

## Martial Unity 1631

### Chapter 1631: Domains-101

Rui had worked during the time that the Martial Master had engaged in his little star-gazing session to create a proof of concept. It didn't need to function properly then and there, it just needed to work enough for a night's work into it to convince the Master that it was worth getting his hands on.

"And you're sure that this can be turned into a domain technique with even greater telescoping power?" The Martial Master inquired, shocked.

"Indeed," Rui nodded.

"Then we must create this technique!" The Master exclaimed. "I will be able to peer into the nature and structure of the universe with this technique!"

Rui raised his eyebrows, a little flummoxed. "I don't mean to be too rude with my inquiry but, if you care so much about astronomy, then why didn't you become an astronomer? They are able to learn much more about the universe than most Martial Artists."

"Hmph, your words betray a modern outlook," He snorted. "I am three hundred and twenty years old. Back then, astronomy was hardly a thing. Back then, we did not even know that the small twinkling stars in the sky are all in fact individual suns that are unfathomably far away from us. The only people who learned the most about what were those with the best vision, in other words; Martial Artists."

"I see," Rui replied, turning to the sky. "I respect and understand that. The universe is, in fact, wider than anybody can possibly fathom."

Rui wondered if anybody in the world understood just how gigantic the universe was. It was a fact that he had learned in high school, and had grown numb to. But every once in a while even he could not help but gaze into the universe and wonder what was out there.

It was the human spirit of curiosity.

But alas, he was born too late to explore the seas and born too early to explore the universe.

"You say that as if you what's out there," The man replied, raising an eyebrow.

He did, but he didn't say that.

He shook his head instead. "Let's get started. The sooner that you teach me the foundation of domain techniques, the sooner I can give you the ability to peer into the universe farther than anybody else."

"Okay. Let us begin immediately then," Master Gurren got to both feet, determined.

Rui stood up before his Martial Master.

"What do you know about the field of domains?" Master Gurren asked Rui.

"All I know is that it involves control and manipulation of a larger part of the environment," Rui replied.

"If you know only that much, then you didn't need to come to me," Master Gurren snorted. "The Martial Union has enough to give you the basics and some half-decent techniques."

Rui shook his head. "I want the best of the best."

He knew from experience that Masters could impart a foundation that was much better than if he tried learning from techniques from the Martial Union. He would not be nearly as lethal an assassin if not for the foundation that Master Reina imparted to him.

He would not be nearly as much of a powerful hypnotist if not for the foundation that Master Zeamer imparted to him.

He was hoping for something similar from Master Gurren. The two of them relocated to a barren mountain with no

"A domain is simply a slice of heaven and earth that is under your control or influence," Master Gurren began. "We control heaven through our breath. We control the earth through our bodies. With breath and body together, we control heaven and earth together, creating a domain around us within which we can trigger certain effects."

"I see," Rui murmured. "Interesting."

"Naturally, not all techniques need to manipulate both heaven and earth," The Master informed Rui. "Most techniques lean towards one, only truly powerful domain techniques manipulate both at once. Those that do gain complete dominion over the world."

He paused for a moment. "At the Upper Realms, there are even aspects and planes of our reality that can serve as the foundation of a domain technique, but as a Martial Senior, you only possess the power to manipulate heaven and earth, and that is enough for any Martial Senior."

Rui nodded, listening attentively.

"Let us begin with why anyone even bothers with domain techniques," The Master calmly explained. "After all, there are other forms of environmental manipulation even without domain techniques. Domains were developed much later, born out of a combination of environmental manipulation techniques and breathing techniques. Why even bother with domains if the only difference is area of effect?"

That was a good question. Rui personally pursued domain techniques because he felt as though they had good synergy with his Martial Art in concept.

If he could adapt his environment against his opponent, then he would, in theory, be expanding his adaptive evolution to a dimension that he thought was not possible before.

However, that was the extent of the reasoning behind his drive to learn domain techniques. His reasoning was not the reason why domain techniques were pursued, even if they were niche.

"Offensive domain techniques offer the highest hit rate out of all domain techniques," Master Gurren explained. "These techniques are extremely difficult to avoid since they cover a large area. The probability of landing an attack is thus extremely high since it unreasonable to evade them for long, if at all."

Rui nodded. He too had ultimately failed to avoid the attacks of the domain Martial Artists that he fought despite using the Metabody System.

"Good domain techniques do not sacrifice too much potency for the area of effect," The Master explained. "A natural disadvantage of domain techniques is that their power is distributed across a large amount of area, thus the potency is often weaker than even long-range techniques. A bad domain technique dilutes it too much, while a good domain technique either minimizes the dilution greatly or makes sure that the impacts of the technique in combat are worth it."

#### Chapter 1632: Strengths and Weaknesses

Rui nodded, absorbed. He knew that domain techniques covered a lot of areas intrinsically; it was what defined it and set it apart. This naturally meant that a lot of energy was spread out, resulting in low energy density, which could easily result in a weak technique whose effects are too spread out.

"The most common means by which this shortcoming is solved is by ensuring that, despite being spread across a large area, the entire area impacts the target of your technique in some way. If the entire area that is receiving energy from your domain technique is impacting the target directly or indirectly, then the total spread energy will end up impacting your target directly or indirectly," The Master explained. "In this case, the low energy density doesn't matter because no amount of energy is being wasted. The entire area impacting the target means the entire energy you are outputting is hitting the target. Suppose only a portion of the environment is impacting the target. In that case, the energy in the rest of the environment will not impact your target, and thus will be underutilized and wasted."

That made sense to Rui. This way, the domain's shortcoming was mitigated while its advantage of highly successful hit rates was retained.

"That is the most common consideration regarding the field of domains," Master Gurren remarked. "However, it is not the only one. Domains may seem simple conceptually, but in my many years of exploring, I have come across immense depth in them that they are never given credit for. That is what I will convey to you, arrogant brat."

Rui nodded, smirking. This was why he had come to Master Gurren instead of just searching for random domain techniques in the Martial Union's library.

Centuries of experience resulted in wisdom and understanding that no scroll or book could compete with.

"The field of domains can be divided and organized in many ways," The Master explained. "One important distinction within domain techniques is the nature of its energy requirements. Does a domain technique require a constant supply of energy to maintain it? Or does the technique require some amount of energy to set it up and then no longer require any energy for maintenance? The latter usually involves shaping the environment or changing its state in some way. The former is usually a domain of a temporary effect that is generated by the user constantly exerting and manipulating force onto the environment. It tends to be stronger and more energy-consuming while the former tends to be weaker and less energy-consuming."

"In addition," The Master rapidly continued. "Domain techniques can also be divided by their target scope, which is not the same thing as the domain area itself. Some domains cover a wide area and many objects but have a limited target scope. These techniques often leverage a large amount of area to work against or for a single target, just like I discussed earlier. However, there are some domain techniques that are designed to target every single thing in their vicinity. These are meant for when faced with a large number of opponents and targets, generally."

"I see," Rui murmured. "That is...interesting."

He may choose to create a technique like that, though he wasn't sure about how necessary that measure was. If he faced a swarm of equals, then he was probably screwed, but if he was swarmed by weaklings, then he wouldn't need a domain in the first place.

"That gives you a general and broad overview of domain techniques and how they're categorized," Master Gurren remarked. "There are very defined and inescapable shortcomings of domain techniques like their high energy consumption, but there also are very concrete hit rates. As long as you can create potent effects in the domain, the negatives of domain techniques are compensated for, and you're left with the overwhelming benefits."

"However, the one disadvantage that really holds back the field of domains from becoming mainstream is the difficulty of individualizing them," Master Gurren explained. "Manipulating a large portion of the environment is difficult, and it's even more difficult to make individualistic progress in this field. Because there are a limited number of principles through which one can manipulate such large swathes of the environment."

Rui nodded. "I'm not too worried about that."

Rui was certain that he could bypass that limitation with new principles of Physics that he was aware of; he already had a lot of good ideas on how to go about it. He would immediately begin testing them out when he had the foundations of domain techniques down.

"Hmph, as expected of an arrogant brat," Master Gurren huffed. "Do you think you can chart new territory in domain techniques?"

"Absolutely, I'm going to create domain techniques that adapt the domain to counter my opponent," Rui replied. "That will most likely require some effort, but I am confident that I can achieve it."

"Adapt the environment to your opponent, hm?" The Master raised an eyebrow. "Domain techniques are already suitable counter against maneuvering and speed-oriented Martial Art. This is because they invalidate the biggest benefit of maneuvering or speed: evasion. Evading a domain is a task that nobody should find themselves doing. If you do, you ought to question everything that leads to those sets of events."

Rui chuckled. "I would only need to if I come across an extremely lethal domain. Are there any domains that instantly kill their opponents without any opportunity for resistance?"

"Indeed, arrogant brat" Master Gurren nodded. "These domains are based on powerful principles and are excessively difficult. It's not that just about everyone can master them. The few grade-ten domain techniques are nothing short of magical."

Rui smiled, growing excited by the prospect of creating such techniques. Just the idea of manipulating the world around him in extraordinary manners to create extraordinary domains that adapt to the environment to counter his opponent was fascinating to Rui. He couldn't wait to take this next step and expand the scope of his Martial Art.

## Chapter 1633: Heaven and Earth

"Now then, let us get to the principles of domain techniques," Master Gurren continued. "The principles of manipulating the heavens are very different from manipulating earth."

He exhaled heavily before him as his hands were poised, ready for action. They began moving in slow, delicate movements, curling, shifting, and flowing, which in turn impacted the wind currents, sound, and pressure gradients, causing their vectors to change as he pleased.

"This is how we manipulate the heavens. We bend breath. We bend its force to, in turn, bend the heavens," Master Gurren explained. "This is known as heaven bending. The quality of your heaven techniques is dependent on the proficiency of your heaven bending."

Rui's eyes widened. "I see, that's incredible!"

There were many forces in this world that determined atmospheric and air factors together. Gravity from the planet and the moon, the forces from the Coriolis Effect, exposure to sunlight, the composition of air, topography, and ecology all acted on the atmosphere, resulting in the outcome.

Heaven techniques, a sub-field of domain techniques centered around the heavens, relied on turning the powerful force of breath of the user into the dominant force acting on the atmosphere around the user, allowing them to impact it.

"Of course, the quality of heaven techniques is also dependent on your understanding of the flow of heaven," Master Gurren informed him. "The flow of the heavens is not one of chaos. There are rules. Laws. Principles. Of course, theoretical scholars have yet to gain anything more than a minor understanding of the order that lies underneath the seemingly chaotic surface. While scholars attempt to codify the order of heaven on paper with strange symbols that they insist are scientific and mathematical, we Martial Artists are left with no other means but our instincts, intuition, and experience. The latter hones the former, improving our subconscious understanding of the world."

Master Gurren paused, raising an eyebrow. "What are you smirking about?"

"Nothing."

"Hmph, you are arrogant through and through, arrogant brat."

Rui did his best to suppress the excited grin that was threatening to completely occupy his expression. He couldn't help it, of course. Master Gurren's words inadvertently highlighted the massive advantage that he held over all his peers.

He possessed the scholarly understanding of the flow of heavens that Master Gurren insisted that Martial Artists couldn't have. Fluid dynamics, Classic Wave Theory, Sound Dynamics, Thermodynamics, Kinetic theory of gases. What were these, if not the order of heaven, codified into scientific theories?

"In all my many years of peering into the depths of heaven, I have yet to uncover more than a portion of the depths of the order of heaven," Master Gurren heaved a sigh. "Anyone who uncovers the truth of the heavens will possess truly heavenly domains. Regardless, that's enough about the heavens. Let us talk about earth."

STEP

He pushed his foot down to the ground.

RUMBLE!

"We manipulate heaven with our steps," Master Gurren remarked. "With each step, we supply the earth with power. We bend earth to our will using pressure, sound, and heat. Like so."

STEP

The ground around Rui moved up faster than he could react, wrapping around him before solidifying into solid rock. Instantly, he was trapped inside a mud boulder.



"I liquified earth using vibrations and then relied on force to displace the earth around you and then ceased the vibrations," Master Gurren explained. "Earth bending tends to be more powerful for one's body is stronger than one's breath alone, but it is also far more limited in versatility and application and tends to be easier to evade. It is also less vital to the battle since land can be avoided, but the heavens can't. It, too, has an inscrutable order that we have yet to understand. Regardless, we can only do our best."

Once again, Rui had a hard time suppressing his smile. He had yet another advantage that he couldn't wait to exploit.

"Together, we create techniques of heaven and earth," Master Gurren explained before exhaling heavily and striking the land with his foot.

RUMBLE!

WHOOSH!

A tremendous tornado enveloped them while the land began shaking violently.

"Woah...!" Rui exclaimed, excited.

"And that brings us to the introductory session," Master Gurren replied. "You can forge your own path across heaven and earth after you have mastered heaven bending and earth bending."

"I see," Rui furrowed his eyebrow, deep in thought.

His goal in mastering domain techniques was to develop techniques that adapted the environment to his opponents. Obviously, it was impossible to immediately find a way to adapt to the environment against all Martial Artists right off the bat. But he could start by adapting to the three primary fields of combat.

'Hm, but I already am able to adapt to the primary fields of combat extremely well...' Rui realized.

He had the pattern recognition system; of course, he also had the metabody system and the Hypnomatrix. All of these, as they currently were, were geared toward the three primary fields of offense, defense, and maneuvering.

Perhaps he should consider creating domains that adapt secondary fields in addition to the primary fields. Or maybe he could focus more on secondary fields, too. It remained to be seen. While he would want to adapt perfectly to everybody and everything, he was still very far from reaching a stage where he could disregard everybody else as he adapted to them. The three primary fields of combat were the most common fields that he was going to be facing in combat, so he couldn't just ignore them.

"Oi, are you listening?"

"Hm? Oh, sorry, Your Mastery."

"Hmph, arrogant brat."

"You were saying?"

"I was saying that I'm going to have you start training on heaven bending and earth bending with the best training methodologies that I know," Master Gurren remarked. "And then you simultaneously start developing the the stargazing technique that you promised me using heaven and earth bending. Only then will you have fulfilled your end of the bargain."

Rui nodded. "Don't worry, you'll get what you want and more."

Chapter 1634: Decker Byrnes

Rui departed that day without commencing his training. He had already spent a lot of energy and skipped sleep in pursuit of convincing the domain Master to accept him as a pupil. They would begin their training at a later date.

Rui also had an appointment to tend to.

His meeting with Princess Rafia was due the next day. She had invited him to a business conference with a lot of prospective patrons whom she hoped to reel over into her faction. Rui wasn't sure what to expect from her, although he did have a very basic understanding of what kind of person she was from the intelligence he purchased from both the Beggar's Sect and the Martial Union.

Soon enough, the day arrived.

He quickly prepared himself, donning the custom-tailored formal Martial Art attire that he had worn to the reception that Prince Raemina had prepared for her patrons and prospects.

Rui found it interesting that Princess Rafia was not nearly as inclined to go for a formal social event as opposed to a formal business event.

The exorbitantly clad invite that he had received specified that it was a business event and not simply a social meeting. Meaning she would most likely be formally making some sort of business proposition to the members of the business conference.

Rui wasn't sure what he was going to do there. He had no business history or involvement, barring that of Esosale Suppliers, but that company was dead and empty, absolutely worthless at the moment.

Furthermore, he recalled what Master Vericita had told him.

Something about a controversial proposition for Rui specifically: he wasn't sure what that was about either.

Still, he was obligated to hear the princess out. Not doing at least that much could be considered a sign of hostility, a sign that he had no intention of conveying to a Royal Princess of the nation.

It wasn't long before he had prepared himself, having dawned his formal attire before taking off for the skies. He avoided going too fast, using a breathing technique to prevent drag and wind from disheveling his hair.

Thankfully, the business conference was in the Town of Hajin, which made sense given that it was a commercial trade hub. Princess Rafia was very much in her element in the town, which was all the more good for her.

Regardless, he reached the location of the business convention swiftly.

[Rafia Consortium]

Rui raised an eyebrow as he beheld a large corporate complex in one of the inner districts of Hajin. This was the Hajin branch of the Rafia Consortium, one of the largest consortiums in East Panama.

Like all consortiums, this consortium was simply an association between many commercial entities with a common agenda. In this particular Consortium's case, it was essentially a lobby group for commercial and economic reform as far as laws and regulations went, something that was mostly under the Emperor's power alone.

By pooling their economic might together, they gained purchasing power and bargaining power that was on par with nations. Many of these organizations were powerhouses inside and outside Kandria, after all. Even for the ruler of Kandria, it was neither easy nor wise to simply dismiss their growing demands for even greater liberalization of the economy than it currently was.

It was something that didn't affect Rui in any way, which is why he had never heard of it before he purchased information on Princess Rafia among the other six.

In addition to lobbying for a more liberalized economy, it also was essentially the headquarters of the Rafia Faction. She purchased a twenty-percent stake in all commercial publicly traded organizations, firmly gaining a solid grasp on the company's decision-making. Given how large these corporations were, Rui couldn't even imagine how much wealth it took, but as a member of the Royal family, she was entitled to a small minute portion of Royal treasury. Combined with intelligent investing, she had managed to build immense capital, support, and control.

It was said that she owned hundreds of billions of gold worth of stake, which she utilized to further her agenda of a libertarian economy.

Philosophically and politically, she was aligned exactly in opposition to the Communist Princess. He had no doubt that there was a fierce competition that went on between the two of them that he wanted no part in.

Around the corporate complex was a line of motorized carriages pulling in. He felt strangely out of place when he looked at all the distinguished conglomerates and business tycoons exiting their carriages one after the other. They were accompanied by Martial Squire and Senior bodyguards.

To a certain extent, the Realm of their bodyguards was a testament to their wealth and economic stature. There weren't even two thousand Martial Seniors in the Kandrian Empire, and most of them were firmly with the Martial Union. Maintaining active partnerships came with many benefits that simply could not be found anywhere else, in addition to high revenue. Only the most loaded corporates had the ability to lure away Martial Seniors with even more lucrative deals.

"Invitation," The security vetting entrants turned towards him.

Rui made his way through after producing the invitation that Master Vericita had provided him, heading towards the convention hall.

The internal architecture of the convention hall had a rather modern edge to it; it was of advanced civil engineering and esoteric technology, yet its design leaned towards practicality rather than aesthetics, in sharp contrast to the exorbitant reception hall he had been invited by Princess Raemina.

He had already begun drawing a few glances from the various businessmen and businesswomen who had gathered at the business convention once he entered the convention hall. His features were pretty identifiable, of course. Yet he was grateful that they were too self-conscious of their image and dignity to display any reaction at his arrival.

Except for one fellow.

"Senior Quarrier!" A strapping young man who was about as old as him walked up to Rui, calling out to him. Behind him were two Martial Seniors who, for some reason, glared at him openly.

The young man had facial features that seemed familiar to Rui for some reason. Rui was curious why he would openly try to reach out to Rui in such a loud fashion.

"It's a pleasure to finally meet you, Senior Rui Quarrier," The man smiled confidently, stretching out a hand to Rui.

For some reason, Rui could feel everybody's eyes on the pair. This particular meeting was special for some reason.

"And you, Mister...?" Rui asked, shaking his hand.

"Ah, my name is Decker Byrnes," The young man smirked. "I am the new chairman and owner of Deacon Industries."

#### Chapter 1635: Prickling Conversation

Rui's eyes sharpened. Now he understood why he could feel everybody's eyes on him. It made sense; who wouldn't want to witness such an exciting meeting?

The young man was smirked with a hint of mischief. "What's the matter, Senior Quarrier? Cat got your tongue?"

"As I was saying," Rui continued. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Chairman Decker."

"Come now, you needn't be so formal, Senior Quarrier," The young man chuckled. "I know you so well and have known you for so long that we're practically already friends."

"I, on the other hand, learned your name less than a minute ago," Rui replied calmly. "Perhaps we should address each other as what we are: strangers with no relationship to each other."

"Ah, but you're the man who killed my father after he hunted you for nine years," The man smirked mischievously. "This may be the first time we've met, but our paths have crossed each other's for a long time."

The atmosphere grew colder.

The air was wrung taut. Many watched the heat of the conversation escalate as Chairman Decker boldly accused Rui of murdering his father.

"I would advise you to abstain from making false remarks," Rui narrowed his eyes. "I could sue you for defamation for those words."

"Indeed, but I'm sure you're intelligent enough to know that you shouldn't," The chairman smirked. "You may win in court; hell, I would probably even plead guilty. But the court's decision doesn't matter; what matters is the court of public opinion, and that court will not find me guilty."

"I don't take patrons," Rui replied. "It brings about obligations, in the long term, that shackle me. I don't like shackles."

"I see," The young chairman remarked. "That's a shame. Many people, even in this conference, would love to be your patron; I can assure you of that."

Rui glanced around; he could feel their attention and curiosity even if they weren't looking at him directly.

It couldn't be helped. His return to the Kandrian Empire was a spectacle in and of itself. After that, there had been several more high-profile incidents featuring him. He had become hot news in the Kandrian Empire.

"Still, it is good to meet you face to face," The young chairman smiled. "I would love to be your friend. We are in the same generation, too, after all."

Rui raised an eyebrow. "Friendships involve trust. I'm afraid what we have doesn't come anywhere even remotely close."

"True," The man remarked, nodding. "Still, everything starts somewhere. Regardless, I am content with just making your acquaintance today. For now, let us focus on the event that we have gathered here today."

Rui glanced around; the convention hall had grown even more densely filled as even more guests entered one after the other with their own Martial Artist bodyguards. Each of them wore tailored suits and scrupulously groomed appearances. They possessed an invisible weight to them that wasn't nearly as pronounced as the pressure that Martial Artists exerted, yet it existed.

It was a pressure that came with the power to impact nations with a single command. Its indirectness meant that it did not directly convey itself the way it did for Martial Artists, but Rui was not fooled. Each of the people here was an elite of the international economy and market and was not to be trifled with, even for him.

Eventually, a door at the end of the conventional hall opened. A woman with golden hair and golden eyes walked through, followed by two Martial Master bodyguards. Her attire was business-oriented, yet an exorbitant Royal crest was embroidered onto the chest area of her attire.

"Her Highness Princess Rafia Leoufil Kandria has arrived."

Every member of the Convention Hall bowed in adherence to the code of conduct when graced by a member of the Royal Family.

#### Chapter 1636: Controversial Proposal

Prince Rafia had a very distinct demeanor. It was cold and detached. Her eyes lacked warmth, and her body language was devoid of consideration. "Raise your heads," She commanded.

Even her tone was monotonic and devoid of any grace or measured cadence.



"Distinguished guests, welcome to the convention held by the Rafia Consortium," She began unceremoniously, speaking clinically. "Today's agendas, as you all have been informed, have to do with a new scheme that the Rafia Consortium will be implementing in regard to the new system of patronage of our esteemed members to the Rafia Foundation. The presentation will begin immediately, and your seats have already been prepared."

Immediately, an array of luxurious seating arrangements across the wide and spacious hall appeared out of nowhere, much to Rui's surprise. Whatever esoteric technology was being employed was extraordinarily exclusive and rare.

A large board appeared behind her as the guests took their seats across the convention hall hosting the business convention.

The large title head at the top of the board immediately drew everybody's reaction.

[Patronage Tiering System]

Below it was a large intricate maze of layers and sub-headers with several points below each of them, with many arrows that stretched across the entire board.

"Senior Rui Quarrier, please come with me. I wish to speak to you about an important matter privately," She remarked without a hint of commanding assertiveness. Her words once more drew the attention of the various guests who were engaged with her staff as the convention hall grew silent.

Rui Quarrier was the first person at the top of Princess Rafia's list of people to privately consult out of all the distinguished individuals invited to the business convention.

That was an unexpected development for many.

She simply stared at him with a blank expression that may as well have been frozen in time, waiting for his response. Rui, on the other hand, groaned inwardly at being placed in the spotlight yet again.

"I would be honored, Your Highness," Rui got up, bowing, before following her to one the door at the end of the convention hall, ignoring the many stares fixated on him.

"It may behoove you to dispense with such gestures, Senior Quarrier," she remarked when they were out of everybody else's earshot, referring to his bow. "This is a business convention and thus merely semi-formal at most. Such polites are not observed in business gatherings such as this one."

"I wasn't aware of that, Your Highness," Rui replied courteously. "I shall bear that in mind."

Her assistant opened the door to the office that they found themselves in. "Please have a seat," the princess gestured before taking her own. "I am not fond of small talk; thus, I hope you do not take offense at my tendency to avoid them. I have but one proposition to make to you."

She stared into his eyes without even the tiniest shred of emotion as she uttered the following words.

"Please marry me, Rui Quarrier."

#### Chapter 1637: Persuasion

Rui was quite proud of his ability to maintain a facade of composure and hide his thoughts. Short of Martial Masters and their seemingly telepathic ability to peer into one's mind, his control over his micro-expressions and body language was quite high.

Yet even his formidable control was shattered by the sheer absurdity that the Corporate Princess uttered to him.

"What...?" Rui whispered.

"I just offered a proposal of marriage to you, Senior Quarrier," She remarked without so much as a hint of fluctuation in her cadence.

Rui stared at her with bewilderment. "I don't understand. Is this your idea of humor? It is rather strange."

"I am not jesting, Senior Quarrier," She replied with the same monotone that she had conducted her presentation with. "I am offering a proposal of marriage to you."

"...But why?" He stared at her, unable to believe what was happening at the moment.

"I suppose it would be prudent to inform you," She remarked. "It would be better if you comprehend the reasons. The first reason is that marriage is a powerful tool to reel in support. It is a bond of commitment, and thus, it is a strong symbol of partnership and alliance. There is a reason that families and even nations employ marriage to strengthen and affirm their bonds. That is what I aim to achieve by marrying you."

Rui had already understood this. He had also already understood why she had chosen him of all people as a suitor.

"My Martial capital is far lower than my six siblings," She continued. "The only ones among my six prime competitors with lower Martial capital would be Raemina and Raul. This is a sub-optimal state of affairs that I cannot allow to remain in place. One of the measures I have at my disposal is marriage, as I am the youngest out of the seven prime candidates for the throne. I intend to employ it to increase the allure of my faction for Martial Artists. For that, I require a high-profile Martial Artist who happens to be of the same generation as me and who commands great respect, prestige, and soft influence in the Martial Community. Ideally, I would like to bear his child as well to completely seal the bond."

Rui winced inwardly even though he had figured as much.

That didn't mean he was eager to accept her proposal. Getting engaged with a princess? That was a horrific idea as far as he was concerned. Having her bear his child was an even worse idea; it would make it impossible to break away from her. It would vastly increase the probability of him being the target of an assassination, and he didn't have a pair of Martial Masters guarding him.

He was not inclined to be under constant supervision even if he did.

No amount of wealth or resources or anything was worth it.

"I'll have to decline, Your Highness," Rui informed her, shaking his head. "Please pick someone else."

"There is no one else," She remarked.

"That's not true," Rui replied calmly. A mischievous smile threatened to crack at the edge of his mouth as a hilarious idea popped into his head. "There is Kane, known to be a prodigy of his generation. I'm sure that he would love to be your fiance, surely. I can even give you his contact information if you wish to speak to him."

His face was calm and composed, yet he was inwardly cackling at the little prank he was pulling.

Imagining his best friend's face when he realized what Rui got him into made him want to burst out laughing, but he held himself together with superhuman will.

"He is only a Martial Squire," She shook her head. "Even if he magically broke through to the Senior Realm today, he would still be far less attractive of a choice now that he had cut all ties with the Arrancar Family."

Shame.

"What about Ian Nepomniachtchi?" Rui wondered. "He too is touted as a genius of his generation."

"He is even less attractive as a prospect," She remarked. "Furthermore, the head of the Nepomniachtchi Family is already part of my faction."

She stared straight into Rui's eyes. "It must be you, Rui Quarrier. Your track record as a Martial Artist is extraordinary. You singlehandedly won the Serevian War for the Kandrian Empire, and you defeated a Martial Squire as an Apprentice. You dominated the Shionel Dungeon and then broke through as the youngest Martial Senior before killing Deacon Byrnes in an assassination and returning home as a high-grade Martial Senior. You then earned the Martial Union's immense goodwill with the secret Squire

evolution breakthrough method, so much so that Martial Masters are willing to run across the country to protect your life from one of their peers."

She didn't even pretend like he wasn't the assassin who killed Deacon. He didn't even bother refuting it; it was pointless, and he just needed to never acknowledge it by word. Regardless, she laid out concrete reasons for why she needed Rui.

"If you accept my proposal, I can give you anything in this world," She remarked. "For everything has a price, and I have the ability to pay all prices with the capital that I have amassed. In return, I will have you let me completely harness every ounce of influence over the Martial Community you have and use it to win over skeptics who believe me to be antagonistic towards Martial Artists. While you singlehandedly cannot fix the problem, the sheer prestige both in the empire and across the entire world that comes with being the youngest Martial Senior will do much to alleviate my problem."

"I don't care for wealth," Rui replied.

"To not care for wealth is to not care for anything," She remarked. "What is it about this arrangement that displeases you? Is it my bodily aesthetics?"

She glanced down at her well-endowed figure. "I have been informed that my sexual appeal is prone to causing phallic tumescence in men. I believe that nothing about it should be displeasing enough to be averse to what is purely a business transaction."

Rui coughed awkwardly. "It is not that, Your Highness. You are indeed beautiful. However, I simply am unable to tolerate the inevitable consequences of marriage with you and simply do not care enough for what you can offer me. That is all."

#### Chapter 1638: Disagreements

"You seem rather certain," She remarked blandly. "If you marry me, our children and family will become the new Royal Family as long as I am able to ascend the throne. Is that not an alluring prospect?"

"It sounds like a nightmare," Rui blankly retorted.

For the first time since he had seen her, he saw a hint of emotion on her face. She was rather surprised by his words. It appeared that she was unable to parse why anyone would think negatively of fathering the next Royal family.

Rui, on the other hand, had no intentions of starting a family. Even if he did, he had no intention of ruining any prospects of his children having a normal life. He didn't even know the full extent of what being born with so much wealth and power did to their psychologies. He didn't want to know. He wanted nothing to do with it. That was why he was very firm in his rejection.

Even putting aside the rational reasons to avoid this horrific proposal, the very prospect of the woman before him bearing his children sent shivers down his spine. He could barely see anything resembling a sane human when he looked into her lifeless eyes, even if they were, admittedly, stunningly beautiful.

This...creature raising his children? It sounded like a horror story.

"I see," She simply remarked. "It is rather disappointing that you have rejected me with such firm certainty. It does not appear that there is much of a possibility for me to convince you otherwise."

"There most certainly isn't, Your Highness," Rui heaved an inward sigh when she appeared to be getting the hint.

"I see," She remarked. "That is a shame. My proposal is open at any and all times. Please contact me if you ever reconsider. I am more than willing to accommodate this arrangement at any time."

She paused for a moment before seamlessly continuing. "I would invite you to be a part of the Rafia Faction nonetheless. You surely care about some of the things that wealth can bring, even if you do not care for wealth itself. I am willing to humor your requirements to a substantial degree."

Rui wanted to shut down that offer immediately, yet his rational side intervened, encouraging prudence. "I will consider your offer, Your Highness. However, I maintain the stances I have already conveyed thus far."

"I am pleased to hear that," She remarked. "That brings us to an end of the agendas that I wished to discuss with you. If you have any questions or statements to convey, please do."

Rui stared at her for a few moments. "...Do you really think you can get away with trying to criminalize worker unions? You realize that the Martial Union would never allow you to get away with that, and they most certainly will not allow you to enforce it. Do you really want to trigger a civil war?"

"If I have to," She replied straightforwardly. "The power of the throne is absolute."

"Surely you don't believe that," Rui scoffed openly. "The Kandrian Martial Covenant exists because the first Emperor Ra was unable to control the Martial Union. The Martial Union has only grown astronomically more powerful since then and continued growing stronger."

Definite emotion entered her eyes for the first time since he saw her.

"The Throne's power is absolute," She declared. "It must be. For this nation to thrive economically, I will create a nation where the Martial Union does not have a monopoly over the Martial economy through brokering services. I will create a much more open and free economy where Martial Artists will directly interact with the consumer market at all levels."

Rui raised an eyebrow as he stared at her with narrowed eyes. "The martial Union must go for this nation to thrive?"

"That's right," She remarked. "You may believe that the Martial Union is a force for Martial Artists, but in reality, it is a brokering middleman that increases the cost of services for consumers while decreasing the profits for Martial Artists without offering much in return. Getting rid of this middleman will economically benefit the suppliers, Martial Artists, and the consumer market as well."

Rui heaved a sigh. "It does take a cut of the revenue without a doubt. However, to say that it offers little is disingenuous at best. The Martial Union vastly simplifies the process of finding commissions. If not for the Martial Union, I would have to meet with every single potential customer personally and speak to them individually, most likely in vain because their commission would not suit me. Simply choosing a commission would take days of tedious back and forth. With the Martial Union, that process becomes exponentially easier where I can review dozens of commissions in under an hour and find one that is extremely suited for me."

"That's not all," Rui continued. "The accuracy of the information of the commissions is evaluated by degrees of accuracy certainty by the evaluation department and the intelligence department of the Martial Union, allowing me to weigh the risks of given commissions in a calculated manner. These services make a huge impact on my ability to provide services as a Martial Artist. It allows me to focus on Martial Art and the mission alone while all these bothersome logistical impediments are completely removed.

"And, in turn, it takes a fifty-percent cut of the total revenue," She retorted. "Does that not bother you?"

"It's thirty-seven percent for Martial Seniors," Rui replied. "Let us say the Martial Union did not exist, and I got one hundred percent. What would the cost of the intelligence services and sophisticated and extensive management services that the Martial Union provides cost? Would I be able to purchase all those services from external service providers for thirty-eight percent of my revenue?"

Rui narrowed his eyes. "Most likely not. Purchasing intelligence from information groups is not a cheap expense. Neither is hiring a manager, secretary, or team of assistant staff to gather, manage, and process customer data into simplified information packages. I would have to personally look for and hire competent and qualified people to do all that work, and it would definitely be another expense..."

#### Chapter 1639: No Common Ground

"There are cons, of course," Rui added. "I'm not denying that the Martial Union can be difficult to deal with sometimes. The contract can be considered exploitative for Martial Artists of the Apprentice and Squire Realm since there are clauses that involve conscription. But Martial Artists are free to dissolve the partnership at any time with a written letter."

"The reason that the Martial Union can get away with exploitation is because it is hegemonic and oligopolistic," She replied. "If I liberalize that market and dissolve the Union, then corporations will not be able to get away with adding such tyrannical clauses because another corporation will exploit that opportunity to offer a free contract, attracting all the Martial Artists instead. This is the power of a free market. Competition and a wide variety of choices force everybody to be more lenient and pleasing to Martial Artists to not lose out on attracting them. Currently, there is no real competitor to the Martial Union that can threaten it or keep it on its toes. That is why it thinks it can get away with adding such authoritarian clauses."

Rui stared at her wordlessly.



She did have a point. Rui recalled how he had essentially been conscripted into the Serevian Dungeon War and how he had been pressured into serving as an ambassador for Vilun Island.

Although those worked very well for him, it was true that he was compelled to serve in those regards.

Still, the positives largely outweighed the negatives in this case. The reason that the Corporate Princess was unable to see this was because her understanding of the Martial Union was shallow.

"Your analysis of the Martial Union is predicated on the assumption that it is fundamentally a commercial organization," Rui heaved a sigh.

"Is it not primarily commercial in nature?" Princess Rafia tilted her head with a hint of confusion. "The commerce of the organization funds all of its operations and is also the reason that younger Martial Artists are attracted to it in the first place. The charter of the Martial Union describes the Martial Union as a broker platform to connect the supplier and consumer markets of the Martial sector."

Rui shook his head. "It is not a commercial organization. The Martial Union, fundamentally, is an organization to maintain and progress the independence and dominance of Martial Art. The agenda does not exist for the sake of its commerce; its commerce exists to support this agenda. That is what you fail to understand. It exists to maintain Martial supremacy from the state to ensure that Martial Artists do not ever become reduced to tools and weapons as they were before the dawn of the Age of Martial Art."

"I am not unaware of the political inclinations of the Martial Union," She replied.

"What you are unaware of is the motivations behind it," Rui replied. "Even if I were to steelman your perspective on the oligopolistic nature of the Martial Union, I would still disagree with your conclusions. A Martial oligopoly may be sub-optimal economically, but it is optimal politically. Martial Art will be easier to tame and conquer if it is divided. This was the case in history at one point in time. That is why unity is required. If we fight amongst ourselves, then we become easy pickings for ambitious rulers who wish to commercialize or enslave us."

"Even if I were to accept that at face value," She replied. "It is sub-optimal economically. A more competitive market would yield more revenue, which would strengthen the Martial sector, which, in turn, would increase the difficulty of dominating Martial Artists."

"That is a naive take, Your Highness," Rui shook his head, heaving a sigh. "Wealth does not help Martial Artists the same way it does other sectors. You possess a poor understanding of what it takes to cultivate a greater quality and quantity of Martial Artists. Simply pouring in one thousand times the money will not yield one thousand times the Martial Artists. I do not expect you, of all people, to understand what is needed to empower Martial Artists. There are dynamics in Martial Art that one only learns as a Martial Artist."

The Martial Union, of course, did understand, from pouring an enormous amount of wealth into the sixteen Martial Academies to vastly reducing the difficulty of finding commissions that were perfectly attuned to the Martial Artist's Martial Art. Rui understood the significance of these systems now that he had gained a deeper understanding of Martial Art.

It was absolutely imperative that Martial Artists complete missions that are attuned and synergistic to their Martial Art. This allowed them to gain a high quality of experience that was needed to refine their Martial Art. The experience that a defensive Martial Art gained from an assassination mission was worthless compared to what they would get from a bodyguard mission. This was because the latter was far more attuned to the Martial Artist, giving them highly relevant experience needed to refine their Martial Art and their individuality.

That was why the Martial Union maintained an extremely rigorous and sophisticated commission system that allowed Martial Artists to choose the mission that was exactly perfect for them.

A large number of such nuances that Rui was unaware of before became evident to him, but it was very difficult to convey all of these to someone who was not only not a Martial Artist, but also of royal descent and an unfeeling psychopath.

He was simply unable to be persuasive to her.

"It is a shame that we are unable to find common ground and gain a mutual understanding, Senior Rui Quarrier," She remarked. "Nonetheless, this conversation has been interesting. I hope you will take my offers into consideration. I am quite sincere in my marriage and child conception proposal with you. I hope that you will come around to accepting my proposal."

Their conversation came to an abrupt and unceremonious end as she moved on without any compunctions to her next agenda of the day.

#### Chapter 1640: No Choice

Rui heaved a tired sigh as he left and returned to the central business convention, where the distinguished guests discussed various matters with each other. Rui half-considered returning home now that he had spoken with the princess.

"Ah, you've returned," Chairman Decker smirked, interrupting a conversation he was having, immediately dispensing with his formal tone.

Rui wasn't even interested in talking to him, yet the man refused to take a hint.

"How did it go?" He asked informally like they were already friends. "Are you a couple now?"

"Wait, you know?!" Rui widened his eyes.

"Well, yes," Chairman Decker tilted his head. "I am part of the Rafia Faction and was for the motion to reel you in if you must know."

Rui turned around with a feeling of horror. "So, how many people know that she proposed to me?"

"Not too many, but it's bound to be spread now that an attempt has been made," Chairman Decker replied.

"...Damn," Rui cursed.

He didn't need more attention on him than he already had, and now he was the guy a royal princess proposed to.

"You seem displeased by the proposal," Chairman Decker tilted his head in confusion. "Even if you did not want it, the prestige cannot be denied. A princess as powerful as Her Highness does not propose to just about anybody. Your value as a Martial Artist has undoubtedly gone up."

'My value did not go up because she proposed to me; she proposed to me because my value went up.'

He didn't bother voicing his thoughts to his newest acquaintance.

"From the looks of it, not only did you refuse her proposal, but you also refused to join her faction, didn't you?" Chairman Decker managed to glean. "It's a rather shame. I would have loved to be a part of the same faction as you. We could have been faction-mates."

"Well, if you know me as well as you claim, you'd know I would never join the Rafia Faction," Rui remarked. "Should have taken that into account when joining if you wanted to be part of the same faction as me."

"Ah, but you see," The man heaved a sigh. "I didn't join the Rafia Faction. My father did. Unfortunately, he had long sold a twenty-percent stake in Deacon Industries to Princess Rafia and joined the Rafia Consortium. On top of that, he invested heavily in the Kandrian Empire to get closer to you, and there isn't much I can do about that without making severe losses, either."

Rui glanced at the young executive, heaving a soft sigh. He recalled hearing that the new chairman was attempting to liquidate the investments that Deacon had made into the Kandrian Empire, but it had proven to be too much of a loss to undo all the progress that had been made.

Thus, he had been forced to go all out in the investment in the Kandrian Empire, even if he wasn't the most pleased about this inevitability.

"However, if I'm to partake in the Kandrian market and the Kandrian Throne War, then the Rafia Faction is objectively the best faction. You are aware of the goals of the Rafia Faction, yes?"

"A libertarian economy," Rui simply stated. "Essentially, she would love to turn the Kandrian Empire's economy into that of the Shionel Confederation, with the only difference being that she would be in power instead of a merchant guild."

"Indeed," Chairman Decker nodded. "That is a desirable outcome for me as well since I have decided I have no choice but to go through with at least a large portion of my father's plans. In that case, it would benefit me greatly if the business ease index of the Kandrian Empire increased by about many points."

"Is it that low at the moment?" Rui raised an eyebrow. He had no idea about the details, although he knew that the Kandrian Empire's economy was not as liberal as it could be.

"It's not unbearable, but it would make my life much easier if it improved," Chairman Decker heaved a soft sigh with a troubled expression. "It's actually one of the reasons that I wasn't able to smoothly liquidate all the investments my father made into the Kandrian Empire. The sheer number of permits, approvals, statements, and criteria you must meet for any venture in this country is an eyesore."

"If that's the case, then it's a little surprising Guildmaster Bradt didn't see fit to join the Rafia Faction," Rui remarked nonchalantly.

Chairman Decker shook his head. "He doesn't need to. He's so influential and well-connected that these impediments are not even significant to him. The gap between Deacon Industries and Bradt Distribution Services has only grown. If anything, he would hate to see these impediments removed because it makes things much easier for his competitors than it does for him."

These were nuances that an outsider like Rui, no matter how intelligent, simply did not possess the depth of understanding that came with extensive experience to realize his own merit.

"He has more to gain from joining the Ranea Faction than he does the Rafia Faction, I suppose," Rui realized. "If the Kandrian Empire turns into even more of a seafaring powerhouse than it already is, he can deepen his reach across all of human civilization through the Great Nam Ocean as long as the Kandrian Empire improves its seafaring capacity."

Seafaring capacity was a measure of the maximum amount of net flux of seafare to and from a given nation that said nation was able to handle at any given point in time. It was essentially a measure of the bandwidth of the seafaring flux of the nation's seaports.

"Indeed," Chairman Decker heaved a soft sigh. "If Princess Ranea becomes Empress, he will probably become the most powerful figure in the transportation and shipping sector across the entire continent. No one, not even I, will be able to challenge his power anymore. He will effectively become the emperor of the Shionel Confederation. That is his true goal."