

Martial Unity 1731

Chapter 1731: Impediments

Eventually, Rui found himself training in the Great Jraa Mountain Range once more.

He recalled the fight against the Stringing Executioner; she had managed to temporarily negate the effects of his Sonic Singularity domain by not allowing the sonic singularity to actually form.

By dispelling the technique when it had yet to take effect, she managed to deal with it much easier than if it had hit her.

This was a bit of an unexpected weakness but one that he should have expected in hindsight. Unfortunately, it was a fundamental flaw of the technique; he could not get rid of it, but he could mitigate it with other factors.

One of them was the solution that he had come up with in the fight itself, which was relying on the principles of Death's Sympathy. He could use that to bypass any barrier that tried to obstruct the sound coming from his domain.

'Regardless, her Martial Art was definitely potent,' Rui gave her the credit that she was due.

While there were many drawbacks, shortcomings, and constraints to her Martial Art, they all occurred prior to the battle.

In the battle itself, she could functionally operate with a stamina many times greater than what her Martial Body and Heart would have. She could also operate with potency and power many times greater than what her Martial Heart would warrant.

Twenty strings released at once would have twenty times the power of a single string, even if her true attack power is on par with a single string's power. Unlike the stamina of the body, the net potential energy in all of the strings could be set up however she wanted. In fact, if she was willing to sacrifice all string stamina, she might even be able to launch a single quasi-Master-level attack.

However, she would need to plan ahead of time.

He shook his head, putting the matter aside.

She was dead.

The same could be said for the other assassins that had given him some trouble. The Suffocator displayed domain mastery that exceeded even Rui's. Passive domain mastery was truly impressive now that he had actually fought against it. The man was able to fight normally while still moving in a manner that bent his breath to, in turn, bend heaven.

One of the constant problems that he experienced throughout the battle was the fact that it was difficult to use domains while fighting in any other manner. At the very least, if he had to use a domain while fighting in hand-to-hand, his hand-to-hand combat would be quite limited.

Thus, he had to effectively choose between domains and hand-to-hand combat.

There were some circumstances where hand-to-hand was more desirable. Such circumstances were when his opponent was had a non-specialized Martial Art that had more balance across the field.

In such a circumstance, there would not be especially one domain that perfectly countered his opponent.

He did not have the ability to launch two domains partially and simultaneously. The Yggdrasil System was less flexible than the Hypnomatrix.

'If I want to adaptively evolve smoothly in the future, then I'm going to have to gain both passive mastery and domain flexibility,' Rui realized.

Ideally, he would want to reach a stage where he could use multiple domains simultaneously and partially to correct the right configuration to counter his opponent while also being able to engage in hand-to-hand.

This way, he would have reached a state where he could adaptively evolve his body to match his opponent, as well as hypnotic offense and his domains. And of course, his combat style.

The day he reached that pinnacle of mastery was the day that he would be deploying multiple dimensions of combat to perfectly adaptively evolve to his opponent.

His fist quivered with excitement as he thought about just how much adaptive evolution he would have cultivated.

Body, mind, Art, and domain.

These were the four dimensions of his adaptive evolution.

When he first became an Apprentice, he only had one, Art, through the VOID algorithm. He actually had less than one since he hadn't mastered the pattern recognition system back then.

'I've come a long way,' Rui's determination grew. 'And I'll go even further. No matter what hurdle I have to overcome.'

"Speaking of things I have to overcome..." Rui's mind delved into the only domain technique he hadn't used during the assassinations.

"The Angel of Laplace."

The technique had a lot of potential.

If there was one weakness that the pattern recognition system of the VOID algorithm had, it was the fact that it needed time to be activated.

This was not a small weakness.

What if he faced a Martial Art with an extraordinarily lethal and quick attack from the very start of the battle?

In that case, the pattern recognition system would be unable to help him. In the worst case scenario, he would die.

He knew that the solution to this weakness could not come from the pattern recognition system.

In order to predict the future, the past needed to be known.

As sharp as his mind was, Rui did not think that he would be able to break this principle. It was fundamental.

It was a result of the law of causality.

Back on Earth, this was not a problem. While Rui had created the VOID algorithm for all combat, it was mainly used in the context of the UFC rather than street fights.

He didn't need to worry about this flaw because the past data of all fighters were available. All fights were recorded and broadcasted. Thus, all the past data needed was available.

This was not the case in Gaia. If he was ambushed by an assassin, or assaulted by a Martial Artist, he didn't have access UFC fight footage of these Martial Artists.

That was why he had created the Angel of Laplace.

If the past was needed to see the future, then the past he would grasp.

However, the Angel of Laplace had proven to be...difficult.

Chapter 1732: Path Forward

Rui meditated in the Great Jrava Mountain Range.

Some distance away in a little hut was Master Gurren.

He had yet again been thrown under a pile of homework, cursing incessantly as he persevered through the assignments on the Parallax Method that Rui had supplied to him.

Rui ignored him.

He was focused on something more important.

Inside his mind, an ocean of information blasted through the mindscape of his Mind Palace.

"Rgh!" Rui struggled as he processed every packet of information, each containing a vector, magnitude, and direction.

Each packet was like a drop of water.

Yet there were so many that nothing short of a sea of information had been drowning him in his Mind Palace!

It was only more than an hour later when he managed to extricate himself from the sea.

He opened his eyes as he put the final piece of the puzzle together.

The puzzle of the past.

Time reversed as he bore witness to the past.

It was overwhelming.

"Huff...Huff..." he broke out of his stupor, gasping for air like a fish, glancing at a timer.

"Damn, eighty-nine minutes," Rui cursed.

It was better than his first attempt, which took several hours, but it was still a long way from being combat-viable.

An expression of frustration flashed across his face.

"Can I not employ this technique without the power of the Master Realm?" Rui gritted his teeth.

That was what he had initially concluded.

Yet, now...

A glint of greed flashed in Rui's eyes.

"I want this power."

Perhaps it had been because he had experienced how game-changing the technique was when he used it to essentially bypass Master-level stealth.

"This technique definitely has the power to erase my weakness."

"It has the power to elevate the quality of my thought."

His eyes widened as a higher realization dawned on him.

"The Master Realm cannot help me harness the Angel of Laplace, no...it is the Angel of Laplace that will help me harness the Master Realm."

This realization was euphoric.

He had almost chosen not to try and overcome the hurdle that was the Angel of Laplace, placing his trust in a higher Realm of power that came after the hurdle.

Yet how could a power that would only be gained after overcoming the hurdle help him in overcoming said hurdle?

"Stupid." Rui shook his head.

He had let the sheer difficulty shock him into believing that only the power of the Master Realm could help him overcome the Angel of Laplace.

It was cowardice.

His eyes sharpened with determination.

"I will overcome the Angel of Laplace."

A commitment had been made.

"I will harness the past."

"I will harness the past to harness the future."

His powerful mind shot to work as it swiftly processed dozens, hundreds, and even thousands of broad solutions.

He could look toward optimizing processing.

He could potentially increase the tolerable margin of error, reducing the burden on him for accuracy.

He could reduce the scope.

All of these solutions handled the problem of excess information, but they each were either difficult to even conceive or sacrificed too much.

The ones that were difficult to conceive were extremely information-heavy and would likely be even more difficult than actually creating the Angel of Laplace. This was the most difficult technique project he had ever worked on, second only to the original VOID algorithm that he had created in his previous life.

"I'm not opposed to such solutions, but..." He shook his head. "I would rather go for something that has more certainty of success."

Uncertainty was a dreadful thing.

Throughout all of Project Reverse Prophet, he had felt deep uncertainty about its success, he did not want to subject himself to that once more if he could avoid it.

It meant that he was favoring the options that made a bit of a sacrifice with more guaranteed returns for those sacrifices.

"If I'm going to sacrifice something, then I would rather it be something that does not hurt me as much," Rui thoughtfully considered. "Ideally, it would be something that I don't need in the context of combat."

His eyes narrowed as he caught onto a promising line of thought. "Sacrificing something I don't need for something I don't. Hmmm..."

In order to know what he didn't need, he needed to establish what he did need.

"Information on my opponent, everything else other than that..." His eyes widened with realization. "I don't need anything else."

While it was nice that he could roughly rewind time of the entire world around him in his head based on the analyzed information...how much did he really need information of the past of the entire world in combat?

"The input is high...but the output does not need to be high," Rui realized. "The only output I really need is the past of my opponent. I don't need to see the past of the rest of my environment in combat..."

What good did knowing the past of a rock, or a tree, or a bird do him?

Especially in combat, he did not need to know the past of a squirrel on a tree near the fight.

The system of thought for the Angel of Laplace simply derived the past first and then focused on the relevant information, but what if he knew to only derive the past relevant to combat?

"If I could get rid of having to process the past of every rock, tree, grain of sand...then I could massively reduce the burden of the Angel of Laplace!" Rui exclaimed, excited.

The only trick was knowing exactly which vectors to process and which ones to not, but even that was theoretically and logically possible. He just needed to add a scoping system that would allow him to only process the past that he needed to process.

A path forward had been found.

It was not going to be easy.

"Nothing worth it ever is," Rui said, feeling a surge of motivation and energy as he immediately began working on this auxiliary technique project.

Chapter 1733: Shocking Reports

FSHHHHHH...

In a well-guarded medical room in the Martial Union, a chamber opened, releasing steam.

Around the chamber were several Martial Masters.

Further away was a large team of medical experts monitoring some readings on their panel.

"Preliminary evaluation; the procedure is a complete success," One of the more senior doctors announced with a relieved expression on her face.

She would face a lot of heat if something was wrong.

CLASP

A hand emerged from the chamber, grasping at the side.

Prince Raijun pulled himself up and gazed at his new body with shock and bewilderment.

It was euphoric.

At that moment, he felt like a god.

He felt like he was an unstoppable force.

Nothing could be a match for his newfound power!

Of course, his rationality was more than strong enough to recognize that that was a stupid thought or belief to have.

He was logically cognizant of the fact that he was a grade-one Martial Squire.

Of course, grade-one Martial Squires today were now what grade-two or even grade-three Martial Squires were before the Hungry Pain technique. But even considering that, he was still extremely low on the totem pole of the second of six Realms.

Getting arrogant would be the height of foolishness.

Still, he found it difficult to humble himself.

"It is alright to indulge yourself for a bit, Your Highness," Master Zentra assured him. "Congratulations on becoming a Martial Squire."

"...Thank you," Prince Raijun murmured. "Now what..."

"Normally, you would enter into isolated acclimatization training for however long it takes to get you acclimatized to your Martial Body. However, in your case, that cannot be afforded to be done," Master Zentra explained patiently. "You have a throne war to win. Thus, we have specially adjusted our acclimatization body suit to be sleeker, thinner, and less noticeable so that you can acclimatize to your body even whilst you go about your duties and obligations."

"I'm grateful to the Martial Union for taking my circumstance into account, Master Zentra," Prince Raijun smiled.

He was glad to know that he could immediately get back into the working. While it was true that his growth and now successful breakthrough to the Squire Realm would yield him a great amount of political capital, he could not kick back and relax.

He needed to capitalize on it.

Only a few days later, he left the Martial Union in his new bodysuit.

It greatly restricted his raw power to that of a human for now; it would slowly be released at about one percent every day so that he would completely be acclimatized to it over a span of a little over three months.

"Alright, what do we have on the agenda?" Prince Raijun asked his secretary, sitting at his table for the first time in two weeks.

"There have been some concerning developments, sir," His secretary handed him a stack of papers.

"What am I looking at?" He asked, skimming through the pages.

"A report regarding the six tier-five patrons that have passed notice for the termination of their contracts with the Raijun Foundation," His secretary explained.

Her tone was calm.

Yet her words physically rocked him in his seat.

So much so that his secretary would have died had he not been wearing a suit that suppressed his raw power.

"What?!" An expression of shock flashed on his face. "Which ones?!"

"Chairman Frenek, Minister Zioschek, the Kandrian Distribution Service, Nereau Defence Enterprise, and Naracka Limited."

"Damn, why didn't you inform me?!" He exclaimed, frustrated.

"Your instructions were to not disturb you during your breakthrough unless it was urgent," She calmly replied.

"..." She was right.

"What is the net change to our patronage count?"

"We have gained six and are losing five, thus the net gain is one," His secretary told him.

"What are the reasons those five offered for the notice of termination?" He incredulously skimmed through the documents.

"The official reasons are perfunctory, as evaluated by the analytical team," His secretary informed him.
"The Martial Union's intelligence department has found out that each of the five patrons has received...surprisingly generous offers from four different royals."

She placed another document before Prince Raijun.

"Randal, Raemina, Rafia, and Ranea?" Prince Raijun glared. "Just what have they offered to steal my patrons away from me?"

"Princess Rafia made a four billion gold donation to Chairman Frenek shortly after he filed a notice for termination. We can assume this was part of the deal."

Yet another shock struck Prince Raijun. "What the hell?! Twelve billion gold donation?! Is she trying to go bankrupt?!"

He was stunned into silence.

Twelve billion Kandrian gold was a large amount of money, it was similar to the entirety of all of Rui's profits from the Shionel Dungeon raid. To donate this enormous amount of money in a single donation was an absurd and absolutely shocking move.

Donations were typically in the millions of gold, maybe even a few hundred million, to genuinely incentivize people into doing things.

A twelve billion gold donation just to immediately terminate the contract that Chairman Frenek had made with Raijun and join her faction was insane. There was no way she was making any profit with that investment. Raijun was truly surprised because it did not sound like the meticulous, calculating sister he was familiar with.

It was no wonder he had lost Chairman Frenek, there was nothing that Raijun was willing to offer that could possibly beat match twelve billion gold, it just wasn't worth it.

Yet the same should also be true for his sister; there was no way this was worth it for her either.

"Randal stole my patron through an authorized defense-

security contract signing away official military protection...?! Raemina stole my patron by issuing two billion gold worth of treasury bonds...?! Ranea stole a patron by selling the Karokann???" Pure and unadulterated bewilderment overtook him. "This is insane! They're burning through their capital just to hurt me."

He stared at the report in disbelief.

"Have they given up on the throne or something?"

Chapter 1734: Opaque Intentions

Prince Raijun could not feel as though something had changed.

"What is happening?" Prince Raijun stared at the reports with disbelief.

From the various actions of his siblings, he could feel a shift in their mindset. This was not the action of someone who had hope left. The sheer rate at which they were spending resources just to cripple him was a troubling sign.

It seemingly signaled an apparent lack of hope in the prospects of their ascendance to the throne.

Yet, Prince Raijun couldn't imagine this happening.

As much as he disliked and even detested his siblings, he did respect them. They were indeed powerful competitors who had managed to develop a massive power bloc centered around them, enough to compete with him and potentially emerge victorious.

Yet, currently, they had begun a self-destructive bid to do everything they could to stop him.

'They wouldn't do that as long as they were still aiming for the throne,' Prince Raijun stared at the reports before him, completely flummoxed. 'What has changed? What could have caused such a drastic change in the four of them?'

He felt like he had missed something.

Something really important.

"Your advisors have prepared a briefing for you," Her secretary remarked as she handed him a single sheet.

"That is very much appreciated," Prince Raijun nodded his eyes. "I must listen to what they have to say after I've familiarized myself with all recent developments."

Prince Raijun hurriedly tried reading through the documents at superspeed, only to discover that a Martial Squire's enhanced speed did not apply evenly across the board, much to his chagrin. In general, the cognitive boosts that the Martial Path provided as a result of maximizing the potential of the brain came from areas of the brain related to combat.

The further away an activity was from physical combat, the less it would be empowered above human limits.

It wasn't long before he had caught up to the state of affairs of his campaign. He had made the choice not to let it impede him while preparing for the Squire evolution breakthrough procedure, thus he did need to spend some time overlooking the reports and records.

"Something has changed since I was away," His eyes narrowed as they flew around. "What happened to the four of them? Why are they acting like this? What has caused them to take such a suicidal approach to hampering me?"

"Your advisors believe they have some explanations," His secretary explained.

"Then I must speak with them at once." Prince Raijun narrowed his eyes as he immediately got up and walked away, accompanied by his secretary.

It wasn't long before he found himself seated at the head of a long table with many elderly figures around.

"Your Highness, welcome back," One of his advisors smiled. "On behalf of us, I can say that we are sincerely proud of you. Congratulations on stepping into the Squire Realm."

"Thank you, but this is not time for that; let us save the congratulating and well-wishing for the celebration party," Prince Raijun remarked. "Cut to the chase, what is happening?"

His advisors grew solemn. "We believe that...Princess Ranea, Rafia, and Raemina, as well as Prince Randal, have formed an alliance dedicated to stopping your ascent at any cost."

Prince Raijun's eyes widened with surprise. "What?"

"It is clear that they have learned about your breakthrough, but the timing is far too suspicious," one of his advisors sighed. "There must have been an information leak somewhere."

Prince Raijun narrowed his eyes. "Even if they learned about my breakthrough to the Squire Realm, that alone does not explain this. Twelve billion gold donations, signing away military protection, giving away the Karokann, selling massive treasury bonds...These are rather extreme measures. Extremely extreme. The kind that would not be taken unless they were willing to burn themselves alive to stop me, even if it meant their deaths."

The atmosphere grew severe.

Everyone fully understood his words. Someone who didn't care about getting hurt could spread more damage and destruction than someone who cared about their well-being.

The measures that they were taking were those of the former than the latter. If Princess Rafia continued making such absurd donations to tear away his most supportive patrons, she would go bankrupt. If Prince Randal handed away military capital with such ease, he would lose the resources needed to win the war and lose the support of his militaristic power bloc. If Princess Raemina kept issuing such debt, she would weaken her position as the finance minister. Ranea giving away the Karokann would shatter her relationship with the ship-building bloc of her faction.

Yet they had taken these measures all just to impede and hurt him.

"We...have been unable to find the case for the extreme shift in their aggression toward our campaign," His advisors heaved a solemn sigh. "They have always been aggressive towards you, but this is quite different. The measures that they have been taking recently make it abundantly clear that they are willing to hurt themselves and their ambition at the cost of holding you back."

"That is not the scariest possibility, Your Highness," One of his advisors murmured. "We believe that they have not just allied against you...but also have been compromised. This is not their work nor their idea...this might be the work of someone else."

Prince Raijun's eyes widened with shock. "You mean...someone has gained control over them?"

"...Yes, Your Highness," His advisors nodded. "They have always prioritized their ambitions over halting yours; the only way for their decisions to make sense is...if it's not their decisions. Otherwise, it is inconceivable that Her Highness Princess Ranea would ever give away the Karokann."

That was a compelling point. His sister had loved that submarine-like it was her own progeny. The fact that she would give it away for something like impeding Prince Raijun was unthinkable.

In other words, it could not possibly be her decision.

"Someone powerful may have gained control over the four royals. Someone who doesn't want to see you become Emperor."

Chapter 1735: Emperor of Harmony

"That idea seems increasingly alluring," Prince Raijun remarked. "I, for one, find it hard to imagine that all four of them had a massive shift in priorities simultaneously. It is much more likely that there is a common causal factor between them."

"We agree," The advisors nodded. "That is our analysis on the matter as well. We believe that there is a common cause behind their aggressive shift towards you."

Prince Raijun nodded, narrowing his eyes. "I just am unable to imagine who or what it could be; these are truly mind-boggling events."

"There are some possibilities, but there is one that stands at the top of the list..." One of his advisors signaled to an assistant, who promptly supplied Prince Raijun with a report document.

"What is this...?"

"Something you haven't heard about yet. We saw fit to hand it to you ourselves to minimize an information leak," His advisors explained.

Prince Raijun raised an eyebrow as he went through it.

His eyes widened. "Father...has awoken once more?"

"His Majesty, Second Emperor Rael Di Kandria, has awakened from his Eternal Dream sleep, perhaps for the final time," The advisors solemnly informed him.

The atmosphere was severe.

Second Emperor Rael Di Kandria was the man who elevated Kandria to a powerhouse Sage-level nation.

He was known as the Emperor of Harmony in the political sphere.

The reason for that was because, across all of Panama, he alone was the one and only ruler in the history of the Age of Martial Art to have averted a civil war.

One of the most universal political phenomena during the early half of the Age of Martial Art was civil war.

On one side of the civil wars were the ruling political establishment that had been in power since long before the age of Martial Art. These included royalty, aristocracy, and monarchies.

On the other side were the younger and newer Martial Artists of the new age who broke free of the control of the existing political establishment. These were younger Apprentices, Squires, and even some Seniors.

Every nation experienced this power struggle. It was the defining hallmark of the earliest phase of the Age of Martial Art, which itself was an era marked by the beginning of the first Martial Squire leading a revolution.

The Britannian Empire had a civil war that led to the old monarchy falling, replaced by a Martialocracy. The Sekigahara Confederate was a state where Martial Artists grouped together, selectively breeding with each other to create their own bloodlines, resulting in clans that swept the militaries of the aristocratic clans that previously ruled the Sekigahara plains. The clash between the Martial faction and the dictator of Gorteau resulted in a tie and a compromise, causing a democracy to emerge.

Yet, the Kandrian Empire was the only nation in history that had never experienced a civil war.

It had come close.

While the first Emperor Ra had not tried oppressing Martial Art and even signed the Kandrian Martial Pact and the Covenant, he did expect loyalty from Martial Artists. He refused to give up the right to conscript them for war.

This led to immense friction between him and the young Martial Union.

In fact, it was bound to lead the war.

Yet before he could pull the trigger, he was assassinated.

First Prince Rael overcame the allied resistance of his siblings and became Emperor, becoming Emperor Rael. He immediately formed agreements with the Martial Union with a compromise on both sides, conceding to a highly conditional and limited defensive conscription in the event of an all-out invasion.

His political acumen made for a brilliant lobbying effort that appeased the Martial Union despite extracting several concessions. His expertise in law and administration created a system of governance that worked around the Martial Union and slotted perfectly into the power system of Kandria, seamlessly harnessing its power. His diplomatic and militaristic acuity empowered Kandria's influence and control over its domain of power, becoming a true powerhouse on the international platform.

He was widely regarded as the man who saved all of Kandria from destruction and elevated it to power and dominance, earning the respect and admiration of all his subjects.

His name invoked silence.

While the advisors were firmly a part of Prince Raijun's faction, they would be lying if they did not have an immensely favorable opinion of the Emperor of Kandria.

Prince Raijun's eyes sharpened. "Tsk, he should have stayed asleep. Better yet, he should have died."

None of his advisors commented on that remark.

"Still, Father has woken up, hm?" Prince Raijun read through the report. "This may indeed be the last time he wakes up."

The Eternal Dream disease was often thought of as a curse. While there was a medical community, this world was still one filled with much superstition. One would progressively fall into sleep for longer and longer periods until they eventually slept forever before dying in their eternal sleep.

Was that not a curse?

"Once he goes into eternal sleep, he will probably still not be pronounced dead," Prince Raijun tutted. "Courtesy of my power-hungry grandfather, Emperor Ra. What a foolish system. However, the moment he dies, I will do everything in my power to commence the Crowning Ceremony and crown myself as the third Emperor of Kandria."

Prince Raijun furrowed his eyebrows as he considered the cards that he was dealt.

"I hope the old man just accepts his fate humbly," Prince Raijun snorted. "His time has passed. I doubt that he's responsible for my four suicidal siblings going all out against me."

"Don't be too certain, Your Highness," One of his advisors cautioned him. "Even if he isn't responsible for it, we can be sure that he will take action once more now that he has awakened. He is not a man who will sit tightly as he watches his children trigger yet another civil war that may bring about ruin to Kandria."

"Hmph," Prince Raijun snorted, yet a hint of wariness flashed in his eyes.

"I just hope nothing happens."

Chapter 1736: Revisit

"I must say..." Prince Raul remarked. "I didn't expect you to come back."

"Well, I don't have much of a choice," Rui replied.

"I thought our last conversation made it clear that we are not compatible in philosophy," Prince Raul raised an eyebrow, smiling.

"Maybe," Rui shrugged. "But like I said, I don't have much of a choice but to try."

He couldn't make any of the four royals on the palm of his hands into Emperor because that got rid of the weight of his evidence pretty much entirely. The power dynamics would flip, and he would forever be targeted by the new ruler.

That was why, while he might have considered Princess Ranea if she dialed down her extremities, he simply could not do that.

It would be the height of foolishness to put himself and his family at risk.

After all, the whole reason he had become involved in the Kandrian Throne War was to ensure that the harmony and peace of the lives of his family were not disrupted. It was motivated by the guilt of having disrupted their lives by his sudden disappearance; he didn't want anything like that to happen again if he had the power to avoid it.

And now, he did.

With the four royals who tried to assassinate him being completely disqualified from consideration, that left three royals; Raijun, Rajak, and Raul.

Raijun, too, was disqualified.

Between Rajak and Raul, Rui was inclined to go with Raul, especially since the royals had confessed that Rajak was indeed peripherally involved with his assassination. However, Raul, despite certainly knowing that Rui was responsible for Raijun's growth through the Beggar's Sect, did not take any measures to eliminate Rui.

That was why Rui had turned to Prince Raul.

Despite having every motive to assassinate Rui, he didn't take such measures.

Soon after he began fleshing out his plans for the Angel of Laplace, he had taken the liberty to visit Prince Raul in the

"You make it sound like someone is holding you to a blade's edge," Prince Raul raised an eyebrow, smiling amusedly.

It was the reverse.

But he didn't need to know about that.

Rui needed to carefully choose his words.

He couldn't make it sound like he had the power to make Raul Emperor. That would make the Beggar's Sect suspicious.

"In a sense, I am," Rui admitted. "The reason I am here is to make an offer to you."

"Oh? Let's hear it then," Prince Raul smiled, leaning forward.

"I will give you all my power and knowledge in return for not abolishing the Kandrian Martial Covenant," Rui replied.

"I refuse," Prince Raul shook his head. "That is not something I can compromise on."

"...Why not?" Rui raised an eyebrow. "You come off as anti-

Martial Art if you're so hell-bent on abolishing the Kandrian Martial Covenant. What is it about Martial Artists securing rights and privileges befitting the power they contribute to this nation that you dislike?"

Prince Raul stared at him calmly. "I am not anti-Martial Art. I'm not fond of physical conflict, but people have a universal right to cultivate their personal power. What I am against is what that power is used for..."

His demeanor grew more hurt. "Do you know how many innocent people are hurt by Martial Art in the Kandrian Empire every year?"

"...A lot?"

"About a hundred and fifty thousand every year."

Rui's eyes sharpened.

That was far higher than Rui had been thinking. Almost ten times higher than he had been hoping for.

Yet deep down, he was not truly surprised.

"It makes up about ten percent of the total annual death toll in Kandria." Prince Raul's eyes grew sullen as he heaved a sigh. "A hundred and fifty thousand innocent men, women, and children die at the hands of Martial Artists every year. Ten times as many people are hurt by Martial Artists in this nation. Most of them, of course, are perpetrated by Martial Apprentices and Squires."

Prince Raul met Rui's gaze. "I've been informed that Martial Apprentices cannot lose control of their power, for their natural power is on par with that of a human, yet through Martial Art, they are able to elevate it to leaps and bounds beyond the limits of human physicality through conscious refined control. If that's the case, then it is almost impossible for Martial Apprentices to kill humans by accident."

Rui heaved a sigh.

He knew where he was going for this.

"When I learned that Martial Artists could not kill humans accidentally by losing control of their natural power, it made me wonder..." A pained expression came upon his face. "Does that not mean these Martial Artists hurt people intentionally?"

That was true.

The fact of the matter was that many people strived to become Martial Artists because of a power fantasy. These were young, disenfranchised boys and girls who partook in the dangerous and risky Martial Academy entrance exam with the hopes of one day ameliorating their low socioeconomic status by becoming a Martial Artist.

An early life of no power made it precious, perhaps a bit too precious. Often these young aspirants were those who bore resentment to the world around them, having grown up with no power and a low socioeconomic class.

It manifested in young, arrogant Martial Apprentices who began exercising their power on others to fulfill their power fantasy or to vindicate their resentment towards those who had antagonized them when they were younger.

"Yet it is the Kandrian Martial Covenant that allows them to get away with it with just a slap on the wrist," Prince Raul explained. "The Kandrian Martial Covenant has acts such as the Martial Judiciary Delegation Act that allows the Martial Union to act as the judiciary for crimes perpetrated by Martial Artists and concession of a special Martial penal code with lighter sentences and punishments for every crime than other citizens. Essentially, there is no real consequence for the crimes of Martial Artists. In such a case, no wonder Martial Apprentices think they can get away with misdemeanors."

Chapter 1737: Frustrating Answers

Rui had to admit that Prince Raul's critiques were more than just valid; they were sound. As a Martial Senior, Rui could commit murder and get away with it pretty easily. In fact, the Martial Union essentially used the crimes to justify squeezing out free labor from Martial Artists as a punishment

Martial Artists were not straightforwardly imprisoned for many years or decades. They were sentenced to Martial labor, as dictated by the Martial Union, which would squeeze them of all the value they could during this time until they served their sentence and were free.

On top of that, the sentences for assault and battery were crimes that were treated with a slap on the wrist, with sentences of labor that lasted months at most.

Essentially, the Martial Union used this as a way to gain free Martial labor. The Kandrian government used this as a way to delegate what would be an expensive judiciary process for imprisoning powerful Martial Artists under the standard penal code.

It was not pretty.

However, Martial Artists were a precious and vital resource.

They could not be locked up; it would weaken the Empire twice, once for losing the power that the Martial Artist had to offer and another for having to dedicate the same amount of power needed to ensure that the Martial Artist was actually locked up and didn't escape with force.

Even if the Kandrian Empire could successfully implement this, it would dramatically weaken the nation, which was highly undesirable considering how many enemies the Kandrian Empire had inadvertently made.

This was the dilemma of the Age of Martial Art.

It was one that Prince Raul did not like.

"That is why I wish to abolish the Kandrian Martial Covenant; I will either abolish it or amend it so that Martial Artists will face real, genuine consequences for hurting people. Power does not make the death of a hundred and fifty thousand innocent Kandrian citizens acceptable, not at all, as far as I am concerned."

Prince Raul was clear on that.

It was difficult for Rui to push back.

He was sympathetic to the plight of the people most vulnerable to assault from Martial Artists. Yet it also wasn't something he was cognizant about on a day-to-day basis, especially in the Kandrian Empire.

Yet, at the same time, he didn't think highly about Prince Raul's goal of trying to get rid of the Covenant.

"You'll be provoking civil war. And even if you win that, you'll weaken the Kandrian Empire by shackling our Martial Artists and make us more vulnerable to external pressure," Rui shook his head. "It is the height of irrationality to believe that you can fix this problem through niceness."

"Everybody has a human heart, do they not?" Prince Raul smiled warmly.

"You know, if not for the fact that you don't have a privileged background, I would assume you have had the privilege of growing up around extremely good and kind people," Rui raised an eyebrow.

Prince Raul chuckled, shaking his head. "People have a greater capacity for kindness than you could ever imagine, Rui Quarrier. Why do you think the Kandrian Ruffians have grown to such an extent? It is not because of my kindness but theirs. It is only because people are fundamentally kind that so many have selflessly joined me in my voyage."

Rui raised an eyebrow as he stared at Prince Raul with a dubious expression.

It was true that the scale of the Kandrian Ruffians surprised Rui. However, that did not mean everybody was fundamentally kind.

"Do you truly believe that just asking kindly will result in success?"

"It will bear my heart," Prince Raul smiled warmly.

"What if you fail?" Rui asked him.

"...Then I will be forced to choose the lesser of two evils," Prince Raul replied with a sorrowful tone. "I don't know what the lesser of two evils is, but I have very clever people who can show me what available path brings the least suffering."

Rui's eyes lit up with a little bit of hope. He could at least conceive of his own failure, which means he wasn't arrogant.

He was just incredibly naive.

However, that didn't mean all the issues were resolved.

"What if the path to least suffering is a civil war?" Rui calmly asked.

"...Then I will do everything in my power to ensure not a single person suffers. We Kandrian Ruffians will protect, feed, and house every person who needs it," Prince Raul heaved a quivering sigh.

"It is impossible to prevent the flames of war from spreading suffering," Rui snorted.

"I fear from the bottom of my heart that you may be right," Prince Raul smiled sadly.

"What if the path to least suffering is maintaining harmony?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"Then that is the path I will go down," Prince Raul firmly replied. "However, I do not believe that this is the path to least suffering. I do not believe that the best we can do is to let hundreds of thousands die over the years. I do not believe that is the very best we can afford to do."

Rui shook his head. "This is the price of Martial Art. This is the price of power."

"Then it is not a price that I am willing to pay," Prince Raul's voice grew stronger.

"Would you reject Martial Art?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"No, as I said before, I am not anti-Martial Art itself. But I will not accept the price of more than a hundred thousand dying every year," Prince Raul shook his head. "If Martial Art is unable to comply, then Martial Art may need to cease to exist."

"Hah," Rui shook his head. "What an asinine thing to say. You will spread more suffering if you try to get rid of Martial Art itself."

"People are kinder than you think, Rui Quarrier."

"You think kindness will get rid of the deaths caused by Martial Art, or Martial Art itself. You think kindness and 'heart' can fix all our problems?!" Rui grew frustrated.

"I am a firm believer in the human heart." Prince Raul smiled, ignoring Rui's outburst.

Chapter 1738: The New Variable

Rui's head fell back as he stared at the ceiling.

He had gone back to Raul, looking for hope that he may have missed last time. But it was entirely pointless.

This fool of a saint was even more irrational than Rui had realized initially.

"You seem distressed." Prince Raul smiled. "Are you in such a dire need of a royal?"

"...Yes," Rui heaved a sigh.

"I don't quite understand," Prince Raul replied as he gazed into Rui's eyes with interest. "Why would a Martial Senior feel so pressured to find an emperor candidate that has earned his approval? What will happen if you don't find someone you approve of? Will something of note happen? Do you possess the power to make them Emperor or Empress?"

For some reason, Raul's sincerity seemed to coax a somewhat truthful answer from Rui.

"...I have much to offer," Rui replied, heaving a sigh. "It may not change the course of the Kandrian Throne War, but it can be impactful."

"So I've heard," Prince Raul smiled knowingly. "What kind of ruler do you seek?"

"...Someone who understands the importance of balance," Rui replied. "That has been the greatest shortcoming among you seven. There is no balance in your visions of the future. You cannot disenfranchise the greatest forces of Kandria for the power that is backing you in your faction. Kandria is built upon a delicate balance between all its stakeholders and power blocs."

The seven royals didn't understand the destruction awaited Kandria should the balance be discarded.

Largely because a war would be waged against whichever side the balance shifted to.

"That sounds like my father, the Emperor of Harmony" Prince Raul smiled. "Speaking of which, did you know that he's woken up?"

"I was not aware," Rui raised an eyebrow. "But at this point, it doesn't mean much, does it?"

"...I don't know," Prince Raul shook his head. "My father is more clever than any of the seven of us. It took a disastrous terminal disease that crippled him with sleep to finally shake his guiding hand off Kandria."

"There's nothing he can do at this point, can he?" Rui remarked calmly.

"I would be careful to say that," Prince Raul cautiously remarked. "My father...is not a man of inability."

"So I've heard, but since his disease is certainly bound to kill him at this point, what can he do?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"...I don't know," Prince Raul shook his head. "As I said, my father is not a man of inability."

Rui stared at him skeptically.

What could an emperor who was inching closer to death by the day do?

This was especially the case when he was sleeping an overwhelming majority of the time for large periods of time in a single stretch. In fact, Rui was pretty certain he had been in a slumber since before he returned to Kandria two years ago.

Even if he tried exerting his power, there were limits because he had yet to be able to stop his own death, nor could he stop his children from preparing for war. He also couldn't change the political system of the monarchy with the power that he had left.

Such a political move would require the unanimous alignment of all power blocs across all of Kandria.

However, nobody would be receptive to the Emperor's lobbying attempts.

"...Because he's dying," Rui narrowed his eyes. "He has lost tremendous amounts of power as a result."

"He has accomplished much in even more dire circumstances," said Prince Raul. "As far as raw competence goes, he has reached what many would consider the pinnacle of statesmanship. Did you know that Kandria was actually weaker than the other three powerhouses during the Founding Emperor Ra's rule?"

"What?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"I found it hard to believe as well," Prince Raul smiled. "But back then, there were only three powerhouses in East Panama, nations that existed before the Age of Martial Art. Kandria was extremely young compared to these millennia-old nations. As far as Martial Art and esoteric technology went, we were actually an entire Realm behind them. It seemed to be in our destiny to forever be inferior to them. That, however, changed after my father ascended the throne."

Rui's eyes widened with surprise.

"I am definitely not knowledgeable about history; thus, my recounting will be limited to the broader events...but my father allowed Kandria to catch up to the other three powerhouses by averting a Martial civil war that ravaged the other three nations," Prince Raul explained with mixed expressions of sorrow and pride. "By the time the other three civil wars had concluded in the Sekigahara Confederate, Britannian Empire, and the Republic of Gorteau, their nations had been ravaged. Kandria, on the other hand, was swimming forward with great speed, reaching extraordinary heights as my father harnessed conflicting forces, adeptly integrated them within a single system, and brought about harmonious synergy between them, producing a nation greater than the sum of its constituents."

Prince Raul met Rui's gaze. "That is my father, the Emperor of Harmony. And now he has awoken. Awoken amidst civil conflict. The only question is..."

"...whether the Emperor of Harmony can pull off one last miracle at death's door and avert a civil war for the second time?" Rui stared at Prince Raul skeptically. "I think you're giving His Majesty too much

credit. Everybody has limits, and being crippled with sleep and permanently bedridden is enough to suppress anybody."

"...Maybe," Prince Raul relented. "I would firmly agree with that sentiment had it been anybody else. But..."

An expression of hesitation appeared on his face. "...I am unable to bring myself to believe that my father is someone who can be suppressed. I believe that now that he has awoken when the Kandrian Throne War is only bound to escalate in intensity...

Something will change."

His uncertain yet admiring tone made it clear that he had deep respect and fear for his father.

Rui, on the other hand, could not help but wonder if there was any truth to his words.

Chapter 1739: The Endgame

1739 The Endgame

"What do you think?" Rui asked as he sky-walked back home.

"What did you expect?" Master Reina snorted. "He's an empathetic fool."

"Do you think there's any hope in choosing him as my candidate?"

"You will doom Kandria if that man sits on the throne," Master Reina shook her head.

"Huff..." Rui listlessly sighed.

It was tiring playing kingmaker. Now, he almost wished he didn't have the power to choose the future Emperor of Kandria. It was an utter complete mess.

"Maybe I should just forget about this nonsense and go back to refining the Angel of Laplace," Rui heaved a sigh. "What do you think, Master Reina?"

"..."

"Master Reina?" He glanced at her.

Her eyes were narrowed as she glanced around warily.

"What's the matter?" He raised an eyebrow.

"I am unable to confirm this...but I can't help but get the sneaking feeling that we're being watched."

Her words were alarming.

Rui furrowed his eyebrows with concern. "Through your stealth?"

"Yes, through my stealth," Master Reina narrowed her eyes. "My instincts are tingling, but my senses can't detect any surveiller."

"I don't even know how many people there are in Kandria who can actually sense you past your stealth, Master Reina."

"There are about seventeen people in Kandria against whom my stealth would be ineffective," Master Reina replied.

"That's an oddly precise number."

"Among them, only three are Masters. The Truthseeker, the Blind Behemoth, and the Lightweaver," Master Reina replied with a severe tone.

He had heard of all three, but he had only interacted with the Truthseeker, who had been present as head of security for his Hungry Pain presentation. It appeared that she truly was as powerful as they said she was.

"But none of the three are here, that much I am certain of," Master Reina's tone grew more intense.

Rui's expression grew grave as he understood the implication.

If there was indeed someone spying on them as her instincts warned her, then it had to be a Martial Sage.

"This isn't the first time either; ever since I've been with you, I get this feeling..."

The air grew electric.

"Well, it's just an instinct. Doesn't mean it's true."

Rui sounded like he was trying to convince himself.

After all, if there truly was a Martial Sage watching them, then there really was nothing he could do. There was absolutely nothing that he had that could overcome the power of a Martial Sage.

"I hope so," Master Reina narrowed her eyes, turning to Rui. "What do you plan to do now?"

"Train while researching additional possibilities in regards to the Kandrian Throne War," Rui shrugged.

Ever since he had decided to reduce the scope of the Angel of Laplace to just his opponent, he had been working on a system of thought that would help him only process what he needed to. However, even then, the technique was still extremely difficult.

Right now, he needed more than an hour to process the Angel of Laplace. Could he really cut down all of that to a single second?

He didn't know.

"Research additional possibilities?" Master Reina raised an eyebrow.

"Yep," Rui nodded. "Though, at this point, I think the Kandrian Empire is just screwed. I might have to resign to protect my family from some civil war catastrophe to the best of my power. I don't think I have the power to protect the peace and harmony in their lives at the moment."

For all his capacity for thought, he was unable to think his way out of this conundrum. All possible paths either led to civil war or economic ruin. While such things would not affect him personally, many of the orphanage members who had livelihoods very much tied to the condition of the Kandrian Empire would be deeply affected.

"That's rather defeatist of you," Master Reina raised an eyebrow. "I didn't expect you to be a quitter."

"That's rather harsh."

"I call it like I see it, boy."

"Knowing when to quit is a good trait to have," Rui shook his head. "Though...I just learned something from Raul that might give me a little bit of hope."

"...The Emperor of Harmony awakening from his slumber?"

Rui nodded. "I don't trust Raul's evaluation of his political prowess because he himself is inept and unqualified to judge. However, I do trust his ability to inexplicably read people."

Rui recalled the very first conversation he had with the man.

"That's a rather flimsy basis to be hopeful that the Emperor of Harmony may open a new path forward," Master Reina scoffed.

"When you're as desperate as I am, even the smallest things provide a lot of hope," Rui shook his head.

Rui was desperate.

That could not be denied.

As it stood, either Prince Raijun, Prince Rajak, or Prince Raul was bound to become Emperor.

All three outcomes led to civil war.

"I also plan to look into the so-called Emperor of Harmony and judge if he truly is as Prince Raul says he is," Rui narrowed his eyes. "As Emperor, he wields power, albeit fading as he approaches death, that is equal to that of the Martial Union. On top of that, he possesses a lot of authority over the princes as their father; there might be something that he can do. Maybe there is something he can do. Maybe there is something he will do."

If Rui could find a new path forward, then he would greedily seize that path with everything he had.

"Something has to give soon," Rui narrowed his eyes. "Although the Kandrian Throne War will not actually ensue until after his death, the fate of the Kandrian Empire will be decided very soon."

Rui's estimations were that within a year from then, Kandria's fate would be decided. They were reaching the endgame, and soon enough, whoever was bound to ascend the throne eventually in the future would emerge now as the victor.

In a race, the winner was often times very clear towards the end, even before the race ended.

Soon enough, the fate of Kandria and perhaps all of East Panama would be clear.

Chapter 1740: His Move

1740 His Move

Not long after his final meeting with Prince Raul, the news about the awakening of the Emperor of Harmony was announced across all of Kandria, evoking immense bittersweet celebration.

While not to the extent of Prince Raul, it was clear that Emperor Rael had earned a lot of love from the citizens of Kandria.

"His Majesty has returned!"

"All hail the Emperor of Harmony!"

"May Emperor Rael live forever!"

While the common folk celebrated cluelessly, the powers of Kandria grew uncomfortable. Many had hoped that, given that he had been sleeping for more than two years, this truly would be the eternal sleep phase of the Eternal Dream curse.

Most people had treated it as much.

Yet the emperor had woken up again this late in the game.

The Cold War had been going on for about seven years now, reaching the endgame where the victor would emerge decisive.

Many forces were confident they had a good grasp on which prince or princess would ascend the throne and which royal's ass they needed to kiss.

However, a new variable had returned to play.

The Emperor of Harmony.

The faction that was displeased the most was the Raijun Faction.

This was because they had the most to lose by the reintroduction of this old yet powerful variable.

There was one thing that everyone considered.

What if the Emperor finally decided to support one of his children?

This was certainly not the first time that he had been awake. The Kandrian Throne War had been sparked when a year-long coma had frenzied the royals into almost triggering the war for the throne until it was revealed that he was not dead yet, merely under the effects of the Eternal Dream disease.

In the seven years since then, he had been drifting in and out of sleep as his condition worsened, slipping away from the public eye and refusing any meetings. He never named his chosen heir.

Although the Kandrian government did not officially recognize an 'heir,' it would still mean immense informal support lent to whoever earned his approval.

Potentially, it would bring bring the many supporters the Emperor of Harmony over to the faction of the heir, massively boosting their campaign.

Prince Rajun undoubtedly was most afraid of this happening, since the probability of him being chosen was only one in seven. If anybody else got the title or crown prince or crown princess, they would gain a surge in progress that would match the one he got from becoming a Martial Squire.

Except he was being bombarded with almost bloodthirsty sabotage attempts from four of his royal siblings.

Prince Rajak and the Underworld were even more displeased by the revelation of his awakening.

There was absolutely no chance that they would be chosen.

Each of the seven royals had their own considerations.

"This might be our only opportunity," Prince Randal narrowed his eyes. "That bastard Rui Quarrier is threatening us with the Martial Union. The only one with the power to protect us from that threat is Father."

At the moment, the four puppet royals were completely alone and isolated inside a highly sensory-insulated zone.

Not even their Masters had been permitted to be privy to this conversation. The four royals did not trust them enough to discuss this sensitive matter.

His three sisters took his words seriously.

"We need to appeal to Father," Princess Ranea narrowed her eyes. "Surely he won't forgive the Royal Family being blackmailed."

"It would be in his interests to ensure that the candidates for the throne are free of blackmail," Prince Rafia emotionlessly stated.

"...Father is not that soft towards us," Princess Raemina shook her head as her wide eyes intensified. "He may very well choose to abandon us to the fate of being controlled for the rest of our lives. This is an outcome of our failure."

Her words hung in the air.

"We need to win him over," Prince Randal's eyes narrowed. "Together, we represent a large portion of the stakeholders of Kandria; he cannot ignore us. We just need to adjust our policies to ensure that he isn't dissuaded from supporting us which we can use to dismiss Rui Quarrier's blackmail leverage with the protection of the Emperor."

While the four of them cooked together a plan in absolute secrecy, many other players moved around, making small adjustments to their plans and strategies, factoring in the decisions of the Emperor of Harmony.

The Kandrian Throne War almost entered a bit of a standstill as people waited to see.

They were waiting to see if the Kandrian Emperor would do something now that the Kandrian Throne War had escalated to close to critical thresholds.

With the advent of Raijun's breakthrough into the Squire Realm, the Kandrian Throne War had almost reached a point of no return.

If the Emperor did not act now, then Raijun was destined to eventually usurp the throne after the Emperor died.

The royals temporarily paused their campaign, and the stakeholders of Kandria temporarily paused negotiations with the royals.

For the first time in more than seven years, silence ran through the political landscape of the Kandrian Empire.

Even the Martial Union held its breath.

Was something bound to happen?

Days passed.

A week passed.

Nothing.

The air of anticipation was fading.

Just as all of East Panama concluded that the Emperor was not to move, a sudden shock spread through the political landscape of Kandria.

An announcement.

An invitation.

Not just any invitation.

And not just to anybody.

The Emperor of Harmony had invited all the powers and stakeholders of Kandria to a gathering where to bear witness to his addressal to the royal family, to all those who bore his blood.

The Martial Union, the cabinet of ministers of the executive government, the generals of the Royal Army, the chairmen of the top one hundred corporations of Kandria, the Martial families of the Kandrian Martial community, the Kandrian Seafare Association, the leadership of the Kandrian Ruffians, national banks, national labor union leaders, and many other nationally relevant Kandrian powers.

He had even invited people with open-secret ties to the Underworld, such as Chairman Charles DiVilliers!

The Kandrian Empire shook as the Emperor of Harmony made a move!