

## Martial Unity 21

### Chapter 21: Home

The sky was dark, the edges of the sunset were dipping below the horizon. He'd spent nearly half the day away from home. Yet Rui was in no hurry, he was walking home peacefully in a nonchalant manner, contemplating what had occurred throughout the entire day.

('The first round weeded out a majority of the applicants, around ninety-percent or so, the second round got rid of seventy percent and the third round got rid of precisely half.')

That left only left around a little over one percent of the applications, such was the tiny proportion of applicants that managed to pass the exam.

('Furthermore, even among the applicants who pass the exam, only a small proportion of them reach the Martial Squire stage.')

It was a brutal ordeal, one Rui had almost overcome.

"Sigh... I wonder if Kane passed... He probably did."

He hoped so, atleast. Although he hadn't even known the kid for even a day, he was cool. Furthermore, he helped Rui out. A debt Rui promised he would pay back.

"Fae definitely passed too."

There was no doubt about this either, he was pretty sure she was either extremely rich, or she was family of an extremely powerful Martial Artist, or both. He sighed. He didn't regret being born in the Quarrier Orphanage, but there were undeniably benefits that he missed being born in a lower class of the economy.

('Still... I'd stick to the orphanage if given a choice.')

He smiled warmly as he thought about his family in the orphanage. The pain of being separated from them was not something he wanted to voluntarily put himself through.

As his mind wandered, he kept trudging through. He was in a very dull mood, but he didn't feel regret, at the very least.

('I gave it my all.') He shrugged. What more could a person do? Besides although he was almost certainly done for, the official judgement had not been released yet, so who knew? Anything was possible.

Rui stopped walking as he reached the gate to the orphanage. He almost didn't want to go inside, he didn't want to be in the center of attention while he was still saturated with shame and frustration.

('The problem is with me, not them. They'll console and encourage me.')

Rui sighed before entering. The door opened before he reached it, and Farion could already tell what had happened based on Rui's expression.

"Don't worry about it, come in, dinner's ready." He said before gesturing Rui inside. Rui smirked slightly, it was a very Farion-way of consoling people. He was not someone who would bare his thoughts and emotions directly, but would still convey what he wanted to. His words just then roughly translated to:

'I know you didn't achieve what you wanted to, I know it sucks, but for now come and spend time with the family you love, we're here for you.'

"Yeah... I'll do that."

He scratched his head walking in.

"I'm back."

Lashara looked to be full of pure relief. Out of all those in the Quarrier Orphanage, she cared more for his well-being and life than his first attempt at the Martial Entrance Exam. She'd scanned his body top to bottom, an embarrassing ordeal for a thirteen-year-old, but even more so for a seventy-two-year-old. But he allowed her to do it, he owed her that much atleast, after ignoring years of overprotectiveness to eventually attempt the Martial Entrance Exam.

Of course, his wounds had all been treated by the Medical Department, so there was nothing to fear, but did that deter Lashara?

"Heh, looks like Mom might even force you to sleep beside her out of anxiety." Nina smirked.

"Anything but that! I haven't done that in six years!" Rui complained.

"Well? How did it go?" Julian asked, despite already knowing the answer.

"I failed in the final round." Rui sighed in response.

"Shame, don't worry, you can try again next year. The fact that you made it to the final round in itself is actually quite remarkable. But how do you know you failed if the official announcement isn't out yet?"

He was aware that the Martial Academies sent official letters stamped with the seal of the Kandrian Martial Union declaring admission of the candidates who were accepted as students while setting up an appointment with the candidate and/or with the Guardian.

"The objective of the round was specified, and I perfectly failed to meet it. There's no way I passed."

"Hmm.. I see. Well, don't worry about it. Let's start eating."

And so they did. They discussed boisterously about a variety of topics rapidly, forcing Rui to take his mind off the exam, which he was grateful for.

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Master Aronian had just finished grading the final round of the Entrance Exam. Only 567 applicants had passed the Entrance Exam in the Kandrian branch, this year. As the appointed head invigilator of this year, he was given full discretion regarding the Exam, and as long as he didn't go overboard, he could do whatever he wanted. Normally, he considered this duty a dull chore, but this year's applicants were interesting, to say the least.

('The top-level talent in this year's batch is impressive... There's Kane Arrancar. Son of Sage Damian Arrancar. Based on his performances, his overall skill and combat capability was at the Martial Apprentice level. Extremely impressive that he managed to discover his Martial Path at the age of thirteen, a genius with unknown potential. What is interesting is how vastly different his Martial Art seems to be from that of Sage Arrancar. Sage Arrancar's Devil Fury Fist is a striking Martial Art that heavily emphasized on raw power and durability at the cost of speed and maneuvering, although I didn't particularly expect Kane to go down the exact same path, it's a little strange he chose the exact opposite.')

Kane had chosen a Martial Art with a strong focus on speed, agility and evasive maneuvering, at the cost of a powerful body.

('Martial Arts are manifestations of the Soul, in a sense. For Kane to have focused on evasiveness and chosen a completely different path from the Arrancar family tradition. I wonder how this bodes for Arrancar Household...')

## Chapter 22: Interested

Although there was nothing concrete, Master Aronian could smell friction between Kane and Sage Arrancar.

"Well, it's none of my business."

Another applicant he was interested in was Fae Dullahan, yet another descendent of a Sage.

('Two of them in a single year is quite rare.')

She also was worthy of her status in his eyes. She consistently dominated the rankings with ease. What particularly impressed Master Aronian was the fact that she managed to learn how to use Outer Convergence. Although he could tell she hadn't mastered yet, the fact that she managed to use a high-end Apprentice level technique was rather impressive. He couldn't wait to see where her Martial Journey would take her.

"Then, of course, is him..." Master Aronian said, looking at a sheer with a picture of a fifteen-year-old boy on it. The boy had long, messy white hair and unnervingly wide blood-red eyes, with a wild grin on his face.

"Rank number one... Nel."

He wasn't even a commoner; he was below that. From what the admissions department of the Martial Academy had learnt about him from their background check was that he was a child who was raised by animals till the age of three, when he was discovered and rescued by humans. Although he eventually adjusted to living like a human by the age of fifteen, he still retained the savagery and ferocity he had obtained living with beasts. He was territorial, cruel to the weak and seemed to have obtained a strong urge for physical conflict. Master Aronian even suspected he got off of it, considering he actually killed several applicants in the Entrance Exam with expressions of unadulterated, almost innocent joy and pleasure.

He hadn't studied Martial Arts even a little bit, but he signed up for the Martial Academy anyway.

And he was monstrously strong. In the second-round, he was the one and contestant who didn't get hit by a slime at all; he successfully dodged or destroyed every slime. Fae had challenged him towards the end of the third round, but unfortunately for Master Aronian, the round ended before the fight could reach a conclusion.

"I regret making the third round so short." He sighed. He wasn't entirely sure which one would have definitely won, had the fight continued. But he knew it would be extremely close, the two contestants were nigh equal.

What particular impressed Master Aronian about Nel was his ferocity and tenacity. Nel grew up in the lowest strata of society in the poorest and most dangerous of districts, he had a lifetime of experience of not just sparring or training, but fighting for his life, every day. He had a shockingly unpredictable, unconventional fighting style stacked atop a body blessed with high physical attributes, and powerful senses and instincts. He was an outlier, a beast. Using his unparalleled senses and reflexes, he was able to dodge or destroy all slimes from all angles. This was something Fae, despite her age and pedigree could not replicate.

"And finally... there is him." Master Aronian glanced at Rui's profile.

Rui was much of a deviant as Nel was, in Master Aronian's eyes.

"Thirteen-years-old. No formal Martial Arts training, well above average physical attributes as a result of training, considering his age, but not too much of note by itself, average physical performative attributes too, slightly above average skill, but again, nothing special. Though the fact that an untalented child like him fact that he reached this level without formal training speaks of great determination and hard work.

Still, this was not the most shocking part about Rui. What is truly impressive was his mind.

"He's an unparalleled genius."

He did not make that statement lightly, no Martial Master would.

"Despite possessing unremarkable physical and physical performative attributes at the age of thirteen. He managed to score above 700 in the second round and secured rank number nine. Furthermore, he did this purely tactically with absolutely no other attribute contributing majorly. He observed the slimes, drew hypotheses and conclusions regarding the slimes and the exam itself, tested the hypotheses to confirm or deny them before devising a set of tactics aimed at fulfilling the objective to the highest degree possible, centered around predicting the trajectory of the slimes rather than reacting to them."

This was an instance of analytical and tactical ingenuity as well as sheer processing capacity absolutely unheard of in an applicant, let alone one as young as Rui, according to the Martial Exam library. Usually only highly experienced Martial Artists who were also inherently intelligent could accomplish such feats.

"Unfortunately, he lost his badge to Fae, but he still held out longer and acted better than likely anybody else would have with what he had. Not even Nel pushed Fae far enough to hastily use her One-Inch Palm against her will."

Master Aronian thought quite highly of Rui, on par with the aforementioned geniuses even though Rui would have undoubtedly lost to them in a fight. None of the other applicants had held Master Aronian's interests. Although they were all mildly different and some even unusual, it was nothing that Master Aronian, an experienced invigilator and teacher, had not seen many times.

He set aside the profiles in his hand and had begun stamping on the letters of acceptance and rejection with the official Kandrian Martial Academy's stamp. The seal pattern on the stamp was extremely intricate and even the materials it was crafted from were from high-grade esoteric bestial matter obtained from powerful beasts, forging a counterfeit was actually extremely difficult. Furthermore, the ink itself was a compound derived from esoteric flora, it absorbed light of all colours and thus was an absolute pitch black that did not shine or reflect any light. These were means by which credibility and reliability were ensured.

Just then, he came across Rui's letter.

"Hmm..."

The decision of course had already been made, it could not be changed now. He just wondered if it was too hasty.

"Well, what's done is done. I'm interested to see what you do from here, Rui Quarrier."

## Chapter 23: Letter

Rui was lying on his bed, the next morning. He had been contemplating about his path forward from here on out.

('The official announcement hasn't come yet, but I should forget about it. What I ought to do is eradicate the cause of my failure.')

He was doing fine until he fought Fae. But what caused that loss? Well, he was outclassed physically and technically; in skill. She was on a whole other level. He still didn't even know what she did to him in their fight. The last thing he recalled was dashing towards the lower half of her body for a takedown, grabbing her and then the lights went out for him and he woke in a medical facility later on.

('She knocked me out, obviously. The question is how.')

He wasn't sure how. He was especially confused on how she managed to generate such raw power when caught off-guard, mid-strike with her whole body still in motion in the failed strike, at point blank range. Was such a thing even possible?

('With Earth's martial arts, that was impossible. No MMA or UFC fighter would ever be able to generate such absurd amount of power, enough to instantly knock someone out like that at point blank range. But she did, how?')

This served as a little reminder that he knew too little about the Martial Art in this world. On Earth, both humans and martial arts had hard limits. But as he had witnessed twelve years ago, neither humans nor Martial Art had hard limits like this. The laws of physics were somehow still the same, as he'd noticed. This world obeyed the three laws of motion, Newton's law of gravitation, Rotational mechanics, kinematics, Euclid's Axioms etc. Yet, somehow, the limits that the universe and Gaea had placed on humans seemed to simply not exist. He wasn't sure if this was something could ever be investigated through scientific induction; the scientific method. But did he care?

('No, not really. I'm grateful for it, of course. It allows me to live in a world of my dreams, and live a life of my dreams. But I don't really care why this reality is so different, I'm not a cosmologist or a theoretical physicist. I will simply exploit the opportunity this reality has presented me with, and fulfill the dream I couldn't fulfill in my previous life.')

Still, it begged the question he hadn't answered yet, how did she knock him out so quickly? He didn't know, and it didn't seem like he could figure out either.

('Some day... I'll reach that level, I'll reach it and far surpass it.')

He leapt up from his bed with renewed vigour.

"I'll work even harder and definitely pass the Exam next yea-"

"RUI YOU PASSED THE EXAM!"

"...?" Rui tilted his head towards a boisterous Alice running towards him.



"YOU. PASSED. THE. EXAM." She screamed, shaking him back and forth.

Rui couldn't understand.

('Is this her way of cheering me up? Alice's cheeriness was always abnormal, but this is something else even for her.')

"Your letter came!" She shoved a paper into his chest.

"It says you passed the exam!"

"Huh?" Rui squinted his eyes in skepticism as he looked at the letter. "There no wa-...!"

He choked when he read the letter;

('Greetings, Mr Quarrier.

We are pleased to inform and congratulate you have passed the Kandrian Martial Entrance Exam, and have been accepted into the Kandrian Martial Academy. We have evaluated you as a student candidate of our Academy thoroughly, and you have indeed demonstrated that you are more deserving of a seat in our Academy than your peers.

We write to you to do more than just congratulate you, we invite you to the official Induction in the Kandrian Martial Academy on the thirty-sixth Autumn at 14:00. There, important matters such as the rules and regulations, fees structure, payment method and structure, scholarships, housing and food amenities, schedules and academic year structure and other facilities and amenities will be presented in great detail, you may consult with our staff on any enquiries you have after. You will also receive your student identification and uniform. It is an extremely important and necessary meeting, so please make sure to attend it. If you cannot, then please make sure to book an appointment with our staff prior to the start of the Academic year on the sixty-sixth Autumn.

And lastly, this letter serves as the official invitation to the Induction, please bring it with you along with identification...')

...

Rui memorized the relevant information as he read every single word with great scrutiny.

('...We look forward to meeting you.

With sincere regards,

~The Admission Department of the Kandrian Martial Academy.')

The letter ended after rambling on for a while about details. But the important part had already been conveyed.

"...I'm accepted..."

"I'm accepted...?"

"I'm accepted." He asserted, chuckling.

"I'M ACCEPTED." The realization had finally struck his core.

He began guffawing uncontrollably, until he grew embarrassed enough to stop.

('But how did I pass? I lost my badge, and the objective was to retain and accumulate badges and points. I objectively failed that task.')

"..r..."

('I'm definitely going to find out how I didn't fail in the Induction.')

"r...i.."

('But still, I got in after all! YES!')

"...Ru.."

('I can't wait to begin!')

"RUI."

"Hm?"

"Sigh, you were so engrossed you didn't even hear us." Alice said with tired helplessness.

"Oh, I didn't notice you guys here, sorry." Rui said as he realized a lot of people had gathered around him. He was scolded by the adults for being so self-absorbed, but ultimately everyone congratulated him. It was a well-known fact within the Orphanage that Rui dreamt of becoming a Martial Artist.

"Congratulations Rui, you made it." Julian smiled at him.

"Thanks."

"I have to say, I am extremely surprised. I thought the chances of you passing the exam at the age of thirteen were practically negligible."

"Ha, thanks for the vote of confidence." Rui snorted.

"Still, the fact that you made it through despite your low odds is the strongest testament to your sheer determination and perseverance. If it's you, you'll be able to tread the Martial Path to the very end." Julian smiled warmly.

"...Hindsight is 20/20 they say." Rui retorted playfully.

"That's a mean thing to say in response."

Rui smirked "Thanks."

#### Chapter 24: Induction

A week rolled by and the Induction Ceremony of the Kandrian Academy had arrived. The event was held in the morning on the thirty-sixth Winter, which would be the sixth of October on Earth. There were multiple Calendar systems used on the panama continent, but the most universal one was the Calendar of systems. The year was divided into 365 days, just like on Earth, but the days were not grouped into months, instead, they were grouped into seasons. The thirty-sixth Winter referred to the thirty-sixth day of the Winter season. This was one of the many differences in the cultures between Earth and Gaea, it had taken Rui a while before he got used to them completely.

"Come on Julian, we might be late!" Rui urged

Julian threw him a helpless sigh.

"We already resolved to leave a whopping half an hour early in anticipation of traffic., leaving any earlier would be silly." He told Rui.

('It's rare to see such a childish side of him.')

"Alright fine, but don't waste anymore time." Rui relented.

"Yes yes."

The reason Julian accompanied him was because all applicants below the age of adulthood of sixteen needed to be accompanied by a Guardian, or an adult who would serve as an acting Guardian. Lashara had requested Julian to accompany Rui as the acting Guardian, and in order to aid Rui in the Induction.

By the time they reached, they were, as perfectly predicted, half an hour early.

"See? We're this early and you wanted to be even earlier." Julian poked at Rui.

"Hey man, better safe than sorry." Rui yawned.

"Sleepy?"

"Not at all."

"You stayed awake all night excited about the Induction, didn't you?"

"..."

Julian sighed, he really did think Rui's childishness manifested when it came to his passion and love for Martial Art. They followed the directions to the Induction Hall after showing their ID and invites to the Guards at the gate.

The Induction Hall was a large facility that seemed to be explicitly designed for presentations of this sort. On the outside, it was large and ostentatious in its architecture, clearly designed to grab attention and demand admiration from its beholders.

On the inside, there was a large stage with a podium upon it at the opposite end of the Hall. The Hall actually descended downwards as one moved forward, with the stage being the lowest in elevation, it had a wide carrying capacity, clearly designed to accommodate the large number of new students and guardians that attended the Induction every year.

"Truly, an extravagant hall that does the prestige of the Martial Arts Academy justice." Julian sighed in admiration.

What held Rui's attention, however was not the Hall itself but its inhabitants.

"So these guys are my batch mates, eh?"

"Indeed, I hope you make a lot friends."

"I didn't come here to make friends." Rui shrugged.

"Yes, but it doesn't hurt to make a few. Good friends can have overall positive impact on your life, maybe even on your Martial Art."

It was possible, Rui supposed.

"Speaking of which, didn't you make a friend in the exam?"

"I knew him for a few hours at most, he's an acquaintance at most." Rui said, before feeling guilty. Kane had saved him in the third round

('Does that make us friends?')

Rui wasn't sure. In his past life, he had never made any friends, his disease and the nature of his career simply prevented him from making any, he'd also developed a relatively asocial attitude due to that.

"True enough, I suppose."

The accepted students were all strong, Rui could feel it. He wasn't sure he could beat most of them in a fight. Even though he was in the top-ten of the second-round, he didn't let it get to his head and bloat his ego. His success in that round was a rather niche outcome and wasn't something that spoke to his

overall combat ability. Ultimately, he was younger, weaker and less experienced than pretty much every single other student in his batch.

('The only other kid my age was Kane, and he was a fucking genius who was personally trained by a Martial fucking Sage. I'd have to have my head deep up my ass in order to think I'm comparable to him just because our ranks were somewhat close in the second-round.')

Rui clenched his fist.

('It doesn't matter how strong I am currently; I have a lifetime ahead of me. This is what the Martial Academy is for, after all.')

He couldn't wait for the academic year begin. He intended to grind and train like a madman under the tutelage of the Martial Seniors of the Academy.

Just then, Rui saw a figure board the podium.

Master Aronian surveyed his audience, sweeping his gaze across them.

"Students of the Martial Academy. This time, allow me to welcome you all to the Kandrian Martial Academy not as aspirants, but as members. Each and every single one of you belongs within the walls of this Academy. You have overcome tribulations as well as your peers and proved without a shadow of a doubt that you belong here. Be proud of how far you've come, yet be cognizant of how much you have left to traverse."

He spoke calmly with sagely dignity.

"Today, we aim to inform you about the everything you need to know, and ought to know about the Martial Academy. Without further ado, I invite our Honorable Chancellor Callux Haine to begin the presentation."

A strapping younger man walked onto the stage as an applause ensued. Master Aronian shook his hand before deferring the podium to him and walking off the stage. He smiled before cutting straight to the chase.

"The purview of this presentation is to provide you with an overall understanding of how the Academy functions. I shall broadly be going over several categories of topics. The educational services the Martial Academy offers to its students. The responsibilities and entitlements that students possess. The fees structure and means of payment. And finally, the future that lies beyond the Academy."

"The primary service that the Academy provides to its students is, simply speaking, the tools necessary to allow students to reach the Martial Squire Realm. The curriculum is not set in stone universally, beyond the bare foundations. The Martial Path is a deeply personal journey that cannot be universalized, yet the conditions necessary to become a Martial Apprentice and then a Martial Squire are defined. The Martial Academy possesses a vast library of techniques and skills that can freely be explored by students in order to discover their Martial Path, before pursuing it.

The Martial Academy offers the tutelage of highly qualified and experienced Martial Seniors, who have all guided countless students into discovering their Martial Path, and aided them in their Journey down it. We offer a variety of highly refined training regimes and facilities for all physical and performative attributes relevant to Martial Art.

Simply put... The Kandrian Martial Academy is a paradise for those who strive to become Martial Artists!"

As he began rattling about the details, Rui pondered about his words.

('I see, so in order to reach the Martial Apprentice stage and discover your Martial Path, one must explore different types of Martial Art techniques, skills and forms, eh? That makes sense. After all, how else can one figure out what kind of Martial Art they wanna pursue? In that case, having a library of techniques and skills definitely makes life far easier. Hell, is it even possible to become a Martial Apprentice without such resources?')

Regardless, just based off this alone the Academy was already worth every ounce of his time, he probably wouldn't be able to reach the Martial Apprentice stage any other way.



('I'm not like Kane, after all. Without the Academy I'll never be able to obtain these learning resources.')

The sheer amount of resources the Academy dedicated giving its students the most optimal education possible was mind-boggling to Rui. His astonishment only escalated as every time the Chancellor presented yet another ostentatious facility that targetedly trained one particular physical or performative attribute or a foundational skill of some kind.

('Is it really worth it to spend so much on us students? I've heard that only ten-percent of students reach the Martial Squire stage, is it really worth it to spend such a large amount of capital into nurturing less than a hundred Martial Squires every year?')

He wasn't sure. He lacked too much information on the interests and decisions of the Union. Perhaps there were several concrete economic and political incentives to increasing the number of Martial Artists than just money. Perhaps he would learn of these reasons once he jumped up the totem pole of the Martial Union.

('I should stop focusing on abstract irrelevant matters and focus on things have a more direct impact on me.') Rui shook his head.

"... In addition to the facilities, amenities and services I've just gone over there exists the possibility of being tutored by a Martial Master. Of course, this is a decision that is entirely of their own discretion and volition. There are no guarantees, promises or stipulations regarding this. There have been several years back to back where not a single student was chosen by the Martial Masters of the Academy, and conversely, there have been years where a plethora of students were accepted by various Masters. On average, a few students are accepted every year. The benefits, of course, cannot be overstated. In addition to extremely high-quality tutelage, Martial Masters can allow disciples to obtain opportunities that other students cannot, with the vast authority they possess they can easily circumvent the restrictions and barriers blockading resources, knowledge, events etc."

Rui grew excited when he heard that. The prospects of being tutored by a Martial Master was incredibly exciting. Their prowess was known to be extraordinarily high, and unless one was their direct descendent, the prospect of one being accepted as a disciple by one was extremely low, Martial Masters were very powerful, influential and naturally wealthy. It was difficult to earn their tutelage services even with a small fortune.

## Chapter 25: Disciple

('Ideally, a Master ends up offering me tutelage once I become a Martial Apprentice. The problem is the low probability, as well as the difference in criterias that Master evaluate potential disciples with. Every Master must be looking for something different in the students. The only thing that can be inferred is that they are likely looking for unique traits. After all it wouldn't make sense if what they were looking for could be abundantly found in every student, if that were the case, being accepted as a student would be a trivial and easy matter.')

Thus it could be inferred that the likelihood of being accepted as a disciple of a Master was greater the more unique one was.

('So now, the question is whether I'm unique enough.') Rui scratched his head.

('Well, I'm reincarnated, that's something I'm relatively certain no other student can claim to be. But revealing that is asking to be burned to the stake as an alien. Even if they didn't believe me they'd atleast conclude I have screws loose in my head. Nothing about this option is a desirable outcome.')

The problem was that Rui wasn't sure he was all that unique in practice. The Martial Entrance Exam had shown him that.

('Sure, my scientific background and research experience in martial arts and combat sports allows me to pull a few tricks like I did in the second-round of the Martial Exam, but that's it. That's not too big a deal. It allowed me to cope with the difference in prowess between me and the other applicants. But is that something that would warrant the attention of a Martial Master?')

Rui didn't think so.

('Another things that likely influences their criterion is compatibility of Martial Arts. I highly doubt a Martial Master with a defensive Martial Art would take in a student with an offensive or maneuvering-oriented Martial Art, no matter how brilliant that student was.')

That made sense. Why would a Martial Master bother with things that weren't their specialty?

('That also implies that the students that do get chosen are probably are Martial Apprentices. Assuming they choose students with compatible and similar Martial Arts, then only those who have discovered and chosen their Martial Art are eligible to be chosen.')

That meant that the best thing Rui could do to be eligible was to reach Martial Apprentice. He highly doubted whether or not Martial Masters bothered with students below that rank. Students who hadn't broken into the Martial Apprentice rank weren't even Martial Artists, they simply weren't worth the time and attention of such august figures.

('So ultimately, neither my goal, nor my decisions have changed. I just need to become a Martial Artist worthy of their attention.')

Far easier said than done, Rui realized, but he wasn't going to let that stop him.

"...And that about wraps up the first segment of our presentation." Chancellor Callux concluded, smiling.

"I'll be moving onto the rights and privileges and responsibilities of students. As an introduction, allow me to inform you about the goal and interest we sought to achieve when the Academy framed the current iteration of rules and regulations, as well as rights and privileges of students. We wish to create an environment where students can dedicate their time and energy into developing and pursuing their Martial Art without unnecessary burdens, hindrances or restrictions."

"The framework of rules and regulations is centred around the goal of preventing students from hindering and obstructing themselves or other students through undesirable practises. The guidelines we present are aimed at helping the students adopt the right mind-set and temperament needed to become successful Martial Artists. We have a rigorous student evaluation system that measures misdemeanours as defined the by the penal code of the Kandrian Martial Academy's rules and regulations."

"The consequences for too many misdemeanours will be straightforwardly be expulsion. The Academy seeks to retain only those students that have the drive to become Martial Artists. Another thing that I will go into is..."

Of course, most of the students who managed to crack the exams were usually all those who strongly wished to become Martial Artists, otherwise they would not have passed even the first round. Yet there

was a smaller proportion of students who managed to pass the exam without possessing a purer drive to become a Martial Artist. The strong penalties for misdemeanours and violations were amended into the rules and regulations of the Academy for this very reason.

"... etc. All of this is, of course, merely the philosophy and principle driving the rules and privileges students possess, not the actual rules and privileges themselves, you will all be provided with a rulebook when you leave. I strongly encourage all students and all guardians to read them thoroughly." He said, as he held up a copy of the rule book.

('That book is thick as fuck.') Rui groaned inwardly.

"Heh, looks like you'll have a lot of reading to do when we get back home Rui." Julian chuckled mirthfully.

"Tell me about it. Can I ask you to read it and then give me an abridged version of it?"

"Don't load your work off of others, young man." Julian said, while playfully karate chopping Rui. "This is part of the process."

Rui sighed, still, he was glad to see that the rules were taken seriously, and were seriously enforced. Back on Earth, bullying was rampant because schools simply lacked the faculties by which it could enforce them. Teachers couldn't be bothered with bullying unless it was too far; they simply weren't paid enough. A lot of kids suffered from antagonisation, particularly amongst the teenagers, they couldn't rely on the teachers.

And if they decided to take matters into their own hands, the situation would escalate and the conflict would be intense enough for the school to be involved, in such cases victims almost always were punished for escalating, while bullies recieved punishment to a lesser degree or in some cases none at all.

('I have no fucking interest in dealing with that nonsense for a second time.') Rui clenched his fist in anger. He had been bullied in middle school and high school, he was a weak and scrawny kid who would start gasping for air every time he grew tense, after all. One of the major driving forces for his motivation for martial arts back on Earth was because he admired the strength that martial artists possessed.

They could fight for themselves, no matter who, no matter what. 'That's so cool!' Rui recalled thinking as a child in his previous life. Of course, as he grew up, so did his love and passion for martial arts and combat sports. What was once a childish infatuation for the aesthetics and exaggerated strength, matured into an intellectual passion, causing him to go down the path of becoming a researcher of martial arts and combat sports.

('I guess, in some way, I ought to be grateful to my bullies?') Rui shook his head, the mere thought if that was repulsive.

('Putting that aside, it seems I won't be re-experiencing that one more time in this Academy. Assuming this Chancellor isn't talking out of his ass.') Rui threw skeptical glance at him.

It was the Induction Ceremony of the Academy, after all. What chancellor would talk shit about their Academy on this day? If anything, it was possible he was just covering up the true state of the Academy with vague, flowery lies that were merely meant to dress up the Academy. This wasn't an uncommon phenomenon in his previous life either.

('Well, to be fair, he did just describe an intricate student evaluation system. It would be one hell of a lie if he blatantly fabricated all of that. Usually when representatives of institutions lie about the state of affairs, they're vague and ambiguous, but he's been nothing but detailed, elaborate and precise, even now.') Rui noted while listening to Chancellor Callux's words carefully.

('Well the only thing I can do either way is wait and see.')

He would find out what the Academy was like himself, soon enough. He took careful mental notes of the extensive presentation on the rules and regulations, the rights and privileges and the means by which they were enforced.

"This brings us to the final segment. The future that lies beyond the Academy." Chancellor Callux continued. "The Academy, as you all know, is owned and funded by the Kandrian Martial Union. The Union invests in students in order to maintain a fresh supply of Martial Artists. Part of the reason for this is of course to compensate for the Martial Artists that perish in missions..."

('Part of it' eh? It seems there's more to it, just as I suspected.')

"Once you graduate, you can immediately register with the Kandrian Martial Union. The Union has a flexible contract system. Graduates with higher capabilities as measured by the Academy will receive more favourable contracts, in regards to the commission cost cut you receive. Your performance in the Academy will impact the contract you negotiate with the Union." Chancellor Callux smiled.

## Chapter 26: Provocation

('Interesting. I guess the contract you negotiate revolves around how much utility you provide to the Union, the higher the utility you provide, the more lucrative the contract you can negotiate. Martial Squires probably can't negotiate that lucrative a contract with the Union, and would probably have to settle with lower commission-cuts.')

From this it could be inferred that higher realms of Martial Artists would easily be able to negotiate higher commission-cut rates; higher proportions of the money paid for the mission.

('Martial Squires probably receive fifty-percent of the money paid for a mission that they completed, or something in that range. It's likely that the higher you go, the greater the cut/percentage of the money paid for the mission you get.')

"...and these are the means and ways by which your time in the Academy can influence your contract in the Union." Chancellor Callux concluded.

"This brings us to an end to the primary presentation of the Induction Ceremony. As I'm sure you've realized, the goal of this short presentation was not to cover every shred of information that is relevant in any way to your studentship at our Academy. But to give you a broad understanding of our system, norms, policies and regulations. The details are far too many to be able to possibly fit within a single presentation, nor are they worth diving into rigorously in a single presentation. Of course, that doesn't mean they are not important, nor does it mean we won't address them, our Admission Department is fully equipped to address your inquiries and doubts of any kind once the Induction Ceremony is over." Chancellor Callux smiled.

"And with that, the presentation has come to an end. I thank you all for your patience, and I would like you all to join me in welcoming the Honour's Student in giving his speech. Please welcome Student Nel." He said, ushering a round of applause.

('Honour's student, eh? That must be the student that ranked number one in the entire Exam.') Rui mused curiously. He was indeed curious about what the number one student was like. Especially so since this student was evaluated to be higher than Kane and Fae by the examiners.

Messy silvery white hair, shockingly red eyes, an undignified and a carelessly nonchalant saunter. These were the traits that stood out from the Honour's student Nel. The applause even died down with how remarkably lacking the adolescent boy seemed to be in the most common etiquette that encompassed all human interaction. Apathy and disdain oozed out from his demeanour, he had the bearing and mien of a wild animal.

('This is the kid that beat all of us?') Rui wanted to laugh. It was too amusing.

The bright light illuminating the stage only intensified his scowl. By the time he reached the stage, Chancellor Callux was sweating.

"Welcome, Nel, I look forward to your speech." He courteously said, despite himself away from the megaphone. "Hm, where is your speech copy? "

"Don't have it."

"Eh?"

"Don't have it."

"S-Surely you jest."

Nel ignored the man and took his place in front of the megaphone-like device.

"Listen closely motherfuckers." He instructed. "He said something about no violence, but I don't give a fuck."

"..."

"Imma fuck y'all up."

"..."

"I ain't playing. I'm boutta fuck all y'all motherfucking asses up." He grinned.

The crowd was unamused.

"Who the fuck you think you are kid?"

"Let's take this outside little brat."

"Acting all tough just cus you won number one."

The crowd heckled him. What was once a dignified gathering was beginning to disintegrate into a chaotic mess.

Nel grinned even wider. This was what he wanted to see. The peaceful, calm and dignified atmosphere was terribly dull. Conflict was his mantra. If this little provocation could spark even a single fight, he would be grateful.

"There's no need to go outside old man, I'm right fucking here." Nel spread his arms. "What? You scared? You a lil bitch? Huh? HUH??" He taunted putting a foot atop the megaphone stand.

"The name's Nel! And I'm here to let you all know that each of you so-called students ain't fucking shit. Y'all lil pussies who ain't got the balls to beat me. I'll dominate each and every single one of you, anytime, anywhere, anyhow and anywho. I'll spank your asses like the little children you are. Come at me, motherfucking wusses." He said with a disgustingly smug, wide grin. He walked away flipping the bird at the audience.



Yet, despite how crude the provocation attempt was, it didn't fail completely. Rui get sense hostility emanating from his fellow batch-mates.

('... Is that even allowed?') He laughed. He wasn't sure. But it was a breath of fresh air to him in all honesty. The kid was interesting. Still, what Rui was more interested in than his antics was his combat prowess.

('He ranked number one in the second-round too from what I remember. It would be cool to see him fight and check out what he's made of. I wonder who'd win in a fight between him and Fae.') He couldn't know until he saw Nel fight seriously, and Fae too. He was positive she'd held back against him, and he still had no idea how she knocked him out.

('All in good time.')

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"Are you sure we shouldn't intervene, Headmaster?" Chancellor Callux wanted to puke. He felt his lifespan reducing every time Nel tried to provoke a fight.

"He hasn't violated any rules thus far." Master Aronion sipped some tea peacefully. His calm and serene demeanor despite Nel's disruption boggled Chancellor Callux. It gave him almost as much anxiety as Nel himself did.

('That's because not insulting your fellow batch-mates is basic common sense! It's not in the rules because it's an obvious norm.') He facepalmed himself.

Master Aronian chuckled at Callux's expense, amused by the turn of events. He threw a glance at Nel. Where others might have seen a dangerous, savage beast in human skin with a maniacal temperament, he only saw an excited little chick throwing tantrums, eager to pick fights.

"This year's batch will be interesting.." He stroked his beard in a sagely manner, while observing Nel's antics.

"He's finally done! That felt like forever." Callux exclaimed as he saw Nel walking down the podium flipping the middle finger to the audience. Relief sparked across his face only to be replaced with anxiety as he realized it was his turn next to follow up after that catastrophe of an honour's student speech.

"Can I resign?" He mirthfully asked.

"Sure, go give that speech first."

"Sigh" Callux steeled himself while putting on his standard diplomatic courteous smile, before walking down the stage, leaving Master Aronion chuckling at his expense.

As Callux commenced the closing speech of the Induction ceremony, Master Aronian threw a glance at the crowd from the guest chambers, spotting several students he was looking for. Nel, Fae, Kane and Rui, among others.

('This year's batch will definitely be interesting.')

## Chapter 27: Friction

('What a wild card...') Rui thought to himself as he exited the Presentation Hall with Julian.

"It's a little worrisome that you're going to be attending the Martial Academy in the same batch as him. Be wary of the boy." Julian advised.

"Will do. I doubt he'd go out of his way to bully a thirteen-year-old child, though."

"You never know."

Rui didn't think the probability of him running into Nel was high. The training and grouping system were not like they were on Earth, where batchmates were of the same age and entered the schooling system in the same year. Since the Martial Path varied drastically from person to person, it made little sense to just thoughtlessly toss people of the same age into the same category.

People developed their Martial Art at different rates, people like Kane were far ahead of other students despite being much younger, it made little sense to treat them the same, and train them the same. Furthermore, since Martial Art was so drastically unique and personal, different people required different trainings. It made little sense for one to be tossed into the same training regime. A large portion of their Academic time would also be exploration of one's volition. Self- training and self-learning were part of the journey.

Just as Rui was contemplating about the nuances of his Academic curriculum-

"Rui! I'm glad you made it."

Kane called out to him. His green eyes wide with delight, he jogged over to Rui.

"Hey man, it's been a while." Rui offered in return, smiling.

"Yeah, it has."

Rui glanced at his guardian escort. A middle-aged man, with neatly combed hair and a well-groomed attire. He wore lavish clothes which, while not enough to draw a lot of attention, indicated he wasn't just some small assistant. Rui noted a crest like symbol embroidered onto his formal clothing, one identical to that of Kane's.

('A family crest, eh?')

"Tell me, how did you pass?" Kane inquired curiously. "I know I saw someone taking your badge."

"I have no idea, I was just as surprised as your when I received the letter of admission."

"That's strange, but still, who cares? You passed, we can hang together now." Kane grinned.

"Yeah, thankfully I was lucky enough to have passed."

Suddenly a voice called out to him.

"It wasn't luck, Rui Quarrier."

Rui didn't even need to turn around to see who called out. He recognized her voice instantly.

"Fae..." He said. She was alone, as an adult, she did not need a Guardian. She wore what Rui could swear was a fake smile. It was a perfect inscrutable mask that hid her emotions remarkably well, preventing those around her from getting a read on her.

Rui narrowed his eyes, clenching his fist as his expression turned stern. He was not a vindictive person, rather than pursuing something as dumb as revenge for getting knocked out by her, he would rather make the best out of that experience and grow strong enough to never let it happen again. As long as he didn't suffer an immoral injustice, he was used to looking forward. Still, he could not look fondly at a person who basically bullied others for fun.

"What do you want?"

"My, you sound a little hostile."

"Tends to happen when people knock me out for amusement. It would be one thing if you attacked me for my badge, it's another thing to torment others for fun. I don't like people like that."

"Technically that self-defense, I didn't intend to knock you out, merely spar with you till Nel was free, but you were strong enough to force me to go all-out." She shrugged.

"That's sophistry, you know." Rui sighed in exasperation.

Fae's eyes twinkled. "Regardless, you passed of your own merit. The Martial Academy's Admission department is not incompetent."

"I lost my badge, that's zero points for me, clearly below the average. I failed in the criteria for passing."

Fae giggled softly.

"Who said the points had anything to do with the criterion?"

Rui threw her a confused look. "Master Aronian said so."

"Master Aronian..." She continued. "...Said that the criterion was up to their discretion. He never said the fulfillment of the objective was a guaranteed pass. Nor did he said failing the objective was a fail."

Rui glanced at her, unamused. Technically, she was right. Master Aronian's phrasing did indeed match what she said, from what he remembered. Still, if an objective is provided with the goal of evaluating the applicants, wasn't it obvious that the outcome of your attempt would be relevant to your evaluation?

"You're splitting hairs again." He retorted.

"The outcome of the badges was frankly irrelevant from the very start. The examiners merely wished to throw the applicants into conflict with each other and evaluate their performance given their circumstances." She explained. "You were a target for applicants from the very start. Yet you managed to retain your badge almost till the very end despite being younger, and thus weaker than most other applicants, you accomplished this through resourceful tactics. Although, you did lose your badge, you lost your badge to me, the strongest applicant. And even then, your performance against me was quite impressive, all things considered. All these data-points factored into the admission department's evaluation of you."

Rui threw a skeptical expression at her. So she attacked him knowing his performance against her would do him good rather than bad? Seemed convenient. "You seem awfully informed about matters that should be classified within the Academy. How could you possibly know all this?"

"She has a Martial Sage for a grandmother." Kane interjected. "there's nothing the Academy can keep hidden from a Martial Sage. She must have gotten a ton of information and used that to her advantage."

Rui could hear a bit of spite in his tone. Fae threw him a courteous smile in response.

"My, it's been a while, young master Kane."

"Wish it had been a bit longer, not gonna lie." Kane scowled.

"Is it just me or do I hear a bit of resentment in your voice. Ah, are you perhaps jealous that I played with Rui here instead of you in the Exam, you must be at that age, after all."

Kane, being the teenager that he was, took her bait.

"You-!" Rui put a hand on his shoulder, pulling him back.

"Calm down, Kane." He advised, before throwing an exasperated glance at Fae.

('She's egging him on and she enjoys it.') Rui mused helplessly. ('These two clearly have some history. There's no way such passive hostility springs out of nowhere. Is it because of their prides as descendants of Martial Sages? Kane never struck me as the proud type, and Fae seems to be half-trolling, though I can't make out a damn thing about her under that mask.')

Still, the conversation had confirmed his suspicions that she was from a Martial family, that partly explained her great combat prowess, she didn't strike him as a genius like Kane was.

('Kane has raw talent and limitless potential, but her prowess strikes me more as the product of maddening training and willpower, and sheer experience.')

Even if he wasn't particularly fond of her façade of a temperament, he had to acknowledge and respect the sheer drive with which she reached her current level of power.

"Let's chill guys." He tried alleviating the prickly atmosphere. He wasn't sure what the deal between these two was, but he'd rather it didn't escalate.

## Chapter 28: Limitless

Rui was still pondering about Fae's words earlier. They made more and more sense in hindsight.

('I do recall Master Aronian saying the criteria was left to their discretion. But I didn't think the criteria would be so independent of the outcome of the objective.')

Rui didn't think the decision to accept it could have been too easy, the outcome likely still mattered to some extent. Maybe there was some degree of a controversy within the Union.

He shrugged, he couldn't possibly know and probably never would. And frankly, he had no interest either. He glanced at Fae before asking her something that had been bugging him for a while.

"How did you knock me out?" He really wanted to know what she'd done.

"I struck you with my palm." She smiled at him.

"How did you strike me hard enough to knock me out in that position and range?" He squinted his eyes in confusion.

"I can't go around revealing my trump cards so easily, now can I?" Fae threw a mischievous smile at him

"It's a technique called Outer Convergence, it's a technique that allows you to gather power from all over your body into a single strike. It allows you to strike with a great amount of power, above your weight class, from practically any position if fully mastered." Kane explained.

Rui's eyes flew wide open, while Fae's eyes narrowed, throwing a subtle, yet sharp glare at Kane, who basked in her hostility with a smug grin. It sparked another bout of bickering provoked by Fae. But Rui couldn't be bothered by their tantrums.

('Gathering power from all across the body into a single strike. That's normally impossible except in a perfectly-suited position allowing you to leverage torque from all muscle groups. It's interesting she

could accumulate and summate torque from muscle groups all across the body in that position. It seems like a much more advanced version of the One-Inch Punch back on Earth.')

The One-Inch Punch was an iconic strike that worked similarly to how Kane described Outer Convergence. Obviously, Rui knew absolutely everything fathomable there was to fathom about the One-Inch Punch. The reason he failed to realize that Fae had hit him with a One-Inch Punch was because it made no sense to him, a person from Earth. It was true that the One-Inch Punch was a good demonstration of the channeling and convergence of power, it was also flashy and cool.

Except the One-Inch Punch was useless in actual fights; it was completely impractical and worthless to launch strikes from one inch away, which is why no MMA/UFC fighter did that. Whereas Outer Convergence allowed Fae to perform feats that would be physically impossible on Earth.

('Martial Art, techniques and skills in this universe and world are not limited the way they were on Earth.')

Well, duh. Rui had known this ever since he saw a Martial Artist destroy a massive tree trunk with a single punch. But back then, it was all veiled in mystery, seeing exactly how they defied the laws of physics was shocking to him.

('It's almost as if the world is warping in and of itself, conspiring to allow techniques and skills such as this to surpass their limits. The laws of physics seemed to be just so ever slightly different such that his scientific background was relevant, while still different enough to allow such phenomena to occur.')

That was, of course, still speculation. He didn't dive deeper into the profound ontological gripes to be had between the differences of this world and his own. Frankly, he didn't care to, it wasn't his main interest. He put the issue at rest, for now.

"How do you know about the technique Kane? Have you also learnt it?" Rui asked.

"I haven't, it's not particularly relevant to the direction in which I'm developing my Martial Art. I know of it because it's a somewhat common technique in offensive striking oriented Martial Arts, I've come across it before several times, it's hard to deal with."



It made sense, Outer Convergence certainly seemed to be a technique that was aimed at maximizing offense at the cost of maneuvering, this would run contrary to what Rui knew about Kane's Martial Art.

"So the fact that you use Outer Convergence means your Martial Art is probably centered around offense, right?" He asked Fae.

"My Martial Art is indeed a short-range striking-oriented offensive Martial Art."

"Short-range because of the palm-centric offensive style, right?"

Fae nodded in return, smiling.

Within the domain of close-quarters combat, kicking length was treated long-range, punching length was treated as mid-range, and elbowing/kneeing range was treated as short range. Fae's striking style fell just short of mid-range CQC(close-quarters combat), thus being short range.

"Speaking of personal Martial Art, I wonder what yours will end up looking like." Fae told him with a hint of curiosity on her face.

"I'd observed you for quite a while during the third-round, you never particularly demonstrated an affinity for any one particular domain, range, or technique" She continued. "From what I can see, you've been dedicating at least a large portion of your life to preparing for your Martial Path. It's rather odd you haven't developed affinities. Usually, signs of one's Martial Art can be seen to atleast some degree even prior to the Martial Apprentice stage."

Rui shrugged. "I'm not particularly drawn into any one particular style of fighting. I might become an all-rounder."

"...Interesting, all-rounder styles are obviously more flexible than specialized styles, so that is a good choice." Kane pointed out.

"Indeed, but there are also downsides to all-rounder styles. All-rounder styles have a greater variety of types of approaches in a fight, however, this means that the analysis and judgement needed to

accurately choose the most efficient and effective choice, is much more difficult. The greater the variety of choices, the harder it is to choose correctly. Furthermore, the longer it takes to choose. This is the downside to all-rounder styles." Rui continued.

On Earth, of course, the benefits that all-rounder styles, like the generic MMA fighting style, brought to the table surpassed the benefits brought by specialized styles. The empirical data was clear, fighters who hyper-specialized lost in a UFC/MMA setting, which was the closest thing to real combat.

Pure strikers were unable to deal with grapplers once the grapplers closed in point-blank, pure grapplers were unable to cope with ranged nature of striking that prevented pure grapplers from reaching point-blank, not without getting severely hurt or knocked out.

However, this was not Earth. This was Gaea. The Martial Art in this world was vastly different from that of the martial arts on Earth. This meant that things that shackled the fighters of Earth did not exist in this world!

## Chapter 29: Clueless Expert

Fae and Kane threw him an odd look.

"Hm? Do you disagree with what I said?" Rui raised an eyebrow to their reaction.

"No.." Kane mumbled.

"I agree with it, I think it's a nuanced take, but it's something I heard from my grandmother, it's odd to hear that from someone with no formal training." She stared at him with a hint of puzzlement

"It's just weird because sometimes you seem clueless about basic Martial Art, but the next second turn into an expert." Kane laughed awkwardly.

Rui shrugged. He, of course, knew the truth. He appeared clueless sometimes because he genuinely was clueless, Martial Art was greatly different from martial arts in many ways. Yet they shared many underlying traits on a broader scale for a large portion of his expertise to be relevant. Things that were

completely alien to Earth such as techniques like Outer Convergence, he was ignorant about. But the general advantages and disadvantages of styles and the determinant variables that determined the outcome between two different styles and approaches did not change, here he was an unparalleled theoretical expert on these topics, the likes of which he doubted anybody but the most experienced Masters and Sages could rival.

Still, he didn't let it get to his head. Fact of the matter was that he was ignorant, he had a lot of learning to do before he could hold himself as an expert on the field like he did in his previous life. And that would take a long time. Not that he minded, the journey was half the destination. Every time he entertained thought of his Martial Path, he would grow excited from the bottom of his heart

"Well, as long as you know." Kane shrugged.

"For what it's worth, I do think an all-rounder style would suit you more than a hyper-specialized style especially because of your resourceful and tactical approach. But that means you'll have to become a jack of all trades, but a master of none."

"I'm fine with that. The greater versatility and flexibility are worth the trade." Rui replied. This he was sure of.

Rui often likened combat sports with artistry. There were several parallels between them. A good painting was born of three things; The necessary tools, the artist's proficiency with those tools and the manner in which the artist applied his tools and proficiency to paint the vision he sought after. Another analogy that Rui had conceived was that of a surgery.

A perfect surgery most certainly needed the appropriate tools and instruments, as well as a surgeon who was proficient in using those tools and also; a surgeon who knew what operations needed to be performed in order to obtain the desired outcome.

Combat and Martial Art were no different, in a way. The tools of a fighter were that of his body, his limbs, his torso, his head and every cell in his body. The higher the quality of the tools, the more that could be accomplished with them. Obtaining high quality tools was the foundation of Martial Art. A powerful, capable body was fundamental to the framework of combat in both Gaea and Earth. Next; the proficiency of those tools was analogous to the techniques employed in combat.

These techniques were nothing more than means and ways to operate the body in order to efficiently and effectively accomplish a set of tasks and actions, this encompassed both accuracy and precision of movements

And finally, the application of the tools and techniques. Using the right move at the right time.

An extremely important aspect of combat. What did it matter if one possessed the body of a god, and the movements of a machine if one used the absolute worst move at any given time? It didn't, such a person would lose to another with bad tools and techniques, but great application.

Currently, Rui was closer to the latter. A lifetime of research into mid-combat analysis and judgement, a lifetime of research into probability of success of tactics applied in various scenarios with carefully constrained and controlled variables.

This was something of immense utility in Gaea and Rui possessed it in spades.

This was why he was likely to pick an all-rounder Martial Art. They were more versatile and flexible compared to other Martial Art, their only downside was that they were very tactically intensive, meaning, of the three aspects of combat mentioned prior; tools, proficiency and application. All-rounder styles required much higher quality of application compared to other styles.

Thus, it was very suited to Rui, whose strongest advantage was his tactical application.

The reasoning behind his decision was certainly a bizarre outlier. There was no way to train tactical application the same way one's body and technique could be trained. Tactical application was something that usually came with a vast amount of experience, real experience. It required fighting, and more fighting, and even more fighting.

The quality of one's application of techniques was mostly combination of intelligence and experience. This was why Rui was suited to it. His brain was still developing, and would continue to do so until the age of twenty-five, meaning his mind would be growing sharper and sharper for a second time. And although he lacked practical experience which would no doubt hinder him in the short run, his theoretical foundations and knowledge were simply out of this world.

Rui suspected that whatever his Martial Art would end up looking like, he would probably be unlike any other all-rounder in the world. Though he still wasn't able to accurately extrapolate what this would look like, exactly.

"Rui." Julian interrupted his train of thought while approaching the trio. He had distanced himself from them when they approached Rui, not wanting to awkwardly be part of a conversation he clearly had no place in. He'd instead given them space and taken the liberty to read up on the Academy information booklet the Admission Department had been providing to students and their guardians at free of cost. Ideally, he'd want to allow Rui to spent time with fellow students for as long as possible, but;

"You really ought to read up and clarify any doubts you have sooner than later Rui, you won't get another chance until the Academic year begins."

## Chapter 30: Debt

"...True." Rui concurred, before facing Kane and Fae.

"Sorry guys, but I really ought to visit the admission department support staff. That is one of the reasons I came here today, after all."

"Sure, no problem, see ya later. We should hang out iny my place sometime." Kane replied, earning a nod from Rui.

"I'll be looking forward to meeting you once our academic year begins." Fae bade courteously.

The two of them waved Rui off before setting out in the opposite directions, as though they did not want to spend any extra time with each other.

('What's with those two?') Rui couldn't help but wonder at this point.

"You have some interesting friends." Julian noted, throwing Rui a wry smile. "But they don't seem to get along with each other for some reason."

"Yeah, it's strange. They're acquaintances, probably because they both are direct family of Martial Sages." Rui shrugged. "They must have some history together."

"Hm, anyway, let's go now." Julian said as he led the way to down a long, large and ostentatious corridor. The décor was so extravagant that Rui couldn't help but wonder whether he was in at a school or the Royal Palace. Gold, platinum, silver streaked across the décor. The architecture was so unnecessarily extra, it made Rui wonder about the actual purpose.

('It's almost like the Martial Academy, no, the Martial Union is making a statement to all students who traverse its Academy.')

It was one thing to rub in its prestige with facilities and amenities that had actual utility, it was another to spend resources on something so vain.

('It's almost like they're purposely competing with Royal standards.')

He'd once seen what Royal extravagance looked like when he saw the Mantian Royal premises from afar a few years back.

('Maybe they are competing with the Royal Family.')

This was random pure speculation on Rui's part. But he didn't think that two separate entities with vast amounts of economic and militaristic power within a single nation would get along with each other.

('Not that I know anything about politics.')

He knew the bare basics back on Earth, and only the bare basis because he didn't bother with politics, ever. He'd never voted even a single time in his entire life. Democratic or Republican government, what practical day-to-day impact did it have on his life?

Ultimately, ambitious rich power-mongers engaged in a squabble for more power and more money, most of which came at the cost of the poorest and most disenfranchised class of people of society. Back on Earth, he hadn't even wanted to even dip his toes in this quagmire of modern society.

Fortunately, he made enough money to not be affected much regardless of how much the political landscape changed. His income was upper-middle class, and he led a frugal and liability-less life, with

that much money, he did not need to give a shit and could engage in the things he cared about most, combat research.

('Though, maybe I should care for the politics in this world, to some degree.')

The reason was simple:

The existence, as well as the impact of Martial Art.

One did not need to be a political pundit to see that Martial Art made a huge impact on political considerations, just the very existence of Martial Art was enough proof. It was highly likely the world would look extremely different if it weren't for Martial Art.

As an aspiring Martial Artist and a lover of Martial Art. The impact of politics in Gaea would likely have a much greater impact on him, should he succeed in becoming a Martial Artist, than it did back on Earth. After all, back on Earth, he was nobody. Just another cog among another 320,000,000 or so Americans. But as a Martial Artist, he would be part of militaristically 'elite' one-percent.

Rui was not arrogant, but Martial Artists impacted politics much more so than other citizens, they were walking fully-autonomous armies. There was no way such power would not get mixed up in a political muck with or without their consent, as long as they lived in a society.

('If that is the case, I should be careful. I should also be more informed on the current political climate. In the future.')

Rui shrugged. Making vague and generic precautions plans was the best he could do. He lacked too much information and too much power to even bother with anything more.

"Looks like we're here." Julian told him. They'd arrived at a large reception hall looking room.

"Fancy as always." Rui noted. The room was filled with an array of counters with staff on one side and students on the other side, clarifying their doubts.

"There's an empty spot there, let's go." Julian gestured. The occupied the seats opposite to an empty counter as a staff member greeted them.

"How may I help you."

"There several things I'd like to learn more about, but specifically, I was hoping you could tell me more about the scholarship program." Rui replied. This was the most important matter to him presently. He needed to qualify to get a scholarship, in order to that he needed to learn more about it.

The staff member nodded in response before replying.

"Absolutely. The scholarship program was set up to help students who are unable to afford the hefty tuition, housing and other fees that end up accumulating to a rather hefty amount per Academic background. You can incur the fees as debt and repay it back when you become a Martial Artist."

"The information booklet provided specifies a specific mode of payment, correct? Can you tell us more about it?"

"Indeed. Let me give you a brief overview about the contracting system of the Martial Union before I speak about scholarship debt repayment. Once you graduate from the Academy as a Martial Squire, you will be negotiating a contract with the Martial Union that describes the payment structure/rates you will receive your payment with, in exchange for completing missions commissioned to the Martial Union by customers. So, for example, one common contract offered by the Union is the commission-cut contract, more commonly known as the Royalty Contract. You will receive a specific proportion of the commission fees paid by customers for a mission. Something like, say, forty-percent. So, if a customer commissions a bodyguard mission for a hundred silvers, for example, then you'll receive forty silvers, and the remaining sixty go to the Martial Union."

"In this case, if you have scholarship debt, then you may repay that debt by taking a twenty-percent lower Royalty Contract." He continued.

"The Royalty Contract is only one type of contract that the Union offers, but going in depth into the contracting system is not necessary. The point is; no matter what kind of contract structure you negotiate with the Martial Union when you register, your debt will be accounted for in the contract and you'll sign a contract that effectively reduced your income until your debt is paid."



('Interesting...')