

## **Martial Unity 1741**

### Chapter 1741: Invitation

#### 1741 Invitation

A public addressal of the Royal Family.

Essentially, he would be speaking to the entirety of all his progeny in a formal ceremony.

He had invited all Kandrian powers to bear witness to the public addressal.

The moment the forces of Kandria learned about this, a single thought flashed through their heads.

There's more to it than meets the eye.

If this ceremony was simply a formal addressal of the Royal Family, there would be no need to invite so many people.

Not just so many people, but so many powerful people.

The Royal announcement, a public notice distributed across all of Kandria, mentioned essentially every single important person part of the ruling class of the Empire. These were people who could impact, no matter how little, the entire nation to some bare minimum degree.

A simple formality featuring a generic speech where a ruler would espouse the importance of responsibility as a ruler to his potential heirs was not an event that warranted inviting so many people.

Their time was valuable, and thus, only significant events worth their time were worth inviting them to.

Thus, the Emperor had sent a clear message to all of them through merely the act of the invitation.

And everybody who received the invitation got the message.

Including Rui Quarrier.

"...Er, yes, I am Rui Quarrier. What is this about?" Rui asked, raising an eyebrow, staring at the man before him.

They stood at the door of the Quarrier Orphanage.

Some distance away before him stood a man clad in a uniform woven from esoteric fabric. His bearing was regal, his chest was pumped out, and his chin was raised.

He made no effort to comport himself in a less condescending fashion.

And with good reason.

Behind him was the most ostentatious carriage that Rui had ever seen in his entire life, accompanied by a squadron of Martial Artists.

The man did not respond to Rui. He instead gestured to a staff of assistants who immediately procured a small chest, bringing it before the man.

CLICK

The chest opened as the man extracted an extravagant scroll woven from glowing gold so bright what may as well have been thread spun from the Sun itself. Yet it was not the scroll fabric that caught his eye.

It was the seal of the Royal Emperor on the scroll that drew his attention.

His eyes widened as he fell down to one knee, with one fist touching the floor and his head bowed. The word of the Emperor required observing protocol.

"Bow!" Rui whispered to the few curious members of the orphanage behind him. "On both knees!"

He wasn't fond of it, but the protocol for ordinary citizens was different from what he had to follow.

"Hmph," The man snorted, his mouth curling with disdain before he conveyed the message of the Royal Emperor.

"His Majesty Second Emperor, the Emperor of Harmony, Emperor Rael Di Kandria, invites Senior Rui Quarrier to the Vargard Royal Palace for the Addressal Ceremony of the Royal Family at the dawn of the forty-second of Spring."

Rui's eyes widened with surprise.

"I, Rui Quarrier, honored by the invitation from His Majesty, humbly accept His Majesty's invitation," Rui replied.

The man carefully offered the invitation with both hands, which was promptly accepted by Rui with both hands as the ritual of conveyance of the invitation was completed.

"The invitation has been made," The man announced. "I shall take my leave, having completed my Royal duty."

The man immediately turned around without waiting for a reply, boarding his carriage with a formal gait.

Rui glanced at the sparkling and glowing scroll with furrowed eyebrows.

"WOOOOOOOAAAAAAH!!!" Max and Mana squealed with excitement. "BIG BROTHER JUST GOT INVITED BY THE EMPEROR!!! THE ACTUAL EMPEROR OF KANDRIA!!!"

It took Rui half an hour to extricate himself from the curious and excited members of the Quarrier Orphanage before he could actually go to his room and process what had just happened.

For quite some time, he just stared at the scroll.

It was surreal.

It was a testament to the impact he made on the Kandrian Empire. Perhaps the Hungry Pain contribution, the spreading of the thought techniques, and the impacts that he had made throughout his career, including the trade influx and contributions to the Kandrian economy during the Shionel dungeon debacle.

His official status as a Senior ambassador and a constituent of the Martial Fiscal Committee of the Martial Union meant that he had a great ability to impact the Martial Union.

All these instances solidified his status as part of the ruling class of the Kandrian Empire.

"An invitation from the Emperor himself..." Rui whispered as he finally opened the scroll and read through the invitation.

It was as the royal messenger announced, but it also contained additional details such as the exact venue and time. On top of that, it served as his entry ticket to the event.

Rui breathed in deeply as a myriad of thoughts flew through his head as he considered the implications for this event.

Undoubtedly, something big was bound to happen.

Rui instantly arrived at the conclusions that other invited parties had also concluded.

This was no ordinary event.

Something was bound to happen.

'The question is what?' Rui narrowed his eyes. 'What exactly does the Emperor of Kandria have in mind?'

The probability of the Emperor inviting spectators to the address ceremony of the royal family to engage with them directly or have them partake was low; it was almost certainly the case that the spectators were definitively going to merely spectate. Rui highly doubted that whatever the Emperor had planned would be a stunt directly involving the participation of the off-guard spectators.

The most likely possibility was that the Emperor of Kandria wanted everybody invited to bear witness to something important or significant, to learn of something that he wanted to convey.

'Most likely, he wants the impact of the revelation to stick,' Rui realized. 'Not only because of the weight of the event, and not only because of all the power blocs of Kandria gathered then and there that day, but also because it will become evident that he endorses whatever it is that he wants people to see.'

#### Chapter 1742: Inscrutable Information

The only question was, what the hell was it that the Royal Emperor wanted to convey? What is it that he wanted everyone to see? What was it that he wanted everyone to learn of?

Whatever it was, it was clearly something that could affect the entirety of Kandria.

Rui furiously processed the various possibilities, trying to eliminate as many as he could.

Unfortunately, he didn't have enough data, so he didn't know what was possible. It was possible that the Kandrian Emperor had actually found a way to completely cure the Eternal Dream disease and had been restored to his prime.

In this case, the point of the ceremony was to show that the Kandrian Throne War was not to happen any time soon.

It would be a declaration that he was alive and well and going nowhere.

Such a move would instantly curb the campaigning done by his children and bring it all down to collapse.

It was possible that he was actually gathering everybody so he could offer his full support to any one of the seven candidates. Thus, he could ensure that the candidate that he approved of the most benefited from his powerful endorsement.

The latter was far more plausible than the former. The fact that he hadn't found a cure for the disease in over seven years implied that this was not something that could be solved by capital. Had there been any known medical treatment, no matter how difficult to procure, the Kandrian Emperor would have been able to procure it over the span of seven years.

Yet he hadn't.

His condition continued to grow worse progressively.

Regardless, there were many more possibilities than just those two; he was unable to constrain the possibilities much.

'I guess we'll just have to wait and see what the emperor has in mind,' Rui narrowed his eyes.

The event was to be held in a week, which was awfully short notice for an event of this magnitude. From this, Rui could infer a sense of urgency; the Emperor didn't want to or couldn't afford to spend too much time waiting.

That further contradicted the hypothesis that he had managed to restore his health. If he truly was healed, then there would be no reason to hold the event on such short notice. The more Rui thought about it, the more curious he grew as to what it was.

Whatever it was, it would undoubtedly affect him and his resolution to find someone suited for the throne. He could only hope that it was something that could help him find a path to the future.

KNOCK KNOCK

"Come in," Rui absentmindedly responded.

CLACK

"Rui," Julian smiled, opening the door.

"Julian."

"I just heard the most unbelievable tale from everybody when I got back from work," Julian remarked.  
"Did you truly get invited by the Kandrian Emperor?"

"...So it would seem."

"That's incredible," Julian eyed the scroll that Rui had received with incredulity.

"Yeah, it is..."

"To think you've become someone that the Kandrian Emperor personally invited," Julian smiled proudly.  
"As expected of my little brother."

Rui absentmindedly nodded.

Julian sighed, putting a hand on Rui's shoulder. "You don't have to stress yourself out. This isn't a personal audience with the Emperor. You have been invited among many other figures across all of Kandria. Unless the Emperor has planned something cumbersome that will involve the impromptu participation of all these important figures, you won't have to do anything other than spectate."

As expected, Julian had swiftly arrived at the same conclusion that he had rather quickly.

"True," Rui got up, walking towards the door.

"Where are you going?"

"I need to speak to some people," Rui replied. "No need to wait for me."

From there on, Rui consulted many of his friends in high places, many of whom had been invited, looking for more information.

Yet he was unable to find any.

"I've tried poking around, but I've been unable to find anything," Master Ceeran had shook his head. "Even Her Highness Princess Ranea knows nothing. I'm just as clueless as you."

"The event, unfortunately, is quite opaque," Headmaster Aronian had heaved a thoughtful sigh before smiling at Rui. "It appears that we will have to simply wait and see."

"Prince Raijun has expressed a lot of concern over this new development," Master Zentra had remarked calmly. "Our analyst department has concluded that the Emperor is going to be using this event to disclose a revelation, and the high profile of the guest spectators is merely meant to be their learn of it first-hand."

The analyst department had not uncovered anything that Rui hadn't easily figured out himself.

"We have tried and failed to gather any concrete information," Master Vericita had remarked with an affectionate smile as she petted his head.

Not even the Beggar's Sect knew anything, which was quite surprising.



"The information security in the Vargard Royal has been absolutely impenetrable even for us," Senior Partner Kaylin at Lambargeau Legal Services shook her head. "Despite the rushing flux of many people managing the enormous event on short notice, Emperor Rael has taken the absolute strictest of security measures, temporarily calling in Her Excellency Sage Farana from the Kandrian Border Patrol to head the security of the event. Thus, even we have been rendered absolutely ineffective."

It was only when Rui heard this that he gave up. If a mind-

oriented Martial Sage had been deployed to secure the event, then there was absolutely no way whatsoever to gather intelligence without equally powerful forces.

Part of the reason for such security measures was that the Vargard Royal Palace would become the epicenter of Kandrian Power, and any attack on it during the event could lead to devastating losses for the entirety of the Kandrian Empire.

Rui shrugged. "What will happen will happen."

He had already resigned himself to that, and now he could only wait and watch until the Royal Addressal Ceremony, which was due to arrive in about a week's time.

Chapter 1743: Stuff

"Have you all heard about the royal address?"

"My, how could I have not? It appears that, on his deathbed, His Majesty the Emperor will surely be passing on his wisdom to the royals, to the emperors and empresses of the future."

"Sounds boring."

"Agreed. I'm glad I don't have to attend such a boring event!"

"Do not look down on it; it's an important event."

"Ah, Damia! Don't play with your food."

Rui smiled wryly as his eyes wandered across the table.

Fae had organized a short get-together, inviting Kane, Fiona, Nel, Hever, Milliana, and Dalen to an evening gathering at a place in the town of Hajin.

"It's a shame that the Emperor of Harmony may not be the emperor for too long," Fiona heaved a sigh. "I can only imagine the chaos that will ensue after he passes away."

"It will be a rough and uncertain time for the Kandrian Empire," Fae heaved a sigh. "We can only hold tight and hope for the best."

"Boring!" Nel grumbled out aloud. "Kane, let's spar again!"

"No," Kane snorted.

"Why not?!"

"Go train if you have time to spar with me."

"Fighting is more fun."

"Enough, you two," Hever calmly quelled the spat.

"Hever will you...?"

"I'm too busy..."

"My, is there anything that goes in your head except for fighting?" Fae shook her head with disapproval before turning around the table. "So, what has everybody been up to these days?"

Hever replied, earning a grumble from Nel. "I have recently received a commission to serve as the bodyguard of the mayor of the town of Hulfrum, due tomorrow. I cannot let slip the opportunity to add this to my track record and career."

A wave of impressed murmurs spread through the table.

"Wow, congratulations on the placement!" Fiona's eyes sparkled. "As for my recent doings...I was recently authorized to lead an expedition in the Freiva Mountain Range. It's a quasi-Squire-level danger zone in the east part of the Beast Domain."

"To be authorized as an expedition leader at your age is quite remarkable," Dalen admitted.

"Hehe...praise me more!"

"I was recently appointed to head of security of the Verain Village in the Mantian Region," Dalen smiled. "It pays decently, and it's close to home, and I'm protecting my family simultaneously. Couldn't ask for more."

He smiled affectionately as he fed his infant daughter with a spoon. Milliana had been pregnant about two years ago when Rui had first returned to the Kandrian Empire; since then, she and her husband had been busy raising the infant baby.

"The only exciting thing I went through recently was this offensive operation commissioned by a government official on a drug-bust operation; it turned out to be a crucial supply chain with a huge drug yield, and I managed to apprehend an important drug dealer in the drug-trafficking business in the town of Brillix, I was personally commended by His Highness Prince Raijun himself!" Fae said proudly.

This earned a particularly outsized reaction among friends.

"From the Martial Prince himself? That's pretty impressive," Kane remarked as he took a bite from his sandwich. "I haven't met him yet. I was considering joining his faction."

"You can do that; after all, Her Highness Princess Rafia proposed marriage to you," Fae flashed an icy smile that didn't reach her eyes. "You should accept her as your sugar mommy."

"I told you that I rejected her!" Kane complained. "Come on, can we forget about that already..."

"Kane has been busy courting a Kandrian princess!"

The table burst into laughter.

"Haha, very funny," Kane grumbled. "I'm too busy grinding missions for experience with the Senior Realm and accruing enough credits to purchase a Lightning Serpent potion to make out with a princess."

Kane, having sparred with Rui routinely, had been thoroughly amazed by how much stronger Rui had become with the Roaring Dragon Blood Potion. He had resolved himself to purchasing a potion that improve his speed and agility.

"So what have you been up to, Rui?"

The question was innocuous and sincere, yet it had caught him off-guard.

Suddenly, everybody was looking at him.

"Ah..." Rui smiled wryly. "You know. Stuff."

This conversation made him feel surreal.

It highlighted how he was worlds, even universes, apart from Martial Artists his age, let alone people his age. His friends talked boisterously about careers, occupations, promotions, commissions, jobs, and a variety of things that were so disconnected from what he was dealing with and used to dealing with.

Their dreams, ambitions, and objectives were objectively not even in the same order of magnitude of impact as his.

He envied them even as it became increasingly difficult for him to relate to them. He found it hard to engage with and reciprocate with them.

What had he been up to?

In the past two years, he had presented a seminar for the Hungry Pain technique that led to the Martial Union adopting the technique on a national scale, increasing the power of new Martial Squires by fifty percent on average across the entire nation, resulting in a dramatic growth in power at the lowest level that would eventually snowball into a huge amount of power, altering the power dynamics of all of East Panama.

He had formed an agreement that produced a power imbalance in the Kandrian Throne War that could very well affect the future of all of Kandria and, consequently, all of East Panama.

He had been inducted as a constituent of the Kandrian Fiscal Committee and then went on to plant the seeds of a new sect, earning thirty-one trillion Martial Credits for the techniques that he had created. Techniques that would increase the probability of Master breakthroughs, substantially increasing Kandria's power.

Having earned the ire of the royals, he then went on to scheme a clever strategy to sabotage their assassination, gain leverage, and eventually complete control over them, gaining the power of kingmaker in the Kandrian Empire.

And now, the weight of Kandria's future was on his shoulders. The decision he was to make would alter the future of not just the Kandrian Empire but, to a certain extent, all of human civilization.

"Stuff?" Fae raised an eyebrow.

"Yeah..." He smiled bitterly. "Stuff."

#### Chapter 1744: The Pinnacle of Kandria

The evening spent with his friends gave him perspective, reminding him of what normal looked like.

Yet it didn't fix the problems he was facing. Problems that were certainly not normal.

While meeting up with his friends was soothing and relaxing, when he returned home, his thoughts returned to the royal addressal ceremony.

'Only a few more days now,' His eyes narrowed.

He distracted himself with working on the Angel of Laplace during the time, at least trying to make it more combat-applicable, but it wasn't easy.

His revelation that the key to the Master Realm was the Angel of Laplace was true, but it was also true that only the Master Realm could help him use the original Angel of Laplace that could allow him to see the past of the entire world.

Essentially, he was trying to create a Senior-level version and save the original Angel of Laplace for the Master Realm.

Because really, it was a Master-level technique based on the sheer scope of the information processing.

Once he reached the Master Realm, he suspected that he would be able to use the full technique without any problems.

Few days passed quicker than he noticed even as he immersed himself in the Angel of Laplace.

The time had arrived.

The event that the entirety of the Kandrian Empire had been waiting for.

The Royal Addressal Ceremony had arrived.

The political landscape of the Kandrian Empire and perhaps all of East Panama was watching this event with bated events.

A single thought flashed through everybody's mind.

Something is going to happen.

FLICK

Rui put the comb aside as he finished his brief grooming session, looking over his custom-tailored Martial attire.

"Looking crisp, Rui!" Alice flicked him a thumbs-up with a wink. "Be sure to leave a good impression of the Kandrian Emperor."

Rui chuckled. "He has more important things to do than to pay attention to a single guest among a sea of hundreds of other important figures."

"You never know!"

"Yes yes," Rui shook his head with a chuckle and a resigned smile.

His thoughts went back to the Royal Addressal Ceremony.

"Rui baby?"

"Yes, Mom?" Rui asked as he heard Lashara call him.

"The carriage is here."

"I suppose my ride is here."

It wasn't too long before he wound himself heading out the door.

"I'm sure you'll do just well, Rui," Lashara smiled affectionately.

"I'll be fine; see you all later!" Rui waved at everybody who had come to see him off.

He headed to the extravagant, ostentatious carriage that was waiting outside the Quarrier Orphanage quickly taking a seat after presenting his invitation.

WHOOM

"As expected..." Rui murmured as the carriage took off into the air before zooming away through the sky. He could sense the presence of several Martial Seniors with active Martial Hearts securing his safety as they traveled south towards the center of Kandria, where its capital resided.

He felt tingly on his ride there.

Something prickled at his instincts.

He wasn't sure what it was.



Despite the incredibly high speeds at which they zoomed through the air, it took more than an hour to cross even a portion of the vast expanse of Kandria.

Yet once he arrived, he could sense many flying carriages converging into the center of the vast landscape of the town of Vargard.

THUD...

The carriages landed smoothly, leading him right to the entrance of the Vargard Royal Palace.

Each person exiting the carriages was clad in truly extravagant attire. Shining fabric, embroidered with precious esoteric materials, made them look like they were each fit to be considered rulers of their own states.

"Well well, if it isn't Rui Quarrier," A familiar voice called out to him, earning a look in his direction.

"Minister Varay..." Rui's eyes lit up. "It's been quite some time."

"Indeed, much has happened since our first meeting in Princess Raemina's gathering," The Minister smiled warmly. "I was deeply pleased to learn that you heeded my suggestion and request regarding your own sect."

"...I ultimately decided that it was in my interests," Rui confirmed, smiling wryly.

"And in the interests of everybody around you," The minister added. "You have risen to even greater prominence since then. I look forward to seeing not only how far you go but also how far you take this great nation with you."

The two conversed lightly as they entered the Royal Palace.

It was his first time entering the prime palace of Vargard.

He wasn't a fan of extravagance, but when he beheld the throne room of the Kandria Emperor he could not help but admire the sheer brilliance of the throne room.

The tall, ostentatious platinum-gold walls of the massive throne room converged towards the Emperor's throne from the entrance, growing narrower and narrower as it approached the throne.

This architecture conveyed a simple but strong message: The Throne was the center of attention.

And center of attention it was. Its workmanship was beyond anything Rui had ever seen in his entire life. Even to his sharp senses, he was unable to spot even the tiniest flaw, flawless on even deeply microscopic scales.

It was made with breathtakingly beautiful esoteric substances, the likes of which Rui had never seen before.

It was as though it was ethereal.

Not of this world.

Once fully entered, however, it was no longer the magnificent throne hall or the glorious throne that drew his attention.

No.

It was the people occupying it.

Rui's eyes narrowed as he bore witness to the forces that drove Kandria.

The forces that decided what Kandria was.

Or what it would be.

Or what it would do.

Or what would be done to it.

An ocean of Martial Masters, powerful merchants, chairmen, and CEOs of corporations, firms, guilds, and banks, as well as wealthy capital owners, and high-profile government officials of all branches, the most knowledgeable of scholars, the leaders of powerful organizations and institutions were spread across the Throne Hall.

This was the very pinnacle of what the Kandrian Empire had to offer.

#### Chapter 1745: Arrivals

For a moment, Rui could not help but short-circuit as he tried parsing the importance and weight of the sheer gathering that he was a part of.

"Is this your first time?" The Minister of Martial Art smiled friendly.

"...Was it that obvious?"

"Haha. Your reaction was the reaction that everybody, without fail, has in their first time. Being invited to an important event with the many powers of Kandria in the throne hall is indeed an extraordinary event."

Rui nodded.

No wonder the Martial Sage of the Kandrian Border Patrol Force had personally arranged for the security of this event. In hindsight, at least one of the fourteen Martial Sages of the Kandrian Empire needed to personally guard this event, anything less was a poor allocation of Martial resources.

On top of that, there were many Martial Masters in the Martial attire of the Royal Security Force inside and outside the Royal Hall as an additional guarantee, making it such that their safety was high.

He walked around, overly conscious of everybody around him. There was loud chatter and murmurs among them as the many guests began intermingling with each other.

After all, this was a rare event where the many powers of Kandria were gathered in a single room. The ceremony would not begin until every last guest had arrived.

Thus, it was only natural that they would take this rare opportunity to speak with each other about various topics.

He was unable to calm down.

The air tingled.

"Rui!"

A relieved smile flashed on Rui's face as the familiar, friendly voice of Master Ceeran beckoned him.

"Master Ceeran."

"Quite the event, isn't it?" Master Ceeran murmured as he eyed their surroundings.

"That's an understatement," Rui replied as he took measure of the other guests. "Have all Masters been invited individually or...?"

Master Ceeran glanced at Rui. "All Masters merit being invited to this event; however, the nation cannot afford all Martial Masters to abandon their training or operations to be in this room simultaneously."

"This is the norm when it comes to Martial Artists in general," The Minister nodded.

Rui nodded. "Makes sense."

Martial Masters were entrusted with important duties, many of national importance. They could not be drawn away from it. Certainly, it could not be the case that all of them were simultaneously taken away from their duties.

"That is why each major and minor sect has sent an appropriate number of leaders. Today, I represent the Long-

range Sect along with another of my elder colleagues," Master Ceeran explained.

That matched Rui's estimations, more or less, based on the distribution of the present Martial Masters.

As the three of them spoke, it wasn't too long before they were approached by several familiar faces.

Headmaster Aronian.

Master Vericita.

Master Zentra.

These familiar faces helped him feel more comfortable.

Yet despite that, the underlying tingle never disappeared.

He didn't know what it was.

But something, something deep inside him, was...uneasy.

It was not dangerous; he knew how that felt consciously and unconsciously. It was alarm bells ringing as Primordial Instinct would yell at him about the incoming danger.

No, this was subtle.

It was soft.

Dim.

It was a little voice.

A little voice that whispered to him.

'Something is off.'

"-i?"

He didn't know what it was.

"-ui?"

Yet it felt like his mind was on the brink of figuring it out.

"Rui?"

He jerked out of his reverie, turning to the concerned Master Ceeran. "I'm sorry, what?"

"It's time," Master Ceeran gestured to the final carriage taking away, having dropped off the final guest who came scrambling through, undoubtedly embarrassed at the outsized interest in him.

Now, the stream of incoming carriages was no more.

That was not the only change that became evident.

Each and every single one of them felt it.

In the depths of their bones.

In their souls.

Be they human or Martial Artist.

For the air had changed.

The lands beneath them seemed to shift.

Rui's eyes widened as he recognized the familiar sensation.

RUMBLE...

The world quivered.

It quivered, for she had arrived.

It quivered as heaven and earth bent.

They bent under the weight of her existence.

STEP

An oppressive Sage-level aura spread throughout the gathering within the throne hall, weighing down on everybody it graced.

STEP

Her steps were light, yet their impact on the world and the minds of those who beheld her were heavy.

STEP...

Her ostentatious appearance seemed to embed itself in their minds by force. Her militaristic uniform attire featuring the crest of the Kandrian Border Patrol Force matched the disciplined body language that her demeanor echoed.

Her visage was elderly, yet her presence could not be further away from that of a senior citizen.

She commanded the atmosphere, demanding their attention.

"The Royal Addressal Ceremony is due to commence soon. Comport yourselves in accordance with royal protocol."

The commanding tone of her elderly voice was unmistakable.

And yet, not a single person dared to retort.

Not a single person disobeyed.

Before a Martial Sage of the Kandrian Empire, every other identity melted away.



The crowd scrambled, splitting into two equal, neatly arranged crowds on either side of the golden red carpet flowing through the throne hall.

STEP

STEP

STEP

Sage Farana walked through the throne hall with a disciplined gait, standing behind the throne.

"Please welcome their Highnesses, the royal princes and princesses of Kandria!" The royal announcer declared.

A fast-paced drum roll echoed through the throne hall as a line of royals began pouring into the gigantic throne hall.

Rui beheld all the princes and princesses of Kandria in ascending order of seniority, walking into the throne hall in perfectly synchronized footsteps one after the other.

The eldest of princes and princesses were quite old, looking to be in their eighties. They had lived the entirety of their lives out long before the Kandrian Throne War began and clearly had no intention of competing with their younger and more ambitious siblings.

Soon enough, Rui saw Prince Randal's domineering militaristic figure before the others followed suit.

Chapter 1746: Does It Not?

Shortly after, he spotted the eager figure of Prince Raul, who was soon followed by Princess Raemina, Prince Raijun, Princess Ranea, Prince Rajak, and Princess Rafia throughout the long line.

They alternatingly split into two lines on either side of the ostentatious carpet leading to the throne.

The time had come.

"Please welcome the Emperor of Harmony, the Second Emperor of the Kandrian Empire, His Majesty Rael Di Kandria!"

A powerful drum beat reverberated through the throne hall with each step.

STEP

STEP

STEP

Rui's eyes widened as he beheld the vaunted Emperor of Kandria.

...Now, a weary old man with a diseased body.

His skin was a shade of sickly darkness, hanging off his gaunt face. His body was lean and haggard; his thin, weak limbs conveyed an impression of malnourishment. His hair, once a brilliant golden, had lost its luster. His eyes, once an ethereal blue, had lost their shine.

Yet they never once lost the light of determination.

His gait was unstable even as two of his concubines held his hands, aiding him as he exerted himself to reach the throne.

Nearly twenty-five Martial Masters followed behind him, absolutely alert for any threat whatsoever.

Not that there were any threats.

Not with a Martial Sage overseeing security.

STEP

With each passing step, each guest bowed their head deeply as the Royal Emperor passed them, paying their respects to the Emperor of Kandria.

STEP...

He had arrived at his rightful throne atop the elevated platoon, beholding it for what could very well be the last time it bore him.

"Ahh..."

A voice of comfort escaped him as he sat upon his throne. His security detail circled around the throne, forming a layer that encompassed him, his concubines, and Sage Farana standing behind him.

A single command escaped his voice.

"Raise your heads."

His deep and rich masculine voice cut through the silence as each of the guests abided, beholding the seated Emperor of Kandria.

Despite his sickly appearance, a profoundly deep air of power and authority seemed to radiate from him. This was power, not innately of his own but that of the entirety of Kandria.

When Rui saw him, he saw the hundreds of thousands of powerful siege weapon artifacts.

When Rui beheld him, he beheld the might of a million-strong army of elite soldiers armed with the finest artifacts and potions that the Empire had to offer.

When Rui bore witness to him, he bore witness to the power of three Martial Sages who had sworn absolute loyalty to the throne.

When Rui regarded him, he could almost feel the weight of his power, the power to erase Sage-level nations with a single command, to hunt Martial Sages like they were no more than prey, to leave his mark on the fabric of all of human civilization today and forever more.

The guests did their best to hide their nervousness as the emperor's eyes swum across each and every single one of them.

The silence lingered.

It was deafening.

"It's good to be back."

A nonchalant remark.

No, it may as well have been law, considering who spoke those words.

"My citizens...My children..." His voice reverberated through the throne hall. "It is good to be back, wouldn't you agree?"

The air grew electric.

It prickled.

His eyes nonchalantly swam across the guests and his own children as a wave of apprehension washed through the crowd.

"You seem nervous."

They undoubtedly were.

Be they the most powerful business and economic tycoons or the most accomplished Martial Masters of the Martial Union, a heavy weight weighed down on their weary shoulders.

"Do I inspire fear?"

He certainly did now, with the way he was talking.

Uncertainty began gripping the hearts of the many guests that were present in the throne hall.

"Does my sickly visage inspire fear?"

His voice grew stronger as it pierced through the tingling silence.

"Does my impending death inspire fear?"

Many of the invited guests stirred at his words.

"It should."

His words grew ominous.

"It should inspire fear in you but...I know it doesn't," The Emperor calmly declared. "What it inspires, if anything at all, is...."

A fierce light lit up in his eyes as his nonchalance receded. "...is ambition and greed, does it not?"

Silence rang through the throne hall.

"DOES IT NOT?" His voice boomed through the throne hall.

His words shook them.

His wrath shook them.

Physically, but also mentally.

It shook them to their very core.

"...So much so that a war that threatens to tear Kandria apart boils in the undercurrents of this Empire. A war of greed and ambition. A war for ultimate power," The Emperor's voice took on a hint of ferocity. "My fragile life happens to be the only force that keeps it at bay. Should I die at this very moment, the lot of you would leap at each other within this very room, fighting each other to race to this throne over each other's corpses."

"Civil wars...a known tale," He remarked. "One that has recurred many a time in the annals of history in all manners of unfolding. Yet, do you know what each of them has in common?"

His eyes narrowed. "They are all marked as human catastrophes by history."

"Tell me, my subjects..."

His voice was calm.

Yet it betrayed a deep undercurrent of cold fury.

"Tell me, my children..."

Ferocity glinted in his eyes. "Do you, too, want to be known as human catastrophes by history?"

Uncertainty flashed in the eyes of the many forces and powers that heard the Emperor's words.

It was not just the words being uttered.

No.

What mattered more was who uttered them.

Any common man or woman could lecture them on the perils of civil war.

Yet it wasn't just anybody lecturing them about civil wars.

It was the Emperor of Harmony, the man who prevented the greatest civil war of all of East Panama from unfolding, who spoke to them.

The weight of history itself accompanied his words.

#### Chapter 1747: Rhetorical Dominance

At that moment, the net entirety of all Kandrian powers and forces that heard his words faltered.

Many of them had aligned themselves with one of the princes and princesses, excited about the possibility of a ruler that worked for their interests. Excited about a ruler that would warp Kandria to elevate them above all.

Yet, history was a heavy weapon.

When wielded properly, it could break apart any conviction and any emotion.

Rui's eyes widened as he realized the Emperor understood this truth better than anybody else.

His powerful words were armed with the weight of human history.

Not just human history.

His history.

He who quelled the most fierce civil war. He who masterfully intertwined countless opposing forces into a single nation. He who elevated Kandria to the pinnacle of human civilization with the power of harmony.

Yet history alone was not enough.

It needed to be channeled carefully, masterfully, and with immaculate communication, both verbal and nonverbal. It needed to be channeled so that it wove past the greed and ambition of its beholders. It needed to weave past the human condition that drove man to war.

It needed to strike the human heart.

And struck the human heart, he had.

At that moment, uncertainty radiated from those who beheld his words.

Rui's eyes widened as realization dawned upon him.



At that moment, the Emperor of Kandria sought to move Kandria with the weight of history...with the weight of his words alone!

Yet it was not to be.

"Permission to address His Majesty Second Emperor Rael Di Kandria." A powerful voice cut through the atmosphere.

It cut through the progress that the Kandrian Emperor had made.

It was Prince Raijun.

The Kandrian Emperor glanced at Prince Raijun with calm nonchalance. "Raijun, my son..."

Prince Raijun glared at him, waiting for a response.

"You have grown much," The Emperor gazed at him with pointed interest. "Your breakthrough to the Squire Realm was one of great surprise to me. I was now aware that there was a way to overcome the fact that you've never fought a real battle in your entire life as a Martial Artist."

Rui stirred at his words.

He couldn't help but feel that the Emperor was looking at him even though his eyes were fixed on the Martial Prince.

"Permission." Prince Raijun gritted his teeth at being humiliated before all the powers of Kandria.

"Granted, my child. Not just to you, but to all those who bear my blood." The Kandrian Emperor's tone grew relaxed. "Let us speak with each other as the family that we are. Let us indulge in open dialogue before the subjects of Kandria. Let us truly engage in the spirit of the Royal Addressal Ceremony before commencing the formalities of the ceremony."

Rui understood what he was trying to do. He had already planted the seeds of doubt with his powerful words earlier. Hammering the same point over and over redundantly would not help his case at all. If anything, it would weaken it.

On top of that, the optics of refusing to allow anyone to speak was one that could ruin his impact. It conveyed an inability to engage, perhaps even fear of engaging, crippling his credibility.

However, by freely allowing not just Raijun but also all other royals to speak openly, he maintained the momentum he had built, conveying unerring confidence.

It was only then that Rui realized that the sheer mastery over communication that the Emperor of Harmony possessed was far greater than that of anybody else he had ever seen.

In just a short amount of time, he had demonstrated a profound ability to move people with words alone.

He truly was what Prince Raul thought of himself.

"Your Majesty..." Prince Raijun's eyes narrowed. "Your words betray cowardice. Yes, civil war is bad. Yet, it is inevitable. Conflicts of ambition and greed are inevitable. Greed and ambition are the fuel of human civilization. Would you have us cripple human civilization in a dovish attempt to prevent its negative consequences? Your way would send us back to the Shadow Ages!"

The Shadow Ages, an era in the five-thousand-year-long history of mankind, was an era long before the Age of Martial Art characterized by the recession of human civilization on all fronts.

Prince Raijun had attempted to associate the negative connotations of this era with the Emperor's words.

Unfortunately, it was a crude attempt. He did not possess even a fraction of the sophistication and mastery of his father's oration and speech.

"My ways will send the Kandrian Empire back to the Shadow Ages, hm...?" Amusement crept into the Emperor's tone. "My ways have ruled Kandria for three centuries."

His powerful gaze pinned Raijun.

"Tell me, boy, have they sent Kandria to the Shadow Ages in the past three centuries?"

Prince Raijun's expression crumpled, growing ugly. "That..."

There was simply no argument to be made. The Emperor of Harmony had elevated the Kandrian Empire from one of the countless nations in East Panama to the very pinnacle of it, standing equal to the three legacy powerhouses that were in power from before the Age of Martial Art.

"You said civil war was inevitable, did you?" A glint of predation flashed in the Emperor's eye. "If that's true, then I suppose it is a shame I was unable to prevent the Civil War of Kandria at the dawn of my rule then."

A light touch of sarcasm to cleanly convey the apparent absurdity of Prince Raijun's statements.

"That's not what I meant!" Prince Raijun gritted his teeth.

The funny thing was that Rui didn't disagree with Raijun's statement. Civil war was indeed inevitable when looking at the very same exact history that the Emperor's compelling rhetoric was based on.

The guests stirred as the Emperor effortlessly dominated the rhetorical battle that underlied their exchange.

"Your cheap word games do not impress anybody, Father." Another voice joined the conversation.

Prince Rajak glared at him. "Your eloquent sophistry cannot obscure the fact that we will fight to ascend the throne, just as you did. It is the height of hypocrisy to condemn us for partaking in a power struggle that you yourself partook in when you were in our position."

The dynamics of the conversation shifted once more as Rajak's words attacked the Emperor.

#### Chapter 1748: Shocking Confession

The Throne Hall grew chilly as Prince Rajak blatantly attacked Emperor Rael with condemnation much more directly than Prince Raijun did.

"Condemn you for a power struggle...?" The Emperor's tone hid a smile. "No. I condemned you for a civil war. Those are close but not quite the same."

Prince Rajak's face contorted with cold rage. "As I said, your cheap word word games do not impress anybody."

"Those are neither mere words nor games, my hateful child of the Underworld," The Emperor smiled. "You and I, indeed, have partaken in our respective power struggles for the throne. Yet, do you know what the difference between the two of us is?"

Prince Rajak stared at him coldly.

He didn't utter so much as a word.

"The difference between us is that I won."

His aura rapidly shifted from serene to overbearing dominance.

"I won the war before it even began."

The Emperor's domineering words sent a wave of surprise washing through everybody in the throne room.

"I won before anyone got hurt."

An abundance of confidence echoed the deep masculine melody of his voice. The dominance of his words came from the fact that they were rooted in history. He ascended the throne at the young age of thirty-one after the previous Emperor passed away mysteriously, crushing the allied resistance of his brothers and sisters, initiating the crowning ceremony, and becoming Emperor.

Prince Rajak gritted his teeth as his expression grew ugly.

"That is the difference between us. The 'struggle' in 'power struggle' came from those who struggled against me in vain," The Emperor's words were unshakable. "I prepared to ascend the throne my entire life..."

A grin lit up on the Emperor's face.

"...and when it was time, I killed my power-hungry fool of a father."

"!!!"

Every single person in the throne hall shook.

They shook.

Physically.

Mentally.

Emotionally.

How could they not?

The Emperor of Harmony had just confessed to assassinating the previous and Founding Emperor of Kandria!

He had just confessed to the highest treason as recognized by Kandrian law.

Even the most hardened poker faces had cracked.

At that moment, regardless of their origin, affiliation, station, rank, or field, every single member of the Kandrian Throne Hall was united in their reaction.

They were shocked.

Shocked to their very core.

Murder conspiracy against the Royal Emperor was the highest form of treason, and it was a crime with no statute of limitations that not even the Emperor himself was entirely immune to being prosecuted for!

Should he abdicate the throne, he would instantly be thrown behind bars!

Yet his expression was defiantly fierce.

His eyes pierced holes into a frozen Rajak, stunned and speechless by the Emperor's confession to high treason.

"I killed Emperor Ra."

His bold words reverberated throughout the throne hall.

"I killed my warmongering power-hungry before he tore Kandria apart with an apocalyptic civil war."

His declaration rang in the ears and the hearts of those who beheld it.

"I killed him and brought three centuries of peace, harmony, and glory to Kandria."

The weight of Kandria itself bore down on Rajak with the Emperor's powerful gaze.

"That is the difference between you and me," Emperor Rael's domineering voice pushed down on the various princes and princesses. "The best way to prevent a war is to win it before it even begins. You, my hateful son, are unable to win at all, let alone before it begins."

Prince Rajak glared at him, gritting his teeth.

Rui, on the other hand, was stunned.

He had begun with an impactful speech that showed a pacifist heart and a saint's aversion for war, yet as smooth as the workmanship of the throne that bore him, he immediately became a domineering conqueror who brilliantly seized power over Kandria moments before the catastrophic war broke out and went on to raise the nation to high heavens for three centuries after successfully blowing out the embers of war.

One moment, he was even more saintly and dovish than Prince Raul.

The very next, he displayed a domineering hawkish dominance that exceeded that of Prince Randal.

Yet, they didn't contradict each other.

No.

They coexisted within him.

They coexisted in harmony.

They coexisted within him for the sake of the Kandrian Empire.

At that moment, Rui truly understood why he was called the Emperor of Harmony. He possessed a depth of mind and dimensions of character that exceeded that of all of his progeny.

A ruler able to adopt any mindset, any inclination, any doctrine, any philosophy to overcome any hurdle, all for the sake of the Kandrian Empire.

He was like water in that regard. Formless, shapeless, able to become what was necessary for the Kandrian Empire to survive and thrive.

Rui's eyes widened at that thought.

Never in his wildest dreams did he think that they would share this trait with the Royal Emperor.

"It doesn't matter!" Prince Rajak snapped. "It doesn't matter. No matter what you say. No matter what you do. We will converge upon the throne, and I will emerge victorious. And when you breathe your last breath, I will crown myself Emperor. If you think you can stop us with rhetoric, then you are sorely mistaken!"

His voice was reverberated through the throne hall.

Unfortunately for the Emperor, the Underworld Prince had a point. The bottom line was almost impossible to change. Once he passed away, people would forget about his words this day and fight for the throne.

It was a truly remarkable attempt, of course. Some would even say he came close to putting an end to the Kandrian Throne War.



Yet, reality was not soft.

It was not convenient.

His physical condition, his diseased body, his waning influence and power.

On top of that, the fact that he had simply woken up too late to deliver his powerful words.

All of these seemed to work against him.

They seemed to work against him as the guests of the throne hall increasingly returned to their sober mindsets prior to the powerful impacts that the Emperor dealt them with his words.

#### Chapter 1749: Race For Approval

The incredulous atmosphere blew away as Prince Rajak drew the bottom line. The bottom line that not even the Emperor of Harmony was able to change.

If Emperor Rael was displeased, he did not show it on his face or in his body.

He remained unmoved.

The guests regained their composure even as he stared at Rajak impassively.

It became clear, in hindsight, that this was the reason he had organized an event and invited all the powers and forces of Kandria to it.

Now that the guests and the royals had sobered up rapidly from the cold dose of reality from Prince Rajak's words, it begged the question...

What was he going to do?

Did he really just summon them to try and move them with words alone?

'Surely not,' Rui narrowed his eyes. 'He should have known that the odds were stacked against him when planning this out. Which probably means he most likely isn't done yet...'

The only question was what his final trump card was.

"...Is that so?" Emperor Rael whispered. "You break my heart, my dear son."

Prince Rajak's eyes flared with hatred. "Don't you dare say that."

"I am the Emperor of Kandria, boy," Emperor Rael's powerful, deep voice reverberated through the throne hall. "No force in this world can abate my speech."

"...Not for long."

The Emperor heaved a sigh, shaking his head. "So be it."

His eyes flashed around the crowd.

He seemed to eye each and every guest.

The weight of his vision pressed down on each and every single one of them. Whatever was coming was important. That much became clear to everyone as the air seemed to be wrung by the weight of the tension.

"As I behold all of you, it has become painfully clear that I cannot stop what is to come," Emperor Rael closed his eyes, heaving a soft sigh. "Try as I might, Kandria may be doomed for a civil war between my

ambitious progeny and perhaps yet another civil war as they disrupt the delicate balance that I have dedicated my life to crafting."

He paused for a moment as a hint of sorrow flashed in his eyes. "It pains me that even in a time where I need all the rest in the world to ameliorate my condition, my duties as Emperor beckon me. Even unto death, I may not rest."

He glanced at his children with soft eyes. "Heavy is the head that wears the crown."

His voice reverberated through the throne hall.

"Each ounce of power is also an ounce of responsibility." He remarked. "The lot of you who lust for power to fulfill your ambitions or the ambitions of those you have sold yourself to, cannot begin to understand the burden."

A profound state of introspection seemed to take hold of the Emperor.

"And if you do not understand that burden, you will never be able to carry it," The Emperor heaved a soft sigh as his eyes returned to his children. "I fear for what will happen if spoiled princes and princesses who have known power and luxury without responsibility happen to ascend the throne. Only three royals of the lot of you have grown up outside of the luxury of the Kandrian Royal Palaces."

Rui narrowed his eyes.

As far as he was aware, Rajak and Raul were the only princes who had grown up outside of royalty.

"That is why I have decided," Emperor Rael declared. "I shall bestow my support to one of my children. For the sake of ensuring a decisive victory."

The air grew heavier as Emperor Rael declared his intentions to declare an unofficial heir.

Many had predicted this.

Including Rui.

While the Emperor's influence had waned immensely over the span of seven years ever since his terminal condition became public knowledge, he still had retained a lot of support and power over three centuries. While not all of it could be cleanly passed on to his chosen heir, the latter would certainly gain a large boost in their campaigning efforts.

The only question was who it was going to be.

Rui was deeply curious to know, for this decision was one that had plagued him.

"You may not believe me, but..." The Emperor smiled wryly. "The decision to crown an unofficial heir has been somewhat...

whimsical. Being in a death-like sleeping state for two years leaves almost no room to plan, you see. But it is indeed my final ounce of power. I hope that there will be a prince or princess who can inspire confidence from within me."

He glanced across all his children.

"Is there anybody among you who will?"

The competing princes and princesses grew determined.

They needed to secure the Emperor's support.

Even the lesser princes and princesses felt hope. Even if they could not compete against the seven prime candidates by themselves, they could with the Emperor's support.

The air grew taut, wrung by the tension between all the princes and princesses who vied for the Emperor's approval.

He glanced at Prince Rajak, who was still glaring at him.

"My boy...should you ascend the throne, Kandria will burn," The Emperor declared. "Do not insult my intelligence or those of the esteemed powers gathered here today by denying the hatred in your heart and the vengeance you wreak. The fact that the only force in Kandria that was willing to support you was the Underworld speaks volumes, does it not?"

Prince Rajak glared at his father.

Yet his words could not be denied.

For everyone knew they were true.

He would begin hunting the Royal Family and all those loyal to them using the power of the Emperor. In return for the Underworld's power, he promised to drastically amend the criminal law to allow the Underworld to become a legal and lawful sector of Kandria.

Nobody in the throne hall wanted anything to do with him.

They were unwilling to touch him with a ten-foot pole. Having anything to do with him would blacklist them nationally and internationally to many parties.

#### Chapter 1750: Unworthy

It was a shame that even though it was an open secret that he was backed by the Underworld, the Underworld had mastered the art of evading Kandrian law enforcement, making it extremely difficult to charge him with crimes due to a lack of substantial evidence.

"You are unworthy." The Emperor declared. "Unworthy to bear either the power or the burden of the crown. You are unworthy to be my heir and inherit my power."

Prince Rajak glared at the Emperor, not saying a word.

The Emperor's eyes drifted through his many progeny. "Most of you do not war for the throne, and of those of you who have the ambition to become Emperor, only seven of you have displayed the competence to forge their path to the throne needed to earn my support."

Many of the princes and princesses winced and grimaced at the Emperor's words.

After all, he called all but seven of the incompetent.

And, unfortunately, it could not be denied.

Their campaigning efforts were, frankly, embarrassing. Most of them struggled to reel over even a single power to their so-called faction.

"Of the remaining six of you...hm, let's see," The Emperor's eyes shifted to the closest one.

Princess Rafia stared at him emotionally as he gazed into his daughter's eyes.

"Rafia...my poor girl," He remarked.

"I am not poor," She retorted.

"Certainly not in wealth, no. But you may as well be bankrupt when it comes to emotional intelligence," The Emperor remarked. "So long as we live in a world where people are more irrational than rational, more emotional than intelligent...the capacity to comprehend, harness, and manipulate emotion is more important than the ability to process data."

She didn't reply to that.

She didn't know how to.

Yet a glint of frustration flashed in her eyes.

"I had hoped that in the many years since our last exchange...

you would have grown to experience and understand emotion, yet..." He shook his head. "When I gaze into your eyes, it is clear to me that my hopes have not been fulfilled. Seek the human heart before you seek the throne."

His eyes shifted away from her, moving on to Prince Randal. "Ah...my warmongering son."

"...Father," Prince Randal regarded him with a respectful tone.

"You see, war to the others is a negative externality that ought to be limited," The Emperor suddenly remarked as he eyed Prince Randal. "There is a shared understanding that it is destructive and ought to be avoided. But you..."

The Emperor's eyes sharpened. "You have made war your entire objective."

"..."

"You have delusions of grandeur of being a conqueror and conquering all of East Panama," The Emperor remarked. "You are unable to critically analyze the probability of success, blinded by your desire for conquest."

He shook his head. "If you were truly capable of conquering all of East Panama with brilliant strategic and tactical application of power, you would have won the Kandrian Throne War by now, ready to crown yourself Emperor the moment I passed away, yet even if I were to pass away today, you would certainly not be the one to ascend the throne."

"..." Prince Randal exerted great control on his desire to lash out at the Emperor's judgment.

He needed the Emperor's power to break free from the clutches of Rui Quarrier.

"Father, Your Majesty...you yourself demonstrated that we have the power to overcome the resistance of all of East Panama during the First East Panamic War," Prince Randal respectfully countered the Emperor's words.

Prince Randal appealed to history, pulling a page of the Emperor's book.

The First East Panamic War was triggered by Emperor Rael's discovery of the first marine mine of esoteric gold a short distance off the coast of the Kandrian Empire in the Great Nam Ocean. It was estimated to have more than ten thousand tons of Marina Gold, a highly beautiful golden esoteric with a known non-addictive psychological soothing effect on the brain through esoteric visual stimulus.

It was a substance that was highly in demand across the entirety of the Panamic Continent. Emperor Rael's brilliant decision to make it the basis of the Kandrian Empire's currency was the reason that the Kandrian Empire became an economic powerhouse surpassing even that of the then-

young Shionel Confederation.

The demand for Kandrian currency shot up after the currency became Kandrian Marina gold coins; it consequently skyrocketed the value of the entirety of the Kandrian economy internationally, which was measured in Kandrian Marina gold. The more valuable the currency, the more valuable everything that was measured with that currency became.

That was the first that the Kandrian Empire truly stood equal to the other three powerhouses.

The balance of power shifted drastically, diminishing the significance of the other three powerhouses.

It became the trigger for an East Panamic War as the Sekigahara Confederate, the Republic of Gorteau, and the Britannian Empire could not only not tolerate the rise of a new powerhouse but also sought to get their hands on a piece of the Marina Gold pie.



Yet, they could not. A combination of using topographical defenses, strategic and tactical allocation of resources, and brilliant geopolitical campaigns, Emperor Rael created powerful deterrence until the three powerhouses eventually gave up five years later, signing a peace treaty with the Kandrian Empire.

"You proved that the Kandrian Empire is superior!" Prince Randal declared. "You showed the world that not even the three powerhouses could overwhelm Kandria!"

"Fool."

Emperor Rael's words cut through his jubilation.

"The more you speak, the more I am convinced that you possess neither the rationality to see the errors of your thronely ambition nor the competence to execute your self-

destructive ambition without bringing ruin to this nation."

Prince Randal froze as the Emperor passed his judgment.

His disapproval was palpable.

"Father, I-

"Silence."

The Emperor's command was decisive.

His glare weighed down on the Military Prince, pinning him in place.

"I will not entertain your nonsense any longer."

Prince Randal's expression grew ugly, yet he didn't dare speak after the Emperor commanded him to shut up.