

Martial Unity 1661

Chapter 1661: Reunion

He found himself at a dead end.

"Do you have any business with me?" Rui turned around, narrowing his eyes at a hooded masked figure that blocked his path.

The figure was a Martial Apprentice, that much he could tell. Yet the mask was powerful enough to jam even his Riemannian Echo, which meant that it was no ordinary mask, certainly nothing an ordinary Martial Apprentice could ever hope to get their hands on.

"Do I?" The hooded masked figure asked Rui. His voice was distorted.

Rui narrowed his eyes as he unleashed the aura that he was constantly suppressing. Heaven and earth squirmed under the sheer peril that Rui radiated as a high-grade Martial Senior. Yet he could only widen his eyes in shock as two Martial Masters appeared behind him out of nowhere.

'It's not just them!' Rui realized. 'I've been surrounded by Martial Seniors before I realized it!'

Rui glanced at the two Martial Masters guarding the hooded masked figure, instantly deciphering their Martial Art.

Poison...and symbiote.

One of the Martial Masters had a pair of wing-like appendages attached to his back. 'Unorthodox Martial Artists...' Rui narrowed his eyes as realization dawned upon him.

He understood who he was dealing with.

"It's been a long time, Rui Quarrier," The distorted voice returned to a masculine one as the hooded figure removed his mask. His tone was cold.

"I did not think that we would meet again," The mask came off, revealing a man with beautiful aesthetics.

Rui's eyes widened.

His voice grew ominous.

"The Underworld is not a forgiving place, you see. Back then, I was not the Prince of the Underworld; I was just a low-level Martial Artist with some ties to gangs," The Underworld Prince told Rui. "It is only a decade later that I have grown to harness the Underworld in my bid for the throne."

"So this was your plan all along?" Rui stared at him. "To join the Underworld and harness its capital to fight for the throne."

"Indeed," Prince Rajak calmly answered his question even as his stare intensified. "You taught me much about the consequences of failure in the Underworld. I-"

"Cut the crap," Rui's eyes sharpened. "If you're here to kill me, then get it over with quickly. If I'm going to die either way, I'd rather not have to hear your pretentious monologue."

He activated his Martial Heart, steeling himself. The prickling tension in the air escalated. Yet, the prince did a good job keeping his composure under the pressure of Rui's Martial Heart. "Join me."

His words cut through the taut atmosphere.

Rui furrowed his eyebrows, staring at Prince Rajak. "You corned me here just to invite me?" "Were you under the impression that I would invite you for an Underworld social party or a mafia banquet?" Prince Rajak calmly asked. "That's not how we do things. We can't afford to."

Rui stared at him. "So you intend to compel me with fear? To join you or to die?"

"That was my plan, but..." He glanced at the two Martial Masters behind him. "You have many fans. Rest assured that you will be walking away alive, if nothing else, much to my disapproval. It is not the Underworld's way to forgive someone who crippled our profits during the Shionel Dungeon raid, but alas."

Rui recalled how he stopped the supply of esoteric substances to the shell fronts of the Kandrian Underworld. It appeared that the Kandrian underworld had not forgotten that offense after all this time.

Yet he also understood that Prince Rajak couldn't afford to kill Rui. It appeared that while he had managed to wring away support from Rui had sharply already deduced the dynamics at hand. It was no coincidence that the Martial Masters behind him were unorthodox. Most likely, these sects were the only sects that he could win over against Prince Raijun, given his association with the Underworld. However, while they had associated with Prince Raijun, they were fundamentally a part of the Martial Union.

Rui had already contributed to all the Martial Sects with his Hungry Pain technique. He had earned a great amount of gratitude and approval from them, not to mention being valued for potentially even more such contributions.

On top of that, the Martial Union was looking forward to initiating the spreading of his techniques so that one day, he could establish his own Martial Sect. In the face of all these gains that involved Rui Quarrier, he wasn't surprised that Prince Rajak couldn't kill him so long as he had even a single sect of the Martial Union in his camp.

Aside from the Royal Emperor, nobody possessed the might to stand up to the Martial Union as an equal.

Chapter 1662: Hatred

"So, you can't threaten me," Rui coldly stated. "You shouldn't have bothered with this at all."

"You seem rather impatient," Prince Rajak calmly remarked.

"Tends to happen when I get trapped in an ambush," Ruis snorted. "I assume the no-sky-walking and endless hoards of people thing was all part of the plan to lure me into the alleys?"

"Perhaps," The prince replied vaguely. "It allowed us to meet without anybody the wiser."

"Well, we've met," Rui remarked. "Now what?"

"I asked you to join me," Prince Rajak reminded Rui. "You have yet to make your choice."

"Join you....?" Rui narrowed his eyes. "You can't be serious."

The prince simply stared at Rui. "You know...out of all the seven candidates for the throne, we are the closest."

Rui raised an eyebrow. "We come from the same background," The prince revealed. Yet his eyes took on a dark luster.

"I was born and raised in an orphanage as well," Prince Rajak calmly stated. "Do you know what happened when my siblings learned of my existence?"

Rui stared at him silently.

Yet the silence was deafening.

"They...sought to kill me," Prince Rajak whispered. "They failed. It was a miracle, but I was not home that day in the orphanage. I had snuck out into a traveling merchant's carriage to go into town so I could partake in the Kandrian Martial Festival."

His eyes sharpened, and a glint of hatred flashed in his eyes. "Do you know what happened while I was gone? Do you know what I saw when I came back?"

His golden eyes hummed with unadulterated fury.

Financial services.

Depraved Martial services.

Smuggling.

Depraved human goods and services.

Harmful substances supplies.

Information theft.

The six dons regulated these six pillars of the Underworld, ensuring they thrived, spreading more misery as a necessary and intended consequence.

"You don't have the right to call anyone a disgusting monster," Rui glared at him. "You're more disgusting than them all."

"I'll say this one last time," Prince Rajak narrowed his eyes. "Join me. I have the power to give you anythi-"

"Anything I want?" Rui glowered at him. "You're the sixth prince to make that offer. If that was enough, I would have joined Princess Raemina's faction a long time ago. Fuck off."

"Is that your final answer?"

"It always was."

A moment of silence rang in the air. The two men stared at each other with piercing eyes.

He turned, never once breaking eye contact. "I hope you don't come to regret this decision."

WHOOSH

Just like that, they had all disappeared. Rui's expression soured with displeasure as he considered everything the prince said to him. There was no doubt in his mind that the prince was poisoned with hatred that he couldn't even see, or worse, didn't even care about his own hypocrisy. He just wanted to exact revenge on those who had slaughtered his orphanage. The only way he was able to was the Underworld, for it was the only remaining powerhouse bloc that could allow him to compete with his most powerful siblings. The one entity that none of the other princes and princesses dared to touch.

Chapter 1663: Degrees of Mastery

Yet...when Rui thought about what he had gone through, could he blame him?

What would he have done if he had learned that some powerful forces had slaughtered his orphanage home?

It would be over.

He would find each and every aware and involved person in the matter and erase their existence from this world. In that regard, he was not that different from Prince Rajak. The only difference was that he would do it using his own personal power and not the dirty power of the Underworld.

"Huff..." Rui heaved a sigh.

His eyes dilated, growing unfocused as he thought back to what the prince had told him about the princes and the princesses. Putting aside his hypocrisy, he was right about them. They were the kind of people who would not bat an eye if they had to slaughter an orphanage of children and caretakers if that meant that they could eliminate one vulnerable rival to the throne with ease.

'Aside from Prince Raul, he said,' Rui mused as his expression softened. 'Perhaps he is the only hope left.'

He had always known that he could never support Prince Rajak. Not as long as that man accepted the patronage of the Carnil Mafia that had hurt his family. There was absolutely no chance that he could support such a man.

However, his words also made Rui more disillusioned about the Kandrian Royal Family. He was not entirely wrong in saying that they were monsters. He knew that Princess Raemina and Rafia, in particular, were inhuman, while Prince Raijun, Prince Randal, and Princess Ranea were apathetic to the suffering of people as long as they could fulfill their ideologies and ambitions.

The world was filled with many such people. It could be argued that the Royal Family was prone to producing such people. What else would being born into filthy rich wealth, being brainwashed that their blood was superior, that it granted them authority and entitlement over the entire nation and all of its one hundred and fifty million people do to their psychology?

In that regard, Rui was not inclined to disagree with him.

It was no wonder that the only exception he cited was the only other prince who had grown up a commoner: Prince Raul.

'I must meet with Prince Raul at once,' Rui realized. 'He is the only hope left.'

He was also the only prince that had yet to reach out to Rui. Not even the Beggar's Sect had offered an invitation to Rui on behalf of the prince.

Of course, Rui was not arrogant in that he expected all of the princes to try to woo him and that it would be an insult if they didn't.

But it was curious to him nonetheless.

As much as he would have loved to immediately set out for the People's Prince, he was busy. Ultimately, the Kandrian Throne War was still not his absolute top priority, and he had given it enough of his time and energy since coming back.

He was tired of his strength not matching his value.

He was frustrated at having returned to the Kandrian Empire at a time when not even Senior-level power was significant anymore.

Of course, it was never too significant in the Kandrian Empire due to just how powerful the Kandrian Empire was.

In places like the Derschek Region, the Kaddar Region, and the Gereign Region, Martial Seniors were absolute peak powerhouses. But in the Kandrian Empire, they were far diminished in value and significance.

It was a testament to just how much stronger the Kandrian Empire was. It was an absolute powerhouse for a reason.

That was why he needed to grow stronger and eventually reach the Master Realm. As a Master, there were very few forces that would unnecessarily mess with him. While some truly powerful organizations did have multiple Martial Masters, they tended to avoid antagonizing other Martial Masters unless absolutely necessary. The sheer damage that they could inflict on any nation or entity was too high.

He immediately returned to his training, submerging himself in it.

The four projects he had begun working on were making slow but steady progress, occasionally taking tips from Master Gurren while he trained his new techniques. Although Master Gurren was clueless about the mechanics of Rui's technique, he could help Rui with certain specific aspects.

He even offered advice to Rui about the practicality of the techniques.

"There are two levels of mastery of domain techniques: active mastery and passive mastery," Master Gurren explained. "Active mastery is the basic level of mastery, enough that you can apply it viably in combat and sustain a domain battle that way while actively focusing on the technique. Passive mastery is when you are able to master domain techniques to the point of being seamlessly able to use them in combat while also engaging in hand-to-hand combat."

Rui's eyes widened with shock. "You can do that?!"

"I can, but it's very difficult and takes a lot of time. You will most likely only be able to start with active mastery until you eventually become so familiar with the patterns of heaven and earth manipulation that you will be able to execute them while engaging in hand-to-hand combat. They just require too much mental and body engagement for you to be able to reach this stage immediately," Master Gurren told Rui. "But when you do, you will be able to harness the fullest potential of domain techniques and reach an extraordinary level of environment harnessing."

Rui widened his eyes as he thought about how incredibly powerful he would be when he reached a stage where he could seamlessly go all out with all other forms of combat while simultaneously becoming so familiar with domains that he would also be able to use them. It would increase his overall power to tremendous degrees.

Until then, he would need to use the right techniques for the right opponents and circumstances; such was the philosophy of Water, after all.

He looked forward to mastering such power in the coming months and years.

Chapter 1664: Voidlets

The four projects that he was working on went well as he worked on them. Project Skyfall involved him refining his heaven-bending along a single dimension. It took intricate precision to reach a level where he could redirect the vectors of force along a single direction. The amount of force he needed was actually little, this was a technique that tested his precision and accuracy. It was truly difficult.

Project Speed Prison was a little easier. Manipulating the drag coefficient to be a variable that increased with speed was definitely not easy. He needed to alter the fabric of the atmosphere as a medium. This

project required the most amount of constant trial and error. He constantly needed to test his prototype domains to ensure that he was in the right direction.

Project Malevolent Kitchen was definitely the smoothest of the four. He was very familiar with generating sound; thus, he was not out of his comfort zone in this domain. He employed heaven-bending to create a heavenly domain that would bombard his target with sound in all directions. He created an earth domain that bombarded his target with seismic radiation at the point of contact. The result was that sound was increasingly concentrated within a single person. Since sound was being bombarded onto a single point from all directions, it was not difficult to cancel all the vectors, turning it into directionless vibration: heat.

However, the most difficult of the four was most certainly Project Reverse Prophet. Rui realized that his optimism had been naive. He had been so seduced by the potential power of such a technique and how much it would improve his pattern recognition system that his greed for it was quite strong.

But progress in this technique was so hard that even he was starting to have doubts. Peering into the past was not a feat that was easy to accomplish. Time flowed in one direction. Defying that was a feat that mortals did not seem to be capable of. Regardless, he pushed on, focusing on the four technique projects.

However, that was not the only thing that required his attention. 'I also need to create easy thought-based techniques for explorers and Martial Apprentices,' Rui had not forgotten his commitment in regard to the future Water Sect. He had not forgotten that he needed to create highly diluted versions of adaptive evolution for the major fields so that he could spread elements of his technique that could potentially be planted into seeds later on while also increasing the affinity of Martial Artists to the Master Realm. As long as he could do this, then he would be fine.

However, it was difficult because he couldn't expect everybody to operate at the same level of mental acuity as he did. He needed to account for the diminished mental capacity of the average Martial Artist relative to his own. For the explorers, those who hadn't discovered their Martial Art and were still exploring different fields to see what they had an affinity for, he needed extremely simple techniques that were highly effective but also had low mental burden. He needed to ensure that the explorer techniques reflected his Martial Path without burdening them with extreme mental requirements of the VOID algorithm.

"Oh boy..." Rui murmured as he scratched his head. 'This is back to problems I had back on Earth.'

Ensuring that his system of thought was viable for the average UFC fighter was easily his biggest hurdle back on Earth, and now that he was here, he was going to be facing the problem once more.

'Though it's not nearly as bad as it used to be.'

For one, he didn't need to make everybody master the VOID algorithm. He needed to create...voidlets, diluted elements of the VOID algorithm, and have them master it.

This was much easier. He had used the VOID algorithm even before he became a Martial Artist, he was just limited to the low-level systems within the VOID algorithm. The pattern recognition system was something that pretty much nobody aside from himself could possibly master.

'Still, I can create simplified systems of thought that, when mastered, can allow them to fight more wisely and use less effort to overcome the same opponents,' Rui realized.

A lot of this was just taking several low-end systems of the VOID algorithm and making separate thought techniques for each of them. This was not the interesting part, as far as he was concerned.

There were plenty of low-end systems that he could choose from, for example, he had a system of thought that was centered around learning as much information about your opponent as possible at the start of the fight, especially their stance.

Different stances catered to different styles of combat. Centered legs were a sign of maneuvering; divided leg stances, on the other hand, were antithetical to maneuvering. Divided legs signified stability to form.

Similarly, arm positioning also distinguished between offense and defense, as well as what form of offense. A striker would employ arms very differently from wrestlers, and those were quite evident in their stances.

In addition, distance from the opponent was a good predictor of their moves. An attacking gesture made from beyond arm's distance was a good sign that they were going to kick, which had a much greater range than the punches.

Kicks, in turn, could also be further predicted by the center of gravity and leg positioning. Center of gravity in and of itself was another simple to decipher variable that could be used to predict the opponent.

These methods allowed one to predict their opponent's very next move. They still paled in comparison to the pattern recognition system, which was far deeper and precise in its prediction, essentially allowing Rui to see the future itself, but they were certainly good enough to stand as a useful technique by themselves.

'That should be good enough for the explorer techniques,' Rui mused as he heaved a sigh. 'As for the Apprentice-level techniques...I can make things a little more interesting.'

Chapter 1665: Mind Palace

For the Apprentice-level technique, he could go on one step further and give out techniques that employed a basic amount of data analytics. It didn't need to be something insane, but Martial Apprentices could certainly use a good deal of more rigorous data-driven analytics.

In this world, he even had a trump card that he didn't have in his previous life.

'The Mind Palace technique,' Rui mused.

If Rui were to be asked which technique he would retain and was forced to lose all other techniques his Martial Art had, he would unhesitatingly choose the Mind Palace technique.

It wasn't even close. Not even remotely.

It was the final key to the power of the VOID algorithm. It was the final piece of the puzzle that made the VOID algorithm not just practical but also extremely powerful!

Without it, he was far weaker.

The Mind Palace technique and him were a match made in heaven. What was originally an extremely basic and simple one-dimensional technique whose only utility was to allow dimwitted Martial Artists to not forget mission details in the middle of a mission had turned into arguably the most powerful technique that Rui had ever created in his life.

It had gone from a room, like in the original technique, to a gigantic city that contained places from across his first and second life.

His childhood home back on Earth.

His research lab.

His hospital room in the twilight of his life.

The Quarrier Orphanage.

The Martial Academy.

The Town of Hajin.

The Serevian Dungeon.

Vilun Island.

The Shionel Dungeon.

Ajanta Island.

These, and many more places, had been embedded and fused into a Frankenstein city that became the foundation of his Mind Palace technique.

It allowed his thought process to become like that of a computer. He had created an extremely organized system of memory and recall, allowing him to access any and all information in the Mind Palace quickly.

Every ounce of information that he stored in it contained tags. If he remembered a map of a place, then he would tag it with 'map,' the name of the place the map was showing, the style of cartography, and any other details that he might inquire into in the future.

Then he stored that map into categories of each of those tags, each having its own isolated section of the city. One isolated part of the Mind Palace contained everything that Rui had ever tagged with 'map.'

This included the map of the Kandrian Empire, the town of Hajin, and even the map of the Shionel Dungeon that he had created for Guildmaster Bradt.

Each tag had its own section in the Mind Palace technique. He even had a mental map of the entire Mind Palace should he ever need to find a particular tag!

If he ever needed something regarding a particular tag, then he would just travel to his Mind Palace and the section of the particular tag and then walk around, scouring that section until he found what he wanted.

It was not as absolutely robotic as a computer in the literal sense, but his conscious memory now had a system of protocols that allowed for smooth flow and storage of information.

Of course, he did not expect other Martial Apprentices to be able to expand their Mind Palaces so much. In the first place, one's affinity for conscious thought-based techniques determined what you would be able to do with the Mind Palace technique.

The techniques that he planned for Martial Apprentices did not require them to have extremely powerful Mind Palace techniques. They just needed to be able to store tallied data into basic tables and access it quickly.

Compared to the sheer amount of information that Rui juggled with, this was nothing. It was less than 0.01% of what he handled on a regular basis.

He had plenty of ideas about the techniques that he was going to be creating for Martial Apprentices.

For one, he could have them engage in a very minor and highly diluted level of adaptive evolution as a general all-

rounder technique. He could have them record and tally his opponent's actions in a table across the fight to give them a good idea of the configuration of their style.

How many actions were offensive?

How many actions were defensive?

How many were maneuvering-oriented?

This information, along with an evaluation of physical parameters, should be enough information to allow them to make the most objectively superior strategic decision every single time when it comes to their general combat approach.

It could allow them to make the most accurate decision in regard to how much weight they should put on offense, defense, and maneuvering. How energy-conservative should they be and rough estimates of what the probability of victory was?

They were low-hanging fruits that yielded results without mentally overloading them with an ocean of information.

Thus began a long and slow process of creating two separate classes of techniques for explorers and Apprentices. The latter with Mind Palace-centric thought and the former was simply based on normal observation.

He needed to slow down on his domain techniques and take his time with them, but in turn, the voidlet techniques were being developed at a rapid speed.

Because they borrowed so heavily from the VOID algorithm, he didn't need to think too much about them. That was why the process had become excessively simple.

Most of his time was spent meditating while he relaxed in his Mind Palace, creating simplified algorithms of thought and decision-making that could allow the next generation of Martial Artists to harness thought from the get-go.

"Damn, I hope these new Martial Artists are grateful to me," Rui grumbled. "I gave them stronger Martial Bodies, stronger affinities for the Master Realm...Kids these days are getting everything handed out to them on a silver platter. Just completely and totally unfair I say."

Regardless, he pushed through, developing these sets of voidlet techniques alongside his four domain projects.

Chapter 1666: Immersed

The total number of projects that he was undertaking was increasing dramatically. Not only was he taking on four domain techniques that each was difficult and elaborate enough, but now he was taking on two more sets of thought techniques.

He was working on more projects simultaneously than he had ever worked on in his life. That was why his progress with each one of them was miniscule.

Especially Project Reverse Prophet. This project became a scary titan that threatened to cause him failure.

Regardless, he strived through. Months passed as he continued working on them, mostly meditating or working on his heaven and earth bending while he worked.

His life became monotonous, yet never dull. His mind was fully invested in the technique projects that he was working on. It increasingly ceased focusing on other matters. The Kandrian Throne War became but a smaller and smaller voice in his head, until it got buried under the countless thoughts he had about his technique.

He had quickly forgotten about it.

At the very least, he barely thought about it anymore.

Part of the reason was because he had taken the opportunity to speak to the Beggar's Sect before his season-long immersion into his techniques.

He wanted to request for a meeting with Prince Raul.

"He's not in the Kandrian Empire at the moment," Senior Partner Kayla of Lambargeau Legal Services had told him many months ago. "His Highness is away on an important matter."

Rui had stared at her at this revelation. "...In the middle of the cold war with the other princes?"

"The Kandrian Empire is projected to suffer a particularly harsh winter this year," Miss Kayla calmly informed him. "Our projection predict a long and heavy blizzard that will envelop the country for more many weeks. While the rich and even the upper middle class will be just fine, the lower middle class and impoverished class of the Kandrian Empire will suffer immensely. High Highness has personally undertaken the decision to procure enough of an import of crucial resources to last everybody months and will distribute them to all those who need it. His goal is to ensure that not a single mouth goes unfed."

Rui's eyes widened with surprise. "So much so that he is willing to slow down on his lobbying efforts for the Kandrian Throne War?"

"The Kandrian Throne War is not as important to Prince Raul as the people of Kandria, Senior Quarrier," Miss Kayla had calmly informed him back then. "His Highness cares for every single citizen of Kandria more than he does the throne. Between abandoning the throne and abandoning even a single citizen of Kandria, he would much rather do the former than the latter."

She had stared deep into Rui's eyes knowingly. "Such is the endless benevolence that hides in his heart."

"...He will lose the cold war. He will be able to do less good."

"He is not a calculating man," She had informed him. "Regardless, you're wrong."

Her eyes narrowed. "The People's Prince will win this war."

Rui raised an eyebrow. "If he's not even in the Kandrian Empire, then..."

"Prince Raul does not lobby," She had told him.

"...What?" Rui stared at her dumbfounded.

"He does not lobby," She had told him. "He simply does what he will...and people follow him of their own free will."

"You're kidding me."

"That's how the Kandrian Ruffians came to be. Not once did he ask someone to join him on his thankless journey of saving the world one person at a time. Yet they do."

Rui stared at her skeptically, unsure of whether to take her seriously or dismiss her words as rubbish.

"You should meet him, then you'll understand," She had told him. "We will inform you when he returns."

And thus, Rui had gone back empty-handed, before accelerating his training efforts to the max, immersing himself in the development of techniques.

The voidlet techniques developed faster than the rest since he had a timeline for them. He needed to have them completed, finished, and fine-tuned before the annual Martial fiscal meeting. He will also need to have presented it to the major sects of the Martial Union to prove to them that his Martial Art and Martial Path were truly worth spreading.

Months passed, and while Rui was immersed in his projects, the Kandrian Empire had moved on from the excitement of having the youngest Martial Senior. The seven princes and princesses continued their efforts to win over as much political capital as possible.

Slowly, the cold war made progress, step by step. Prince Raijun grew stronger under Rui's training as he slowly refined his individuality. Fixing micro-flaws was something that took time and effort, he could not possibly get away with fixing all of them quickly, even with Rui's efforts into tutoring him.

Princess Ranea aggressively continued with her naval and nautical expansions. Several small new port towns were slowly being put together across the coast of the Kandrian Empire as new shipyards were born, increasing the production and manufacturing of ships. This, in turn, increased maritime flux by eighteen percent in a matter of several months, increasing the weight of her faction.

Princess Rafia continued reeling in corporations and financial companies across the entirety of East Panama in an attempt to raise money.

The Randal Faction continued its preparations for war, improving its probability of victory to compel more people to their hawkish ambitions.

The Raemina Faction held even grander balls and banquets as the Minister Prince used her authority over budget to win over even more to her call.

The Underworld Prince did not sit stationary either. The Six Dons mobilized the entirety of all their assets and power to draw in as much support from certain liberal parts of the government as possible, appealing to greed as opposed to ideology.

Prince Raul, on the other hand, was missing. Nobody had seen him at all.

Yet time waited for nobody.

In just a blink of an eye, nine months passed.

Chapter 1667: Happenings

"Huff..." Rui heaved a sigh, exhaling mist, looking around.

The Jrava Mountain Range had become buried with snow. The skies had been blurred with an endless dark grey and the white winds of the blizzard that had consumed it and more.

Winter had already come and was well underway, and it was shaping up to be quite bad. Snow had already begun piling up across the entire nation in great amounts. Snow fell generously most of the day, most days, inconveniencing the local people.

Some days yielded as much as several feet of snow, paralyzing a lot of sectors of the nation. Of course, the Kandrian Empire had already taken measures. Martial Apprentices across the entire nation were mobilized by the Ministry of Domestic Affairs and the Martial Union. Despite the enormous snowfall, streets were rapidly cleared, as were clogged residences and homes. The more-than-hundred thousand Martial Apprentices in the Kandrian Empire were easily up to the task of ensuring that the snow didn't get in people's way.

The cold war slowed down in the face of the face of a blizzard that was shaping up to be a generational nightmare. Rui wasn't particularly worried, of course, not for the Quarrier Orphanage nor for himself. With Max and Mana alone, the snow wasn't a problem. With Rui, even if it snowed a hundred meters every day, they would be unharmed.

Still, Rui found that he didn't even need to lift a finger this time. Soon before winter began, the orphanage and various other settlements across the Kandrian Empire were approached by groups of young people offering various necessities and supplies to the impoverished. Food, cooking oil, firewood, clothing. Everything they could ever need.

It was free of cost. When inquired, they proudly revealed that they were the Kandrian Ruffians.

It appeared that Prince Raul had succeeded in his procurement of the necessary supplies for the Kandrian people.

Yet, Rui had gotten no word from the Beggar's Sect about the prince's return. Did it take nine months to simply sign some supply contracts? And if the supplies had been procured, why hadn't he returned to the Kandrian Empire?

Rui wasn't sure, but he hadn't let it stop bothering him for long. In the past nine months, he had been very busy. For one, he had been working on his four domain projects that had been proceeding smoothly.

He had gained a greater intuitive understanding of what the fruits of his effort would be like when completed. He had worked on many original technique projects in his life as a Martial Artist, and most of them had been successes. Yet those past experiences had allowed him to gain a sense of how fruitful a project was.

For these four domain projects, he was quite hopeful and enthusiastic for most of them. He had already created proof-of-concept prototypes for three out of the four projects. This was a great sign that each of the three was quite viable.

He was less enthusiastic about Project Reverse Prophet. He was starting to realize how immense of an undertaking it was.

'I may not be able to complete it along with the other projects,' Rui realized.

As far as he could tell, he had barely made two percent of progress. Even when he took into account the fact that he was working on other stuff, it was still extremely slow. He couldn't even imagine how much time it would take to complete the entire project.

Yet out of all the three projects, the one that had the most promise to him was clearly Project Reverse Prophet.

The project hid an immense amount of potential. More so than perhaps any other technique project he had come across in the past. The prospect of extracting the information of the past to empower his ability to extract the future was too alluring for him.

Yet it was difficult because the difficulty was proportionally high; the sheer amount of data that he needed to process was something else entirely. He wasn't entirely sure if this was viable.

For now, he had decided to work on it. There was no point in wondering about the viability of the project this early on; he would just have to give it a fair shot.

He was glad that the other three domain technique projects were not nearly as hard to progress in as this one.

As expected, the one that was slated to be completed first was Project Malevolent Kitchen. It definitely progressed smoothly compared to the rest and did not require anything particularly revolutionarily new. The only challenge he was having was mastering canceling out the vectors of all the converging sounds. In other words, he needed to go for the opposite of what he did with Transverse Resonance. He needed to engage in destructive superposition to ensure that the waves canceled each other, becoming non-directional and unordered.

Only then would it become heat. The great part of this technique was that it bypassed conventional durability significantly. Simply having tough flesh, hard bones, and strong muscles was not enough to avoid being inflicted with damage.

He thought back to Senior Janeau, the defensive Martial Senior that he had killed in the Great Forest of Hypnonarak. That Martial Senior had withstood all of Rui's attacks without so much as a scratch. Rui needed to use his greatest assassination tool, Sympathetic Death Lance, to kill the man.

Now, Rui would be able to do with the domain technique alone. He wouldn't need to wait all that time, striking his head countless times with trial and error, hoping to reach the right resonance frequency.

He could just use his domain technique to literally cook his opponent inside out. The longer the fight went, the more damage they would be. It would be especially damning when Rui reached passive mastery of domains, using domains while fighting normally. They would be passively incurring damage from his domains as well as his close-quarters combat.

The other two projects, on the other hand, had some interesting progress.

Chapter 1668: Progress

In the past nine months, Project Skyfall and Speed Prison had made optimistic progress considering the fraction of time that he was limited to working on them. For Project Speed Prison, he had discovered the manner of heaven bending needed to alter the drag force and drag coefficient of the atmosphere within his domain.

This meant that he had already found the solution to the biggest problem. Now, all he had to do was master applying it within a large area and embed the heaven bending into his muscle memory.

This, unfortunately, was raw and hard, repetitive training that could not be skipped. He was going to have to put in effort in order to declare the project complete and a success. One of the things that he wasn't the most fond of was the fact that there was little to nothing he could do to speed it up, but there always were elements that could not be accelerated.

Of the three, Project Skyfall was definitely shaping up to be a bit more of a challenge. Redirecting vectors to converge them onto a single target was definitely an ambitious challenge.

Yet it did not deter him. In the past three months, progress with all three projects was satisfactory, considering that he could only dedicate half his time to them.

The other half, however, went to the voidlet techniques.

He had successfully started and completed each of those projects in the past nine months, much to his satisfaction.

He had divided them into two sets: one for explorers and one for Martial Apprentices. He didn't bother creating a set for Martial Squires and Martial Seniors. That defeated the purpose of even doing all of this.

By giving explorers and Apprentices elements of adaptive evolution, he was essentially planting a seed. Hoping that when these explorers and Apprentices became Squires and Seniors, these seeds that he would soon be planting would have grown into mature trees. He was content planting seeds and letting them grow in their own unique ways so he could one day refer to them and gain inspiration for new directions to take adaptive evolution.

Each of the two sets had four thought techniques: one all-rounder thought technique and one technique for offense, defense, and maneuvering. Eight techniques would have honestly been far too much to undertake, but almost ninety percent of the work was already completed in the VOID algorithm. He just needed to translate it properly.

The explorer techniques were simplistic, similar to what he himself was using before he became a Martial Apprentice.

The Martial Apprentice techniques, however, involved a little data analysis. He was actually quite proud of what he had managed to cook up. Highly simplified applications of the Mind Palace to store and analyze data in efficient forms.

The eight techniques were ready for presentation to as many of the Martial Sects of the Martial Union. All he needed to do was demonstrate the impact of his thought-based techniques. As long as the techniques were powerful enough, they would be widely supported.

Of course, because he had only created four kinds of techniques, he wouldn't be able to earn the support of all the sects. But he didn't need to; he just needed to secure enough support to ensure that the Martial Union.

He was planning to hold a presentation where he would be inviting the Fire, Lightning, and Earth Sects to attend, along with the Balance Sect and other sects that were all-rounders and did not lean strongly in favor of one field of Martial Art or the other.

He also needed to invite the Breathing Sect. He had cut a deal with Master Vericita in regard to mutual support over the initiatives that both sides were proposing. As long as Master Vericita found his techniques to be meritorious of their support, he would get it in the annual fiscal meeting of the Martial Union.

All he had to do was figure out what was the best way to convince them of the value of his techniques. If he left a bad impression on them while he was presenting the techniques, they would probably not offer him as much support.

"Hm, I should probably leave all the nitty-gritty details of the presentation to the Martial Union," Rui mused.

There was no point in getting involved with useless things like logistics. What he needed to do was come up with a compelling manner of presentation. He had managed to do that last time, but alas, there were little to no ways in which he could possibly replicate the same formula.

For one, the Hungry Pain presentation was completely different from the ones that he was about to embark on. In the case of the Hungry Pain technique, the value of the technique had already been proven; all he did in the presentation was explain how it worked. It was inherently scientific and theoretical in its objective.

This time, however, he had yet to prove that his voidlet techniques were worth the investment.

Taking a theoretical approach was not optimal. Especially when his target audience was Martial Masters. In the Hungry Pain presentation, the core target audience was actually not the Martial Masters so much as the experts that they had brought along. He needed to provide a compelling explanation of the utility of the technique to satisfy the anxiety of the Martial Union in using a technique that they did not understand.

This time, the Martial Masters were truly the core targets. Since they were the voting constituents of the fiscal committee and had the power to decide whether or not Rui would be a part of the committee from here on out, they also would decide how important his techniques were to the future of Martial Art and whether they would be able to increase the number of Martial Masters in the Kandrian Empire in the future.

It was time to put together a plan that would allow him to dazzle those elder Martial Masters.

'Given that my targets are Martial Masters, I need to curb the amount of theory in my presentation. I cannot impress them with words,' Rui realized. 'I need to demonstrate the power of my thought techniques in real-time. I need to show them just how powerful even a fraction of my Martial Art is.'

He could bring a large board with an array of flow charts, tables, graphs, and pie charts. But they would get bored and lose track of his explanations of the voidlet techniques.

'A demonstration, hm?' Rui smirked as an interesting idea came to mind. 'A demonstration it is.'

He finalized the idea then and there, for he couldn't think of a single thing that would impress them. It wasn't long before he began implementing it. He quickly contacted the Martial Union, informing them of his presentation and his basic requirements for them.

Naturally, the Martial Union enthusiastically agreed, as it immediately began preparing for the event on the date that Rui had specified. From eagerly setting the time and the place to any and all requirements that Rui had, they readily agreed to all of them without complaint.

If anything, it seemed that they were even more eager than Rui was for this presentation, which was a good sign of how eagerly they had been waiting for this day. As for the invitations, he purposely undertook them himself, reaching out to contact the Fire, Lightning, and Earth Sects, among others.

"Oh, you're holding another presentation, eh?" Master Iskan of the Fire Sect grinned when Rui visited the immensely large training estate of the Fire Sect. "Then I shall partake in it this time, my young friend! Your proposal is entertaining. We shall ensure that we do as you say so that you can demonstrate the power of your techniques!"

The friendly, overzealous Martial Master was also the one who had attended his Hungry Pain presentation as a representative of the Fire Sect. He had declared his friendship with Rui back then, so Rui had expected a positive response.

The same came to be true for the remaining three major sects.

The Earth and Lightning Sects were also receptive to his invitations without any surprise.

The Ranged Sect and the Breathing Sect also were quick to eagerly accept his informal invitations to them.

"I am looking forward to seeing what you have cooked up," Master Ceeran smirked with an intrigued expression. "We shall adhere to the arrangements that you have requested of us."

"We are quite interested in the thought-harnessing techniques of your adaptive evolution, Martial Path," Master Vericita smiled affectionately as she petted his head when he visited her. "Do well my child, and we shall fully support you."

With the several sects bagged, he had already accrued a sizable guaranteed audience. He was sure that other intrigued Martial Sects would show up because of all the hype around him in general. That was fine, he had already gotten enough, he didn't need to drag every single Martial Sect under the Sun to the presentation.

A week passed as the date of the presentation arrived. Rui had been fully zoned into the matter of the presentation, and almost nothing could drag his attention away from it.

Almost nothing.

Prince Raul returned to the Kandrian Empire.

News of his return had spread like a wildfire of extraordinary intensity. Not even Rui's return to the Kandrian Empire had caused such a reaction.

Celebrations. Parties. Local festivals. Myriad decorations featuring his face had been put up across the entirety of the Kandrian Empire. The entirety of the populace of the Kandrian Empire had erupted in a celebration that shook the nation.

"Big brother! Did you hear the news?!"

"Prince Raul has returned to the Kandrian Empire!"

Max and Mana excitedly told him about the news when he returned from a long day of training from the Great Jrava Mountain Range.

"What's going on here?" Rui frowned as he saw many firecrackers and rockets bursting in the sky.

"Big brother, can we go to the welcoming parade?"

"I want to go to the welcoming parade!"

Even the Quarrier Orphanage and the various homes that had formed around it were up in celebration at the return of the People's Prince.

Despite the harsh winter and blizzards in the nation, the citizens of Kandria were determined not to allow it to stop them. After all, it hadn't stopped Prince Raul from helping them when they needed it.

"The mayor of the town of Hajin has announced a day off in honor of the People's Prince coming back home."

"The capital town of Vargard has announced a fair to be held in the town for the Prince's return too. Can we visit that?"

"There's also one being held in the town of Fenia. We should go for that, too!"

"Idiot, we can't go to two fairs at the same time!"

Rui stared in amazement at the domestic and national ruckus that the return of the People's Prince had caused across the entire nation. Prince Raul had more of a presence in the nation than every single other prince and princess combined!

Even the crowds that Princess Ranea had drawn did not evoke as much energy as Prince Raul did. She had organized events like the inauguration of the Karokann, but when Prince Raul came, the citizens organized events for him!

That showed the sheer amount of devotion that he had earned from every single citizen. Rui had understood that on paper, but seeing it actually unfold before him was quite amazing. This was a result of many years of personal effort in the groundwork. He visited each town personally and engaged with the many citizens personally. It appeared that he was more fruitful than Rui had previously given it credit.

He found it to be a pity that the prince had returned at a time when he was truly preoccupied with important matters like the presentation of his voidlet techniques, but he definitely was eager to meet the People's Prince as soon as possible.

Chapter 1670: Commence

While the nation erupted into celebration for the return of the People's Prince, Rui immersed himself in the preparations for his presentation. He needed to make sure that he had everything he needed to impress all the major and minor sects.

While Master Ceeran had spread awareness about Rui's Martial Art potentially increasing one's affinity for the Master Realm, it wasn't as though that was instantly enough to convince everybody.

The other sects had plenty of Martial Masters as well; the word of one Martial Master, that too someone as young as Ceeran, was not going to instantly sway their mind. The only ones who had been swayed were those who had already had their eyes on Rui Quarrier and were optimistic of what he was capable of.

He needed to make sure he dazzled all of them.

Soon enough, the day of the presentation arrived.

The Martial Union had taken over all the logistical requirements. The avenue, the things that Rui requested, and an appropriate seating arrangement for the Masters were all deftly prepared by a dedicated staff for the meeting.

Rui was grateful that he didn't once need to intervene in these tiring matters. He simply focused on everything that he himself needed to do.

He waited in a little open-air arena prepared for him, opening his eyes when he felt a presence descend from the sky.

"Master Ceeran, I'm glad you could make it," He calmly addressed him.

"I wouldn't dare to miss it," Master Ceeran smiled. "Not to mention, my reputation is on the line as well."

Rui smiled slightly. "Perhaps it would have been prudent not to put your reputation on me."

"If not you, then nobody else qualifies either," He smiled, turning away. "Good luck."

He took one of the seats prepared for him, not disturbing Rui any further. Yet the flow of incoming Martial Masters did not stop.

"Do well, my child," Master Vericita wished him as she petted his head.

"I look forward to your performance!" Master Iskan grinned.

Beside him was a Martial Senior.

Rui narrowed his eyes.

A powerful one.

"I'm glad that you have decided to take this step, Senior Quarrier," Master Zentra calmly told Rui when he arrived. "As I told you long ago, I believe in investing in the future. Show me the future, Rui Quarrier."

"Thank you, Master Zentra."

Rui's eyes lit up with surprise as an unexpected guest made an appearance. "Headmaster Aronian."

"Hmhmhm..." He chuckled mutedly as he descended from the sky before Rui. "I seem to have caught you off-guard."

"I didn't expect you to come here as well," Rui replied surprised.

"Why wouldn't I? Your Martial Art is being seriously evaluated as a foundational field for the explorer students and Martial Apprentices in the Martial Academy," The Headmaster explained. "It is within my purview, and as such, my perspective will carry much weight. Ensure you succeed."

Rui nodded.

Soon enough, all the relevant Martial Masters had arrived. A handful of Masters from each sect had deigned to take part in spectating Rui's presentation.

It was time to begin.

"Distinguished Masters, I am grateful that all of you have taken the time to attend my presentation," Rui began. "I promise that you will not regret your decision. I do not intend to present a boatload of theory. Nor do I intend to convince you of the value of my techniques through words. I shall prove it right here and now. I am grateful that each of you has fulfilled my request to help me prove to you that my techniques are worth your support."

He glanced at the three grade-thirteen Martial Seniors that stood behind the Martial Masters of their sect.

Their presence there that day was rather important.

They were going to prove that his techniques were important.

"Then, let us begin without further ado," Rui announced. "Would the chosen Martial Artist of the Fire Sect make his way onto the arena?"

The Martial Senior that had come from the Fire Sect was a woman with eyes so sharp that they could cut one where one stood. Her body was well-built and highly athletic, yet not overly muscular. Cleanly chiseled abs were exposed underneath her dark sports bra.

"Have you been informed of the limitations?" Rui asked.

"No Martial Heart, no breathing techniques, no supplementary techniques, no Martial Mind prototypes, no body transformational techniques, victory by knockout or submission," She growled back.

"Correct," Rui nodded. "Let us begin."

She took an interesting stance. Her leg stretched behind her as she crouched, akin to the manner a sprinter might. Her right hand balled into a fist, curling back as she tucked it at her twisting waist.

Boundless energy coiled in her body, preparing a blow of titanic power.

He stared at her as he began analyzing her in accordance with the voidlet techniques, not the VOID algorithm.

This was part of the plan. In order to show the three major sects the value of his techniques, he needed to demonstrate the voidlet techniques augmenting each of the three fundamental styles of combat.

Thus, he had asked them to bring Martial Seniors with stronger Martial Bodies from their sects. He would prove the value of his techniques by fighting against a stronger-bodied chosen warrior. Doing so would allow him to demonstrate the power of the voidlet techniques against all three major fields against Martial Artists of their choosing while also showing them how the voidlet could be used offensively, defensively, and in maneuvering.

It was the cleanest manner of demonstration of his prowess with the highest credibility. He didn't know anything about his opponents, while his opponents knew of him, both in preparation and because of his unparalleled fame as a Senior.

The Martial Heart and breathing techniques had been restricted maximally so that the result would be more relevant to explorers and Apprentices. These were who the techniques were meant for.

So what would that say about him if he used his voidlet techniques to win each fight domineeringly?

Her eyes blazed with determination and battle lust, as befitting one of the Fire Sect.