His progress has been remarkable, all things considered."

She turned to Rui with appreciative eyes. "It is a shame that our family was not blessed with a Martial Artist like yourself. In fact, would you be willing to be adopted by the Nepomniachtchi Family?"

Rui coughed uncomfortably. "Let us dispense with the jokes."

She smiled with a hint of mischief. "It is a shame, but I shall do so. In addition to our prior agreement, I would like to add that I am willing to consider investing heavily in the Martial Art techniques of your Martial Art that you will be spreading. If they truly impress me, then I am willing to spend hundreds of millions of Martial Credits."

Rui's eyes widened at those words. "That is an excessive amount, Master."

"I would have agreed with that statement even a few years ago," She remarked with a smug smile. "But rest assured that that is a very manageable amount these days as a supporter of the Rafia Faction."

Rui raised an eyebrow at those words. It was an interesting remark, and certainly not one that she brought up for no reason.

"I was not aware that the Nepomniachtchi Family was a part of the Rafia Faction," Rui replied with an intrigued tone. "Seems unusual for a Martial family."

"What the Breathing Sect needs more than anything is the capital to fund extensive rallying and lobbying," Master Vericita remarked. "People assume that Martial Artists don't care or need money, especially those of the higher Realms, but the world runs on money and capital. An innumerable problems simply melt before its power. Martial Art is more absolute, of course, but there's no harm in possessing both instead of just one, especially when you are faced with the daunting ambition of

wanting to alter the foundations of the Martial World, such a thing cannot be accomplished by Martial power alone."

Rui listened with intrigue. "I see, so the Breathing Sect has aligned with the Rafia Faction to boost the campaign to bring breathing techniques more recognition."

"That correct," Master Vericita remarked, sipping her tea. "We have deemed it to be a necessary measure to achieve our ambition."

Rui wasn't sure about how he felt about that. "Doesn't Her Highness wish to criminalize worker unions to make it easier for a company or organization to access labor? Technically that would include the Martial Union, right? Do you really support that outcome?"

"Not at all," She sipped some tea. "However, I believe that it is inconsequential. That is why I don't care about her extreme ambition to create a world that favors of commerce and trade. The Martial Union will never accept abolition and no force in this world, short of a Martial Transcendent, can abolish it against our will."

Chapter 1613: Illusioned

Rui didn't disagree with her evaluation.

Frankly, he was surprised that some of the prime princes and princesses believed that they could be Martial Artists and suppress the Martial Union despite their extravagant education.

It showed that education correlated more with knowledge than it did wisdom.

The princes and princesses appeared to believe in the throne, perhaps a little too excessively. It appeared that they truly thought they could achieve their ambitions or ideals as long as they ascended the throne and gained the power of the crown, no matter what.

As children of the Emperor, they were undoubtedly surrounded by those who were fervently loyal to the Emperor and believed in his absolution.

Was that why Prince Raijun thought he could get away with using the power of the Emperor to alter the fundamental nature of the Kandrian Empire and elevate Martial Artists to be the ruling class of the nation?

It was funnily contradictory in his case, yet also deeply concerning. If that was the mindset that the princes and princesses had regarding what was possible with the power of the Crown, then it was no wonder that some of these princes and princesses had crazy ideas!

Regardless, he could understand Master Vericita's argument. The abolition of the Martial Union was essentially effectively impossible and any attempt to do so would lead to a war between two forces that would tear apart the very fabric of the nation, sending ripples of war and chaos across not just the nation but also the entire world.

That was the influence that the Kandrian Empire had across East Panama. A civil war would leave the Kandrian Empire in a delicate state of weakness that would in turn invite its rival powerhouse Sage-level nations to wage war on the weakened nation.

The Kandrian Empire was a highly desirable nation to colonize and take over, the fact that it bordered the Great Nam Ocean alone made it worth acquiring.

"The risks of conflict are high with the Corporate Princess," Rui remarked. "Are you willing to bring war to this land for the sake of the Breathing Sect's ambition?"

"Yes."

Her voice was soft, but her tone was firm.

"War is inevitable, young one," She remarked with a tone of resignation. "Take it from someone who has lived more than a dozen times longer than you have. War is inevitable. Human greed. Human fear. Martial drive. As long as these exist, there will be always war. The Great East Panamic War may have ended eighty years ago, but it will reignite once more. War will come, one way or another. It is better to be prepared for it than to try and prevent it."

"One can do both," Rui calmly replied. "I have taken great measures to protect my loved ones from it while doing my best to prevent its coming."

"That is an admirable sentiment but I fear that you may be a bit naive, young man," She heaved a soft sigh.

Rui simply stared at her. He was aware of the inevitability of war more than anyone could imagine. In his previous life, he was born during the Cold War and in an age when the world was cooling down from the world wars.

He knew that war was like weeds, it would just keep coming back even after it was gone. However, he didn't care to postpone war forever. He wasn't even strictly against war either.

What he was against was a war that would disaffect his family, which a civil war would most certainly do due to its proximity to them. If the Kandrian Empire fought a large war a great distance away that did not affect the Quarrier Orphanage, he would not give a damn.

Rui heaved a sigh. "Oh well, we can only do what we can."

"You ought to consider following suit if you are truly serious about spreading your Martial Art," Master Vericita remarked, smiling invitingly. "Creating a Sect requires capital, rest assured. Maintaining it requires just as much capital. Joining the Rafia Faction will take care of those concerns and more."

Rui scoffed inwardly.

Of course, she was trying to rally him to the Rafia Faction.

"I appreciate the suggestion," Rui replied in a non-committing tone.

"Hear me out, Senior Quarrier. Her Highness is quite eager to gain your support. She has a proposal for you," Master Vericita replied. "It is...controversial, but her reasoning is sound in theory. It may be in your interests to accept it."

He wasn't surprised that an initiative had already been taken to earn his allegiance. "What proposal?"

"Her Highness will convey that to you herself," Master Vericita replied with a soft smile, firmly refusing to divulge it.

She stood up, opening her palm before breathing in a particular manner

Suddenly, a well-embellished envelope appeared in her palm.

On it was the seal of the Royal Family.

Rui heaved a soft sigh.

"Her Highness invites you to a corporate convention," She informed him. "While she is not present at all times, you will be treated with the utmost hospitality for as long as you wish before and after you meet with her. She may also "

Her hands stretched out, offering the envelope to Rui who accepted it.

"I look forward to meeting with Her Highness," Rui replied.

Master Vericita smiled. "We have spoken on many a topic, Senior Quarrier, why don't we get to why we are here."

"Ah..." Rui smiled wryly. For a moment, he had forgotten when he had come to speak to Master Vericita. "Right. I wish to inquire about the effects of the Roaring Dragon Blood Potion. While there is documentation that talks about the effects, it is clinical and does not include the Martial perspective, thus I was advised to speak to a Martial Artist who has consumed the potion."

Master Vericita considered his words for a moment before she began. "The roaring dragon is a species of dragon that is known for its lethal roars that produce a sound that can kill everything within a town as a result of an extraordinary breathing capacity. It is esoteric in that we do not understand the principle,

yet through sheer trial and error, we have managed to glean a portion of the truth and harness its mysterious power."

Chapter 1614: Good Boy

"More than ten thousand test subjects have perished after torturous outcomes with endless trial and error," Master Vericita smile grew melancholic. "That should inform you with how difficult it was to develop this potion. It also tells you the value of the power that lays within"

Rui's eyes widened. "That's an absurdly high count!"

Master Vericita's eyes grew pensive. "It is indeed unpleasant, but this is the cost of harnessing powers and forces that we do not understand."

Rui's eyes narrowed.

This was the flaw of human progress on the Panama Continent. Because they did not understand the underlying principles of the esoteric nature that they were harnessing, they had to rely on an absurd amount of trial and error.

A more refined and deeper understanding would have allowed them to make more progress with less trial and error since their understanding would allow them to avoid errors rather than needing endless trials to spot them.

"It is good to understand the weight behind these miracles of man," Master Vericita explained. "Upon consuming the potion, your breath will grow more powerful. It will feel as though even the slightest bit of effort will cause you to inhale so much. You will need to dedicate some amount of time to remastering your breathing and ensuring that you have regained control over it. In addition..."

She proceeded to give Rui a good description of the experiences that she had undergone when she consumed the potion, giving him several pointers and notes.

"...And while it wasn't easy, the power that I gained was certainly worth it," She explained.

Rui narrowed his eyes. "I see...this has been quite insightful. The Roaring Blood Potion is certainly one hell of a resource for Martial Artists to make up for dated Martial Bodies."

"It is not enough, I'm afraid," Master Vericita sighed, throwing Rui a knowing look. "Especially since the technique that you have bestowed upon the Martial Union has greatly empowered the Squire evolution breakthrough process. While most Martial Artists are pleased by the contribution to Martial Art, their sects, and the Martial Union, there are some Seniors and Masters who are pressured by it."

Rui raised an eyebrow. "Pressured?"

"Yes, you have accelerated the growth of the future generation of Martial Art significantly. The geniuses of the next generations in particular will be able to close the gap between themselves and their seniors much quicker. Thus there are some who are uncomfortable and feel threatened by the superior physical foundation of their juniors." She turned towards him. "You are at the top of their list."

Rui narrowed his eyes.

"Think about it, Senior Quarrier," She mentioned. "There are Martial Squires and even Seniors who are many decades and even centuries old. They have worked hard to reach the power that they have currently obtained. Countless years have gone into painstakingly drawing out their individuality. Even more have gone into refining it in battle. Every iota of power they possess is a testament to their drive, a source of their pride. How do you think these senior Martial Artists feel when they witness you zipping through your Martial Path like a jog in the park? Reaching the Senior Realm at the age of twenty-four and then reaching the higher grades four years later is just so absurd that it's not even funny."

She heaved a sigh. "That's not even taking into account the various other feats that you have accomplished. And now you have made their seniority even less of an advantage with the Hungry Pain technique. That is why already rare potions like these are not longer adequate. I foresee a rise in the demand for body-augmentation treatments amongst elder Martial Artists. Most likely, in the coming fiscal budget allocation meeting that you aim to be a part of, a much greater annual budget will be allocated to body augmentation resources in order to ensure that it can successfully close the gap between generations."

"I see..." Rui murmured. "That does make sense. Considering that these potions are based on rare and esoteric resources, we will also most likely see a substantial increment in the hunter commissions both externally and internally. It appears that I have caused a variety of chain reactions."

In fact, now that Rui gave it deeper thought, his mind was able to calculate many possible chain reactions from this one technique alone.

Master Vericita gave him a gentle smile as she reached out, placing her hand on Rui's head.

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"My child, do not let the inevitable ripples from your deeds affect you," Her tone was gentle yet affectionate. "Great deeds always earn the ire of those who benefit from their absence. Rest assured that they will not be allowed to harm you out of perverse self-interest. I shall personally intervene should any Martial Master employ their power to pressure you. You have my word as the head of the Nepomniachtchi Family."

Rui smiled wryly as she continued pat his head lightly, it was a strangely intimate gesture. It appeared that the elderly Martial Master was too old to care for social distance. Not that Rui minded, the maternal gesture even made him feel like was in his mother's embrace making him feel secure and safe, embarrassingly enough.

"Martial Art requires bright stars like you," She smiled affectionately, still patting his head. "You are of the future. Martial Artists like myself are powerful, yet we are of the past. I am of an era where Martial Art was more primitive and limited. It is only the freshness of youth that can qualitatively improve Martial Art, especially since your mind and body are going to retain their youth for a long time since your aging slowed down even further before you hit your physical prime."

"Your words are flattering, Master," Rui bowed his head even as she patted it.

"You're such a good boy, would you like to reconsider joining my family? You'll get to call me 'grandma' and have head pats like this every day, especially since Ian is too proud to allow me to pat his head."

"I'll have to respectfully decline, Master."

"Then call me 'grandma' anyway."

"That..."

Chapter 1615: Domain Techniques

She eventually ceased patting him, returning to her tea. "It is not every day that I get to speak with a boy as incredible as yourself. I look forward to the day you break through to the Master Realm, that will be quite the spectacle as long as you achieve it."

She gave him a knowing glance.

"I too look forward to breaking through to the Master Realm as soon as I can," Rui heaved a sigh. "Although I have been informed that my path to the Master Real might be particularly tough."

Master Vericita nodded knowingly. "That is the price you must pay for the extraordinary power that you will obtain from the Master Realm. I'm frankly shocked that you have already made such remarkable progress as a young man who hasn't even lived three decades."

There it was again, she eyed him knowingly like she was aware of his thought or could see through the depth of his mind. The insight that Martial Masters seemed to have always astonished him, was this the power of the Martial Mind?

"In addition..." She remarked. "I have never seen a young man like yourself harness the power of thought before he harnessed the masculine power that characterizes the male body. It's almost unheard of. Tell me..."

She reached out, petting him once more. "...what is it that led to a young man thinking so much? It is unnatural."

Rui smiled wryly. "You say that like male Martial Artists don't think."

"Not when they're young, they don't."

"That seems excessively harsh, Your Mastery."

Master Vericita smiled softly. "Perhaps, after all, you are accustomed to harnessing the power of thought more than you are the power of body. The only cases I have ever seen such a thing happen are... when one is crippled when one is unable to harness the power of the body. Were you afflicted by any disease that crippled you? But I don't recall any such information on you."

Rui's eyes widened as she managed to hit the nail on the head.

It was true that being crippled physically gave him time to think. A lot of it. That naturally caused him to be immersed in his own thoughts. Whether it was sitting by himself in school, watching the other kids play outside, or at lunch, or at any other time in his life.

He did think a lot, inevitably, if only to not go insane with frustration at his inability to partake in similar activities.

"Whatever it may be, you are blessed to be able to harness thought so well," Master Vericita replied. "It is no doubt your source of a strength as a power Martial Senior."

"Perhaps," Rui smiled.

"Mmm," Master Vericita nodded. "Then you should constantly nourish thought, develop your Martial Art and expand it with individuality and give your mind more things to think about. Once you do that you will gain more power than you can imagine."

"Thank you for your advice, Master," Rui replied, before thinking about giving it some thought. "On the topic of the expanding Martial Art, I had some inquiries of you, Master."

"Hm?" Master Vericita smiled warmly, eager to answer Rui's questions. "Ask away, my child."

"Can you tell me about the Martial Sect relating to domains?" Rui asked. "I have been quite interested in adding domains to my Martial Art."

Master Vericita stared at him for a second, before shaking her head. "There is no Martial Sect centered around domains."

Rui's eyebrows furrowed in surprise. "What? Why not? Surely the Martial Union has many domain Martial Artists."

"Many, no. Regardless the number is not the reason that there isn't a domain Martial Sect. The reason is because the sole domain Martial Master has not bothered to gather Martial Artists together and create a Sect," Master Vericita informed him. "That is why."

Well, there was nothing Rui could do about that.

"...Does that Martial Master train prospective students?" Rui wondered.

"He doesn't," Master Vericita informed him. "He is quite insular does not concern himself with the matters of man. This isn't unheard of. While many Martial Masters like myself are driven to involve ourselves in human society for various objectives and agendas, there are those whose drive drives them away from human civilization. I highly doubt that you will be able to get him to even teach you. Perhaps you could rely on the trainings or teachings of the Martial Seniors."

Rui shook his head. "I'd rather train by myself if that was the case. Martial Masters are worth training under because of their special insight and observation, which is why I bother. But Martial Seniors are in the same boat, I have much less to learn comparatively and I have always preferred relying on myself."

"Suit yourself," She smiled. "Domain techniques are also techniques that are also partially dependent on breathing. They manipulate heaven and earth with breath and body, the breath part would not be possible without breathing techniques. It goes to show just how important breathing techniques are. No other field of Martial Art has given rise to so many other fields of Martial Art that would not even be able to exist without it."

Rui smiled wryly as she began espousing the value of breathing techniques.

"If you seek to pursue domain techniques, then you made the right choice with choosing the roaring dragon blood potion," Master Vericita informed Rui. "Make sure that you complete the treatment before delving into the field, that will be more efficient than creating domain techniques centered around inferior breathing techniques."

"I understand, Master," Rui replied, nodding. "I appreciate the advice and suggestions that you have given me. I will be sure to bear your words in mind."

Master Vericita smiled warmly before her hand reached out patting him over the head. "Mmm, you're a good boy. Harness the power of thought and work towards the Master Realm. The Martial World needs revolutionary Martial Artists like you if we are to maintain dominance as the age bearers in this era."

Chapter 1616: Procedure

It wasn't long before Rui left Breathing Sect after bidding Master Vericita goodbye. She left a lasting impression on him, she was just like a dotting grandma, the type that could grow intimate with just about anybody, closing the distance between them very fast.

At the very least, if any other Martial Artist called him a 'good boy', he would have assumed that they were trying to provoke him with a condescending manner of addressing him. But when Master Vericita did it, he strangely didn't feel any displeasure at it.

Her age and experience dwarfed his even when he added up both lives. She had truly lived for a long time and it reflected in her insights.

Regardless, he had gotten what he came for and more. Naturally, he had gotten many notes and pointers from her regarding the roaring blood potion.

In addition, he won over a good ally. The Breathing Sect was undoubtedly powerful with the sheer number of Martial Artists that used breathing techniques. With their support, the Martial Union was bound to invest in Rui's Martial Art to a much greater extent than before.

There were conditions, naturally. The Breathing Sect's support would be varied based on merit. If the techniques that he created and presented were not meritorious, then the support from the Breathing Sect would be minimal.

Of course, Rui had his commitments as well. The Breathing Sect required him to openly support the Breathing Sect's motion to instate and officially recognize breathing Martial Art as a fundamental field of Martial Art.

While a single vote from him was disproportionately lesser than the many votes from the Breathing Sect, the prestige of gaining the support of the most dazzlingly prodigious and youngest Martial Senior in history was something that was important.

Rui was the strongest symbol of the future. Gaining his open support added more gravitas and weight to the movement of the Breathing Sect which compensated in the disparity in votes.

But it was a great transaction as far as he was concerned. Both sides gained a lot and didn't lose much with what they were giving. Every motion in the fiscal committee meeting gave every constituent a new opportunity to vote on the matter. There weren't a limited number of votes that Martial Masters had to use wisely. On top of that, votes for a particular motion could not be used for any other motion, thus nothing was gained by abstaining.

Thus neither Rui nor the Breathing Sect lost even the slightest bit of political capital by voting in favor of each other.

Perhaps that was why both sides came to an agreement rather rapidly, the risks were low enough that it wouldn't matter. As long as Rui was not lacking in a bare minimum amount of merit, he would earn their full-fledged support.

He felt the royal envelope in his pocket weighing him down. The corporate princess had taken the opportunity to contact him through one of her supporters. He was curious about what this special proposal was. It didn't seem like it was the regular offer like Princess Raemina gave him.

He didn't see it appealing to him though.

He never had a desire for wealth, land, authority or anything else that they normally used to rope in supporters.

None of that worked on him.

Regardless, he would definitely hear her out.

"Now then," Rui heaved a sigh, shaking his head. "Let's get back to the business at hand."

He needed to quickly undertake the roaring dragon blood potion treatment that was reserved him the next day, thus he did not want to get bogged by any other matter.

The rest of the day, he followed through the various instructions that were given to those who would be undergoing the roaring dragon blood potion treatment. He wasn't allowed to consume alcohol within twenty-four hours of the treatment, not that he intended to.

He also wasn't allowed to consume any liquids on the day of the procedure, among other things. He was also advised to pass motion before the procedure.

He carefully followed through every instruction until the day of the procedure came about and he found himself in the designated medical procedure early in the morning the next day.

"Welcome, Senior Quarrier. I am Doctor Frunhein and I will be personally overseeing your procedure." An elderly doctor with an air of seniority welcomed him in. Around was a large team of assistants, more than Rui had seen for any of the other times that he had relied on the Martial Union to service him with their medical services.

"I am in your hands, doctor," Rui replied before glancing around. "It reassures me that such a large team will be overseeing my procedure."

"I hand-picked them myself, rest assured they are the best of the best," He remarked. "I too was personally appointed by someone extremely high up in the Martial Union to oversee this procedure to make sure that there is absolutely nothing that could go wrong with it even the slightest."

"I am grateful for the Martial Union's prudence," Rui replied, unsurprised.

He had already expected that the Martial Union would go above and beyond with this procedure. He was far too important for anything less.

"Please change into this attire, we will shortly begin the procedure." The doctor remarked, handing a him a medical gown which Rui quickly stripped and changed into then and there.

It wasn't long before a set of doors opened automatically, leading down to a distant chamber where he would be undergoing the treatment. Behind him, the corridor squeezed shut as the ground and ceiling behind extended towards each other, squeezing the way behind him shut.

By the time he reached inside, he was completely locked in imprisoned by long and thick walls of pure esoteric reinforcement.

"Now then, Senior Quarrier," the doctor's voice was projected inside the chamber. "Be absolutely certain not to employ the power of the Senior Realm no matter what. Please harness the gas mask on the bed in the chamber and lie down."

Chapter 1617: Record

He wasn't surprised that the potion was going to be administered in gaseous form. It was easier to get into the bloodstream and had the least chance of failing due to unforeseen factors during digestion.

He followed the instructions of the doctor.

"We will begin the procedure now."

A red gas passed through the pipes of the gas mask before he inhaled them.

His eyes widened as his pupils dilated.

He felt like he had just inhaled spikes into his lungs.

"Rgh!" He grimaced.

Sharp piercing pain ravaged his lungs, causing him to writhe in agony, doing his best to control his movements.

"Restrain yourself, Senior Quarrier."

It was easier said than done. Thankfully, he had been preparing for the torturous pain thus he was able to handle it a lot better than he could have otherwise hoped for. An unknown amount of time passed as he endured the sharp stinging pain that ravaged his lungs.

The roaring dragon blood potion destroyed and reconstructed the lungs of a Martial Artist in a manner that was no dissimilar to the Squire evolution breakthrough procedure. The only difference was that while it was supposed to reconstruct his lungs, it didn't rely on Darwinian evolution, it relied on the blood of the roaring dragon to empower his lungs.

It relied on principles that were decidedly esoteric in nature, Rui suspected that it relied on some compound in the roaring dragon's blood that allowed for its lungs to be so powerful.

"DAMN," What was supposed to be a murmur became a shout. He was aware that this would happen, of course, but the euphoria had overwhelmed any considerations.

He reduced his effort to a whisper.

"Finally, back to normal. I guess this will have to be the norm," Rui whispered, returning to his normal volume. He felt like he was breathing with vigor unlike he ever did before. "Take some time to adjust, Senior Quarrier," The doctor's voice echoed in the chamber. "It will take some time to get used to. But it is best you at least recalibrate your effort to match your enhanced respiration. Thus far, we are pleased to inform you that no anomalies have been detected, your procedure was a perfect success."

"I'm glad to hear that, doctor, I appreciate your services," Rui replied, closing his eyes as he tried different levels of effort to replicate what was normal before. "I think I'm getting the hang of this for now."

He employed a little bit of self-hypnosis to accelerate the process. The principles could be employed at any time, but given that he hadn't refined the image over time, it couldn't be considered at a technique level.

But it helped with conditioning his mind to lower the effort and force he put into his breathing even subconsciously, which was the most important part.

"Would you like to undergo a sneeze test?" The doctor asked him. "It allows you to test just how much control you gain over the force of your respiration. There are certain safety standards that you will need to adhere to, otherwise, you will be hurting and killing people left and right every time you sneeze or yawn."

"Let's try it then," Rui nodded. A strange gas filled the entire chamber, tickling Rui's nose.

"Achoo!" Rui sneezed.

Much to the medical team's surprise, it was a normal sneeze and not a lethal one. "Incredible!" The doctor exclaimed. "I have never seen anyone gain control over involuntary respiratory spasms in such a short amount of time!"

He was defying the norm, which was the norm for him so he didn't even bother acknowledging it.

It appeared that his high affinity for mental techniques allowed him to be much more effective with hypnosis-based mental conditioning, allowing his subconscious mind to change much more rapidly than it normally would.

"Achoo!" Rui sneezed once more. "I think I've -achoo!- passed the test doc."

"Indeed," The doctor remarked with great interest as the sneezing gas was drained away. "You are truly as remarkable as I've heard, Senior Quarrier. This must be record-time for acclimatization to the effects of the roaring dragon blood potion. Come, we must conduct a few more simple tests before we are ready to discharge you. I must document everything about this historic case!"

Chapter 1618: Arrival

The medical team was stunned by how quickly Rui managed to gain control over his new body. It would have been absolutely impossible to adjust the subconscious and involuntary muscle control of his diaphragm so quickly, but Rui managed to do it nonetheless.

Because of his powerful mind, he was able to rapidly conjure up images for self-hypnosis to reduce the effort he put in, accelerating the mental adjustment rather swiftly. What he essentially did was simply convince his subconscious mind through elementary self-hypnosis, while he sneezed, that air was being sucked out his lungs every time forcefully, causing his mind to want to reduce the force with which it pushed air out to preserve precious air that was already being forced out of his lungs.

This way he drastically adjusted the force with which his subconscious mind performed respiratory function.

Eventually, his subconscious mind would fully adjust by itself, but until then, he would need to keep conditioning it with self-hypnosis.

"With the great bewilderment, I am pronouncing you fit for discharge," The doctor eventually said, heaving a sigh. "Congratulations on your successful procedure. Would you like to go for a round of Martial testing? It's part of the package to help you gain a good understanding of the increment to your power."

Rui stared at his palm, breathing softly, before squeezing it into a fist, feeling a surge of power. "What kind of testing exactly?"

"That's up to you, sir. You can go for a battery of measuring tests of various combat parameters. You can go for a combat session as well," The doctor said.

"I'll go with a combat session," Rui replied. "I wish to test my new power in combat."

Combat was always a better way to gauge all the nuances of his newfound growth and power. Rather than putting himself the subject of many boring experiments and tests, he would rather test himself against another powerful opponent.

"As you wish, sir," The doctor bowed lightly. "A training and sparring site has been prepared for you."

"Already?"

He landed hard on the ground, staring at the establishment. "Name, ID, and purpose of visit?" The Martial Senior guards asked him when he approached the gates.

"There's no need for that," A firm masculine voice called out to them from above. "Let him pass."

Rui glanced at the figure that slowly descended from above. He didn't even inspect the man to understand his power. It was quite evident.

"Yes, Master Krakule," The Martial Seniors bowed respectfully.

The Martial Master was unsurprisingly elder. His body was honed with chiseled developed muscles while his skin was littered with scars across his entire body. A thick salt-pepper beard covered the lower half of his face while his head was cleanly bald. His attire was Martial. It was practical and didn't impede his movements and was frugal, noticeably lacking any crest of a Martial Family.

His arms were tucked behind him, he walked towards Rui with measured and stiff steps.

His demeanor conveyed a domineering masculinity. He reminded Rui of Senior Zenshin, except that his body language revealed deep discipline, he did not possess the volatility that the former did.

"Welcome to Daracol, Senior Quarrier," He welcomed Rui with a sharp piercing voice. "I am Krakule Aragaria, the protector assigned to the Daracol branch by the Martial Union."

Rui ignored the reaction from the two Martial Seniors at the revelation of his lauded identity, bowing with respect to the Martial Master. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Master Krakule."

"The pleasure is mine," He declared, almost like he was picking a fight with Rui instead of complimenting him. "So you are the Martial Senior that the Empire has been abuzz of, hm?"

He stared into Rui's eyes with a powerful gaze, sizing Rui up. "The Martial Union is preparing a Martial Senior for your combat testing, they will dispatch a Martial Senior from the corps or through commission. Until then, you may accept my hospitality."

"I would be most pleased by that," Rui remarked, sighing internally. He had already realized where this was going, and he wasn't too pleased to go through it yet again.

Chapter 1619: Deduced Intentions

The elder Martial Master said hospitality, but it appeared that he had a very different idea of what it was. He simply sky-walked high-up into the icy freezing winds of North Kandria.

Rui followed suit, elevating with the Martial Master.

Both of them had Martial Bodies, of course, they were unaffected by the cold.

He turned to Rui, opening his mouth to address him.

Yet Rui was faster.

"Before you begin, please allow me to inform you; that I have no interest in supporting Prince Randal's hawkish ambitions." Rui raised a palm in a distance gesture.

He had already seen through the truth. The truth regarding the Master's intentions.

Master Krakule's eyes sharpened with a hint of surprise. "...How did you know?"

"Your posture naturally gravitates to the Royal Army's military stance at ease," Rui replied. "Your tone and parlanche betray a military background. The fact that you retained such heavy militaristic body language even as a Martial Master allowed me to deduce that you were recently discharged. For, such body language does not last the test of time as a Martial Artist that undergoes many changes as they ascend to higher Realms of power, especially the Master Realm which causes heavy shifts in demeanor."

He thought of how Master Ceeran's entire demeanor and vibe changed from the perilous nature he possessed to that of the softer demeanor he had as a Martial Master. It appeared that the breakthrough to the Master Realm was truly something that altered a Martial Artist.

Rui's sharp mind had deduced that he was undoubtedly discharged from the military well after he became a Martial Master.

Then there was the fact that a Martial Master was assigned to a barren and deserted region with no civilization, by the Martial Union. This one was less certain, but Rui had keenly inferred a hint of distrust.

Why would a Martial Master be discharged from the Royal Army in the first place? They were so valuable that they could get away with anything short of treason or mass murder. Rui highly doubted that someone who practically radiated discipline and control would fall to that level.

It meant he was honorably discharged.

But why? And why join the Martial Union? And why would the Martial Union distrust him enough to assign him to an insignificant region where he could not employ his authority to make any impact on anything important?

The final hint was the first hint; the fact that he arrived to greet Rui before Rui could even state his name to the security guards outside the gate.

There were two things to be inferred.

The first was that he was undoubtedly waiting for Rui.

The second was that he undoubtedly really wanted to speak to Rui.

"Even that little excuse of the Martial Senior not having been prepared yet was a falsehood, was it not?" Rui asked calmly. "You wanted to get the opportunity to speak with me privately."

That combined with his military background, recent military discharge, and the distrust of the Martial Union gave Rui enough information to make an educated induction.

That and this was the third time that he was being solicited by a Martial Master in favor of a Martial Faction. It was a tiring pattern that he was getting used to now.

"Realizing your background, political inclinations, and intentions was but a few seconds of observation and a simple exercise of thought."

"...I had heard rumors of your genius intellect, but only now do I realize that they precede you," Master Krakule remarked softly. "You will make a terrifying Martial Master one day, Senior Quarrier. Your Martial Mind will engulf the Master Realm, perhaps even beyond."

Rui didn't respond, simply staring at the man wordlessly.

"Since you have sharply arrived at the truth, I will not deny it. I am indeed a member of the Randal Faction," The Martial Master stared into Rui's eyes. "And indeed, I am here to solicit you and to win you over to the Randal Faction."

Rui inwardly sighed. It seemed that his attempts to preemptively shut down the man's lobbying attempt had failed. It seemed that he would have to bear through this.

"We have but one reason to invite you to our faction, Senior Quarrier," Master Krakule remarked. "And that reason is that you have already greatly supported our faction more than any other political faction in the Kandrian Empire!"

Rui narrowed his eyes. "What...?"

"The Merger Faction, the Martial Supremacist Faction, the Capitalist Faction...none of them have been supported by you nearly as much as our Hawk Faction has," The Master boldly declared.

"I have not supported any faction to this date," Rui retorted sharply.

"Ah, young man, but you have," Master Krakule grinned ferociously. "We of the Hawk Faction believe in Kandrian Supremacy. The Kandrian Empire has both the right and the responsibility, to itself and to others, to intervene in the geopolitical sphere around the Kandrian Empire."

Rui narrowed his eyes. This was typical of the hawk political ideology, which referred to a political stance on geopolitical that advocated for aggressive foreign intervention, including war, colonization, and even genocide, to protect national interests.

Rui knew exactly what this looked like, having grown up in the Cold War in his previous life in a nation under the rule of Presidents that had an extremely hawkish foreign policy. By the time that he had passed away in 2022, the world was on fire geopolitically as an eventual result of it.

"What does that have to do with me? When did I ever support such a maniacal warmongering policy?"

"In order to secure what is best for our Kandrian Empire, we dominate to ensure that the world around us is most fit for it. In order to dominate, we must be dominant, in order to be dominant, we must be overwhelmingly stronger than our neighbors, our allies, and most importantly; our enemies." The Martial Master declared with firm ferocity.

Rui's eyes widened as he realized where this was going.

Chapter 1620: Fear

"In order to be overwhelmingly stronger, we most certainly need greater armies, greater artillery, greater defense, greater military esoteric technology, but most importantly..." The Martial Master

grinned. "We need greater Martial power. We live in the Age of Martial Art, of course. Martial Art is the most powerful force, whichever side has greater Martial power will win."

"The Hungry Pain technique," Rui murmured.

"Indeed. This incredible technique that you've given the Martial Union is the key to the dominance of the Kandrian Empire," The man informed Rui. "The biggest stumbling blocks in the Kandrian Empire's dominance over East Panama are the three other Sage-level powerhouses in East Panama. Only they possess the power to rival us in war. However, with the power you have given us..."

"The Hungry Pain technique will take forever to transform the power of the Kandrian Empire," Rui retorted. "Decades at bare minimum, a century ideally. It will not transform the Kandrian Empire's power already."

"The Kandrian Emperor can live on for centuries with modern esoteric artifacts and potions," The Master gruffly huffed. "Our faction's foresight is not as short-sighted as yours, Senior Quarrier. Look to the future. One day, the overwhelming advantages of the Hungry Pain technique will accrue and give us an overwhelming advantage in the Lower Realms, allowing us to preserve more Martial Artists of the Lower Realms in the long run, allowing the birth of more Martial Artists of the Upper Realms in the long run. We will win thanks to you."

Rui narrowed his eyes. He didn't like logic, it was demented, but it wasn't invalid. "Join us, Rui Quarrier," The man stretched out a hand to Rui. "Join us and help us usher in an age of conquest and glory for the Kandrian Empire."

Rui narrowed his eyes. "You're insane. The Transcendent Emperor of the Britannian Empire could annihilate our Empire as well as the Sekigahara Confederate and the Republic of Gorteau all by himself if he truly wanted. We should be grateful that he is allowing our facade of dominance."

Rui had wondered more than once why the four powerhouses of East Panama were considered equal when only one of them had a Martial Transcendent.

"I see, so you aren't aware," Master Krakule remarked. "I suppose it makes sense, you were away for a long time and are only twenty-eight and only a Martial Senior."

The weight of the man's words pushed down the atmosphere, wringing it taut.

"The Britannian Emperor, on the verge of defeat and death, broke through to the Transcendent Realm, becoming a Martial Transcendent," Master Krakule narrated with an ominous tone. "What happened next, what I am about to inform you is not public knowledge, nor must it ever become public knowledge. Sage Damian himself narrated what followed Martial Artists of the Upper Realms in the Kandrian Empire."

Rui stared at him in rapt attention, focusing on him with every iota of attention he had.

"The Transcendent Emperor, having broken through to the Transcendent Realm, simply retreated after breaking through without concluding their battle," Master Krakule informed him.

"What...?" Rui whispered, stunned.

"Can you believe it?" Master Krakule continued with a solemn tone. "This Martial Artist, who always killed his opponent. Who believed that any battle without the death of the loser was incomplete. Who lived and breathed conquest. This same Martial Artist retreated from a battle that he had all but won."

Rui stared at the Martial Master with a shocked expression. It truly was astonishing and incomprehensible, had the breakthrough to the Transcendent Realm altered who he was? Rui intuitively felt this was wrong. Power did not change a person, it simply unlocked who they were deep inside.

"That is not even the most shocking part," Master Krakule informed him. "The most shocking part is what Sage Arrancar said after. He said that the Transcendent Emperor disappeared so fast after breaking through that he didn't get to exchange a single word with the man. However, he did manage to get a single look at the infant Martial Transcendent's expression. He said that it was the first time that he had seen his rival make that expression. He said that there was but a single emotion that radiated from the newborn Transcendent before he disappeared..."

He looked deep into Rui's eyes.

"Fear."