

## Martial Unity 291

### Chapter 291: Clash

Rui did not forget that despite all his strength, the Academy counted him as a grade seven Martial Artist, three levels below grade ten. Even Fiona was probably at grade eight or nine at most. She had mastered a lot of techniques, but her Martial Art lacked individuality. Her prowess came from her techniques, not the depth of her Martial Path.

One of the reasons he was able to cope as well as he did in their fight despite the large gap was because his mind had reached a higher level in the Apprentice Realm than hers did. His raw cognitive and neural enhancements were greater, it's just that she more than made up for that gap with a bunch of powerful and incredibly difficult techniques.

Hafborn was the example of someone who was incredibly powerful due to a lifetime of accumulation of techniques and experience. He was not a man who had been a Martial Apprentice for merely six or seven years. Rui wouldn't be surprised if Hafborn had been a Martial Apprentice for far more than just that.

Even if Rui was a monster who could swallow up techniques at a rate of one per month, it was not possible overwhelm such a huge age and experience gap that easily.

It was for this reason that Rui truly looked forward to fighting him. An excited grin broke under his mask as he thought of the idea of testing his Flowing Void Style against Hafbor's Martial Art.

Soon, his wish was granted.

"And yet another win for Apprentice Frillix Hafbor. A remarkable performance, will his streak end?" The butler elegantly spoke. "Coming up next, we have the representative fighter of Lady Nartha Freier. This is Apprentice Falken's debut in the Martial games. How well will he perform against the defending champion?"

Immediately, a mild wave of interest fluttered through the guests. New fighters were always interesting.

Rui walked down the stair leading to the small arena below, as he felt many gazes pouring down onto him. The fact that he concealed his identity made him even more mysterious and exciting to them.

"Lady Freier." One of the women Nartha was accompanied by addressed her. "What is his identity?"

She shook her head, sighing. "I cannot divulge that I'm afraid."

"My." She woman raised an eyebrow, before looking down back at the arena. The air had already changed by the time Rui even reached Hafbor and the arbiter. He wasn't as immersed into his opponent as he was during the Martial Contest, yet the pressure his mind radiated clashed with Hafborn as the two fighters stared at each other wordlessly, silently regarding each other.

Rui stopped as he reached Hafborn.

"Take your stances." The arbiter instructed.

Hafbor adopted his rock-solid stance once more.

Rui instead went for a stance that focused on offensive maneuvering. He didn't bother trying to focus on raw power, his raw power was insufficient to hurt Hafbor. With maneuvering instead, he could exploit holes in his Hafbor's defense to land the Stinger onto his eyes or balls. Rui had no problem in attacking his testicles, Martial Artists staked more than just those when they accepted life-threatening missions.

Furthermore, with potions, any damage to them could be undone, leaving him with no compunctions.

However, Hafbor was not stupid. While it was true that his eyes and balls were his greatest weaknesses, it didn't take a genius to figure this out. It was clear to Rui that he was aware of this. The position of his arms and legs relative to Rui were such that it would be pretty hard for Rui to land a strike on either of those locations.

Normally, Rui's greater speed would allow him to jab those locations before Hafbor could defend, but because his arms and legs were positioned to obstruct attacks to those locations.

"Begin." the arbiter commenced the fight.

Rui shuffled around a bit, before smoothly dashing in abruptly, hoping to throw Hafbor off.

Yet he was unfazed.

POW POW POW!

Rui threw a flurry of jabs at him using Vital Pressure and Outer Convergence

WOBBLE

The strikes were cleanly redirected as Rui felt his balance briefly disrupted. This sensation was rather bizarre, but it also felt unsafe, Rui couldn't really launch follow-up attacks worth launching in that state. He understood immediately that he had underestimated Hafbor's active redirection defense. Not only could Hafbor redirect strikes away from himself with little amount of energy, but he could also raise the difficulty of throwing follow-up strikes. What this meant for Rui was that it was much more difficult even maintaining a constant flow of attacks against him.

"Tsk." Rui tutted as he retreated for a second, regaining his bearings. He dashed in again, launching a weighted strike.

Hafbor shifted his guard to block.

Yet;

WHOOSH

It was a feint!

Rui swirled, crouching as he launched a low strike to Hafbor's crouch.

POW

Hafbor shifted his body ever so slightly before the attack landed, causing it to strike his pelvis bone. Rui immediately retreated.

Normally, when people evaded strikes, they tried shifting their entire body out of the way of a strike, otherwise there wasn't much point in dodging.

However, this wasn't really the case for Hafbor. He didn't need to move his whole body out of the way, he only needed to shift his vulnerable areas out of the way and that was good enough. His body was so tough that as long as he shifted the weakest parts of his body out of the way, he was not worried.

Rui's attacks could hit him basically anywhere, he would not move away unless his eyes and groin were being targeted, and because they were smaller than other places normally aimed for, he only needed to shift his body to a limited degree to move them out of the way of attacks.

This made evasion far easier for him than it was for everyone else.

Rui would need to find a way to land a critical attack despite this, one way or another.

#### Chapter 292: Outcome

Rui gained a more thorough understanding of Hafbor's formidability through their exchanges. The man was probably the best defense-oriented Martial Artist he had come across. Arjun was strong as well, but his Martial Art was mostly passive, since his Martial Path was body conditioning.

Rui was of the opinion that well-balanced defenses such as Hafbor's were the hardest to deal with.

Still, one good thing about the fight was that Rui could be as aggressive as he wanted. Hafbor's offensive and counter-offensive initiative was not all that threatening to Rui. In most cases, he was too slow to land a clean strike on Rui, and even if he weren't his offense was not impressive. It wasn't weak, either,

Rui couldn't withstand it with zero damage, but it would truly take a long time before the damage could actually hinder Rui.

Thus, Rui increasingly hit the pedal harder as he began pushing his maneuvering to the max. Hafbor increasingly grew strained as it became more and more difficult to redirect all of Rui's attacks. He began relying more on his passive defense, his conditioning, than his redirection.

Although redirection was not physically taxing, it was mentally taxing. Although Hafbor was good at it, estimating the correct timing and placement for applying force to correctly redirect strikes away was difficult. This was especially true for speedy motions like the one Rui was exhibiting. This was the adapted style that Rui had created with the VOID algorithm.

POW POW POW

Rui launched a powerful flurry of attacks that Hafbor redirected smoothly. Suddenly, Rui lashed out an attack for his groin, Hafbor shifted.

Yet;

WHOOSH

It was a feint.

('Now!')

PEW!

His right toe cut through the air.

"Aaargh!" Hafbor grimaced as the toe plunged into his right eye, blinding him.

A wave of surprise fluttered across the guests.

Rui retreated as Hafbor cradled his bleeding eye. He tried to regain his bearings as he entered a mild state of shock. He hadn't even seen the kick coming, he felt the pain before he even realized.

Rui had been waiting for the timely blink. The problem with the Blink technique was that Rui had no control over when they occurred. Furthermore, Hafbor was very careful, his eyes and groin were always guarded.

Rui needed a bit of luck for him to pull off a successful Blink-plus-Stinger combination. He needed to divert Hafbor's guard and also hope for a blink to happen that he could then use to exploit and land a Stinger to his vitals.

The best thing for Rui to do was simply creating opportunities that he could exploit and hope for a timely blink.

It had taken a while, but it finally happened. And Rui didn't hesitate to abuse the opening and inflict a critical injury on Hafbor.

Hafbor had managed to lessen the severity of the injury, despite being caught off-guard by the Blink. Yet, with half of his vision effectively gone, he didn't have much leeway.

Rui had also managed to cripple his active defense because perception was necessary for his delicate redirection.

What followed was one-sided domination. Rui abused the blind spot he had created to pepper Hafbor with powerful strikes. With one side of his vision gone, Rui was able to land the Stinger a few more times.

Eventually, Hafbor collapsed.

"And what a shocking outcome!" The butler cried. "Apprentice Falken is the new defending champion of the Martial games!"

A round of applause erupted from the guests.

"Seriously." One of the women around Nartha said. "Who is he?"

"He looks young. I bet he's a real hottie under that mask." Another chimed in.

"Congratulations Lady Freier, seems like you caught a big fish."

"My." Nartha smiled. "It seems I did indeed get a good one."

As the guests bantered, Rui couldn't help but think back to the fight. He felt uncomfortable by how few options he had had in his fight with Hafbor. The Stinger was supposed to be a trump card, but it had ended up his only path to victory.

This wasn't the first time either. The same thing had had happened in the Martial Contest. He wouldn't have been able to beat Ian without it, and he would have been able to hurt Fiona without it. Even in some of his hardest fights in preliminary contest. He needed the Stinger to win several of them.

That wasn't necessarily bad, however, he was coming to realize that at the highest levels of the Martial Apprentice Realm, his techniques were starting to grow obsolete.

A lot of the times, he chose to incorporate the Stinger technique into his adapted fighting style not because it was the best possible technique for the job, but it was the best technique that he had. If he had a more diverse set of higher-end techniques, he would not be forced to be so over reliant on the Stinger.

The same could be said of Blink.

Blink, at the highest echelons of the Apprentice Realm, was no longer enough by itself. It required Rui to go out of his way to create special circumstances and hope that his opponent blinked, and only when they did could he actually use Blink confidently.

Both of these techniques lost a lot of their power once his opponent knew about them. By now everyone knew about these, or at least the Martial Artists did. In a way, this made him weaker than he was before the preliminary contest.

Rui was not pleased about that. He had felt a certain degree of confidence in his prowess, but he soon realized that he needed to get stronger fast. He needed to be able to defeat the strongest of Martial Apprentices without going through a huge amount of strategic effort. Although his tactics and adaptive evolution were powerful, his techniques needed to support the VOID algorithm, not hold it back.

('The next training stage...') He clenched his fist as a wave of determination flashed through him. He stared at his next opponent with sharp eyes.

Chapter 293: Skip

Two months passed.

Rui continued his mission grind. Day-after-day, hour-by-hour. He relentlessly exposed himself to a wide variety of missions of different kinds. Occasionally he would form a party with his friends and complete some grade-nine missions, but otherwise he was mostly operating solo.

In these two months, he had gotten an immense amount of experience with mission completion. He had also consecutively gathered six thousand Martial credits in merely the span of two months. This was nearly thrice his previous rate, on average.

Part of the reason for this was because personal commissions were generally much more lucrative, and he had received a lot of them across the span of two months. Most of them were miscellaneous missions, but he did get enough missions of defense, offense and hunting classes to keep him going.

He had also continued with the sparring partner missions as well as his representative fighter commission with Nartha Freier.

Both of those missions had yielded him outcomes that he was quite pleased with. All of those missions were remarkably well-suited to his Flowing Void Style.



He had confirmed that the Martial Apprentices he had sparred with had grown much better in the span of two months. All of them had become remarkably more solid. Their Martial Art itself had not grown stronger, nor had the quantity or quality of techniques increased thanks to him specifically. However, the quality of the application of their techniques had indeed risen significantly.

They began applying their techniques more efficiently, and more mindful of their shortcomings and weaknesses. No longer could Rui effortlessly exploit and abuse their weaknesses the way he did on day-one. Of course, he still defeated them even without Blink and the Stinger, however by the end of sixty days he needed to fight quite seriously, barring his trump cards.

That was not an insignificant boost, especially not in the span of two months. Usually, this kind of boost required years of experience. Yet, Rui had confirmed that the Flowing Void Style was able to shorten the process significantly. He highly doubted any other form of training could possibly result in such a drastic increase in efficiency and effectiveness. Perhaps the Martial Union could rival him if it invested a lot in esoteric technology, however, the difficult and the cost of such an endeavor would surely be astronomical. He, in turn, could do it at no special cost.

Of course, he didn't necessarily intend to turn this into his main career, of course not. However, it was nice to see the fruits of a two lifetimes of labour result in such an unexpected boon. Perhaps he could reduce the frequency at which he accepted such commissions but still keep doing it once in a while for all the validation it gave him.

There were no worries that he wouldn't be able to either. The effectivity of his sparring training was not gone unnoticed. He had received many sparring partner commissions in the span of two months, not that he had accepted any, of course. Three was already pushing it. But having received all these commissions allowed him the luxury of variety of choice.

His representative fighter commission had gone even better. Two months later, he was still the defending champion. He had been knocked off his throne a few times by newer exceptionally powerful Martial Apprentices. There were Martial Apprentices far older than he was, with much greater experience and accumulation.

However, he always managed to knock them back and take back his spot eventually. The Flowing Void Style and the VOID algorithm was more effective the more data they had. However, it still usually took him a few tries and even then, it was quite close. Furthermore, it didn't mean they could never defeat

him again, there were several who were strong enough to win even after his adaptive evolution. These were Martial Artists with greater physicality, greater number of techniques and experience.

Furthermore, Rui had truly begun to feel his limitations in the past two months of fighting in the Martial games. Blink, Stinger and Phantom Step were now all well-known by all of those who came to fight him. It became far harder to execute these techniques in a fight. He needed to go through herculean effort in order to apply them the way he wanted, and it only kept getting harder and harder.

Not only had it grown harder, it had actually grown dangerous. People had learnt to be extremely careful, but also had learnt to set traps and be prepared for both of those techniques. Although most Martial Artists weren't as intelligent, strategic and tactical as he was, they were not morons either. Once Blink had become largely common knowledge, setting traps with some basic prediction and some powerful attacks while they purposely blinked had started to become more and more common.

This made Blink increasingly risky. Stinger was still a threat, but he still needed to be careful. He had broken his knee once because someone had predicted and prepared to intercept the Stinger. He had grown extremely wary ever since.

He had accumulated more than enough Credits for a set of new techniques, he just kept going to gain more experience. Experience was just as important as technique.

However, he had grown more than satisfied with the two months of mission grinding he had engaged in, he had broadened his worldview and enriched his understanding of the Martial world. Now it was time to take a step forward, down his Martial Path. He felt his Martial Art would stagnate if he postponed this any longer.

He intended to immerse himself in a long training period where he comprehensively took one step towards becoming a Squire candidate. He hadn't forgotten the new goals he had set for himself to immediately focus on; becoming a squire candidate and, eventually, a Martial Squire.

('It's time.') He mused as he paused before the large doors to the Apprentice library. He breathed deeply as he pushed forward.

It wasn't as though Rui hadn't thought about what kind of techniques he wanted to purchase; it was just that the choice grew harder every time he returned to the library.

When he first entered the library looking for the very first Martial Art techniques he wanted to learn, the choices were almost no-brainers. However, once he finished his fundamental needs, then it became a matter of optimization, which was much harder.

Still, he had a good idea of what he wanted. He needed some degree of boosting his foundational parameters such as offense, defense and maneuvering. After that, he needed to increase the variety of his higher-level solutions. He needed become an all-rounder even in his trump cards. Firstly, because that was part of his Martial Path. Secondly, there was no point in learning another technique that was very similar to Stinger, he would quickly run into the same problem. The existing solutions that people found for the Stinger and Blink would apply quickly to similar techniques.

However, if he had a significantly differing solutions, then he could avoid falling victim to existing solutions and tactics.

Another important goal of the upcoming training stage was fixing the VOID algorithm's faults. The first being difficult of application, and the second being adapting it to the Martial Art of Gaia.

Frankly, Rui had already thought about potential solutions. It was possible that there were mental techniques that could aid in the process, and he intended to verify that. Mental techniques that could aid him in the processing that using the VOID algorithm required. This could potentially solve the difficulty problem of the VOID algorithm, or at the very least, alleviate it to some degree.

As for adapting it to the Martial Art that existed in Gaia, that was a bit complicated. However, diversifying his Martial Art techniques and solutions should alleviate this problem. The Martial Contest and even the preliminary contest had shown him the sheer variety of fields of Martial Art that existed in this world. He had seen poison, heat, sound, nerves, shockwaves, friction, alcohol etc. as the basis for Martial Art techniques.

Perhaps there were Martial Art that could be best countered by one of these fields. In that case, Rui would only be able to effectively adapt to counter that Martial Art by possessing techniques in that field. And assuming there was no such thing as a field that had no weaknesses, barring all-rounders, then there should theoretically be no Martial Art Rui would be unable to adapt to.

With all of these thoughts occupying his head, he walked into the library.

('First, the basics.') He mused. ('Let's just begin by picking techniques that boost my basic combat parameters; offense, defense and maneuvering.')

In truth, he had already had ideas for what he wanted to pick.

As much as he disliked Ian Nepomniachtchi's personality and character, he had to admit he was extremely attracted to Ian's Martial Art techniques; the breathing techniques.

He had a foundational breathing technique that improved his stamina; Helical Breathing, however Ian's Martial Art was on a whole other level. The Fire, Lightning and Earth Breathing techniques he had used in the Martial Contest were incredibly strong.

However, they were more than just strong. They actually fit Rui's needs to an incredibly high degree. The Fire, Lightning and Earth breathing techniques amplified power, speed and durability respectively. Ian had mastered all of them and could switch between any at any given point in time, furthermore he could even use multiple techniques simultaneously, albeit partially.

What this meant is that he could effectively manipulate and customize his physical parameters to suit his needs. Manipulating his physical parameters to specifically adapt to his opponent, it was practically made for the Flowing Void Style.

With this, Rui could elevate his adaptive evolution to a level he hadn't even imagined. Before he could only alter the techniques, strategy and tactics he used to suit his opponents, now he could alter the physical parameters his body had as well!

He grinned, excited at the prospect.

Who wouldn't be?

He immediately headed over to the breathing technique sub-section within the supplementary section, and immediately began deep diving into the techniques.

He hadn't ever dug this deep into the breathing technique section, and he was surprised at how many things breathing could accomplish, it was truly remarkable.

Eventually, he stumbled into what he was looking for.

[Fire Breathing]

To increase the output of power of attacks by increasing the amount of air supplied to cells during the launching of attacks rather than a constant unchanging supply of air.

[Lightning Breathing]

To increase speed of certain maneuvers by supplying a large amount of air to cells during acceleration to top speed, allowing for top speed to be achieved sooner.

[Earth Breathing]

To increase durability by countering impacts with increase muscle rigidity caused by an increase in air supplied to cells.

The scrolls mentioned air instead of oxygen because Rui suspected that they weren't aware of the compound present in air that humans actually needed for survival. Still, the techniques worked equally well regardless.

The only problem was that each technique was a grade nine technique, much to Rui's surprise. But it made sense the more he thought about it. These techniques allowed Ian to hugely amplify his physical parameters. To the point where they allowed him to give specialists like Fae, Kane and Arjun a run for their money in their own fields.

Grade-nine techniques were extremely difficult to master. Usually, only people who a strong affinity towards the field the techniques were present in were able to master them.

Maybe if Rui spent a truly long time on one of them, he might be able to, although that was quite unlikely, but three? That was hopeless. He didn't want to pick only one either, since that would shift the balance of his Martial Art significantly, he would no longer be an all-rounder.

Just as he tried to think of a solution, something caught his eyes...

Chapter 295: Revelation

[Flame Breathing]

A less potent and less difficult version of Fire Breathing.

Rui raised his eyebrows in interest as he stepped in closer for a better look. To his pleasant surprise, he found that the difficulty was grade-seven, which was far more manageable and achievable. In fact, he found similar techniques for Lightning Breathing and Earth Breathing.

[Wind Breathing]

[Rock Breathing]

All of the names were tacky, they were each downgraded versions of the grade-nine breathing techniques.

Rui immediately picked the Flame Breathing and Wind Breathing techniques. However, just as he reached for the Rock Breathing technique, he hesitated.

The Rock Breathing technique was a form of active defense. Which meant defense that required active initiative and activation of the defenses from the user. It was different from passive defense which existed regardless of what the user did, like body conditioning.

The reason Rui was reluctant to choose this technique was because he already had three active defense techniques; Acute Edge, Elastic Shift and Inner Divergence. He didn't have a single passive defensive technique.

This was a problem because he had learnt the usefulness and even the necessity of passive defensive techniques. Passive defense would not reduce if he made a mistake in timing because they were perennial. It gave him greater leeway than active defenses did.

Of course, this didn't mean passive defenses were better than active defenses, not at all. There were just as many scenarios where active defenses did much better than passive defenses. Arjun Erigaisi had lost in the very first round because he did not have any active defenses to counter Servil's vibrations, while Rui defeated Servil with active measures.

It all depended on the circumstances, and Rui wanted eliminate circumstances where his Martial Art was entirely inadequate.

He shook his head, breaking his gaze from the Rock Breathing scroll. ('Maybe next time.')

As for passive defenses, he already knew what he wanted.

He quickly headed for the defensive section and began looking for an appropriate defensive conditioning training technique. There were plenty, each for different purposes. He, however, was looking for something more general.

And he found it soon enough.

[Adamant reforging]

A conditioning technique that generally increased the durability and toughness of flesh for a variety of all kinds of damage, including blunt force, piercing, heat and elastic strain.

It was a grade-seven technique as far as potency and difficulty of the techniques went.

He nodded; this did indeed suit his purposes. With this, his combat prowess would reach the upper echelons of the Apprentice Realm without his trump cards at all.

This left him with three or four more techniques, depending on their difficulty, that he was willing to purchase. He did not want to push himself too far nor stay immersed in training for too long, after all. The next thing he wanted to verify was whether mental techniques could alleviate the difficulty of using the VOID algorithm.

Yet, he was disappointed, surprisingly.

The mental techniques were not as powerful or game changing as he hoped. Furthermore, most of them were related to the manipulation of other minds, rather than his own. It was rather unfortunate. There were some self-hypnosis techniques that increased his focus and allowed him to manipulate his mindset, but they weren't nearly enough. He needed something ground-breaking.

('Is there no technique that can increase brainpower by a factor of three or four or something?') Rui cursed.

Yet he realized how unreasonable that demand was, that would be absolutely revolutionary, and even if a technique such as that did exist, Rui highly doubted its difficulty would be below grade-ten. Such a boost to the brain was not too far from the neural enhancements that the breakthrough to the Apprentice Realm provided to the brain, it was simply too overpowered.

At the end of the day, the more powerful systems within the VOID algorithm required immense amount of nigh-instantaneous pattern identification and recognition. His mind was incredible, but it was not a computer. It could not engage in such a level of data storage and processing.

Rui sighed in frustration.

He was just about to leave, when a familiar technique caught his eyes.

[Mind Palace]



A technique that allowed the user to memorize the mission bills of missions perfectly so that Martial Apprentices could complete missions without any problem. It did this by arranging pieces of information inside an imagined location inside the mind that the user was extremely familiar with in real life. The user merely needed to imagine the mind palace and access information that they had previously placed in certain places inside that location, and they would gain perfect recall if the technique was mastered. It was a foundational technique and was entirely free.

Rui chuckled; he had always found this particular technique amusing. The fact that the Martial union went out of its way to develop this technique because there were Martial Apprentices who couldn't memorize basic information was funny to him. He could imagine the Martial Councilors of the Martial Union passing a budget bill draft that specifically allocated a significant budget to a technique that improved memory.

There was no way he needed such a technique.

Just as he turned around, he froze, as a realization thundered across his mind.

The Mind Palace technique was indeed meant to allow the user to store and memorize mission data... But what if he used it to store and memorize other data?

What if instead of mission bill data, he used the Mind Palace technique to memorize the immense amount of pattern identification data that was needed to use the higher-levels of the VOID algorithm that he was unable to use before?

After all, the biggest reason he could not use it was because he was not able to store such a large amount of information perfectly in the middle of combat at all.

Rui turned slowly as he gazed at the scroll of the technique with eyes filled with wonder and greed. To think that the one technique he denigrated the most would end up being perhaps the only technique that could save him from his predicament!

Rui should have seen it earlier but his amusement at the purpose of the technique had created a blind spot around it. If he had treated it as a normal technique, he would have seen this application of it instantly, but because he looked down on it subconsciously, he wasn't able to.

The potential of this technique, to him at the very least, was extraordinary. As long as he could master it and perhaps tweak it slightly to suit his needs, it should not yield poor results. This was especially taking into account the fact that this technique had an extremely high affinity with his enhanced cognition.

('Stupid.') He cursed himself. ('It was almost obvious, yet I missed it because I was being cocky.')

Still, he was glad he saw it now in such a timely manner. He picked up the scroll without any hesitation as he added it to his pouch.

Four techniques down, two more to go.

('The next two-to-three techniques need to enhance my versatility and variety.')

The first four techniques strengthened his foundation and aimed to mitigate the VOID algorithm's weakness. Now, he needed to expand his capabilities to give him more options and choices in combat. He had several ideas of what he would have liked.

"I could really use a boost in range." He muttered to himself. If he gained the ability to hurt his opponent from a distance, life would be a hell of a lot easier.

Also, among all the fields his Martial Art didn't possess, a longer range was the most optimal counter for the greatest number of Martial Art and combat styles. Meaning, by giving his Martial Art long-range capability, he would increase the number of Martial Art he could adapt to more than he could if he mastered some other technique or some other field. Long range was vital, and remarkably powerful in many scenarios.

He even knew what technique he would have liked to master.

He immediately went to the offensive section and began browsing through the techniques in a particular section.

"Aha." His eyes lit up. "Found it."

[Tempestuous Ripple]

An offensive long-range technique that projected shockwave attacks from a distance. The user used a combination a breathing technique as well as body movements to create a small localized region of high-density solid-like air, and then struck said air with a powerful strike launching a wind attack.

He reached for the scroll, picking it up.

This was the technique he wanted to acquire. It was the technique that representative Ana Marianne had showcased in the Martial Contest, he had been quite impressed by her techniques, even if she did lose in the first round.

Rui did not fault her techniques for that. Her opponent in the first round was Mia Marnt, who was remarkably powerful and managed to reach the semi-finals of the Martial Contest, losing to Fiona of all people.

Furthermore, he did think Ana could have beaten Mia if she used her techniques more effectively to counter Mia's sound attacks.

Still, this was indeed was he sought for. If he mastered this technique, he would gain a huge boost in the number of potential solutions he could apply. Furthermore, the quality of his adaptive evolutions against close-quarters fighters would increase substantially.

"That's five techniques, one or two more to go."

He scratched his head. He really wasn't sure what else he ought to get. Perhaps he ought to bolster up his grappling to ensure that he wasn't lagging too far behind in that regard.

He shrugged, that was a good idea, and with the Stinger his striking had over-taken his grappling, enhancing his grappling so that he would be able to adapt to Martial Art that could be countered by grappling was useful. Furthermore, with the Adamant Reforging training technique, Rui's security in grappling combat will have increased a lot.

He immediately walked over to the grappling section as he strolled around, looking for techniques he could learn as he stumbled into something quite interesting and familiar.

[Flow Flux]

A counter-offensive technique that destabilized balanced through intercepting and applying targeted force on incoming strikes in specific angles and directions.

Rui's eyes twinkled as he recognized the technique, or at the very least the principle behind it. This was the core of Hafbor's active defense. The difference was that Hafbor's technique applied this principle purely defensively, while Flow Flux aimed to create vulnerabilities and openings for the user to exploit.

Rui didn't want to learn the defensive version of the technique anyway, not in this training stage atleast. Flow Flux was attractive to him because it had the ability to create vulnerabilities, this was a trait that was extremely compatible with the VOID algorithm. It would allow for him to have a higher probability of being able to squeeze out victories in fights where he was completely losing.

It was a grade-seven technique too, which meant that it was powerful, but not overwhelmingly so. As long as Rui used to efficiently and effectively, it should serve as a valuable trump card for a quite some time to come.

Rui picked the scroll out of the slot, before nodding.

"This should be enough for this training stage."

None of the techniques he had chosen were particularly easy to master, all of them were grade seven, which was around the grade where the difficulty was just low enough that it was worth Rui to engage in mastering. At higher grades, it was often the case that hard work alone was not enough. Many a times, techniques that fell from grade eight to grade ten required affinities and talent.

Rui did not want to waste time on a technique only to discover he lacked the needed talent and affinity needed to master the technique in a needed amount of time.

Rui glanced at all the techniques he intended to purchase.

Flame Breathing.

Wind Breathing.

Adamant Reforging.

Mind Palace.

Tempestuous Ripple.

Flow Flux.

He wasn't even sure how long it would take, but he intended to master all of them.

#### Chapter 297: Regimes

He wasn't entirely sure how strong he would become once he mastered these techniques but he genuinely couldn't wait. He also didn't know if his Martial Art would reach maturity once he finished this training stage. It was possible, but he couldn't be sure, he could only hope.

He took his six scrolls to the payment registrar. He didn't care about the cost; he had earned an immense number of Martial credits and could easily afford many more techniques. He appreciated the system that the Martial Academy had set up. He had even long understood the reason it as the way it was and why it was so good.

The Martial Academies were meant to pump out qualified Martial Artists, this was their top priority. He was relatively certain the Martial Academy didn't give two hoots of the money it earned from the students of the Academy completing missions.

So why did it charge Martial credits that could only be earned from missions?

Wouldn't just giving all the techniques to the students for free allow them to not waste time on missions and quickly master more techniques?

The answer was yes, but doing this would reduce the quality of Martial Artists produced in the long run. Being given everything they need on a silver platter without any cost would simply produce Martial Apprentices who were not worthy of the techniques they were given. Once these over-privileged Martial Artists left the Academy and suddenly run into a much harder system as far as purchasing technique and completing missions went, they would simply collapse under the difficulty because they had not developed the experience as well as the perseverance needed.

Yet at the same time, Martial Academies could not make the difficulty too high. It didn't make sense to force Martial Apprentices to spend years grinding missions just to earn a handful of techniques. That was a waste of valuable time. The human mind and body's ability to learn was at its highest until the age of twenty-five, this was also the age at which the brain would complete its development. After this age, the ability to learn and grow would slowly reduce, bit-by-bit.

Forcing these Martial Apprentices to work when it was best to learn and, afterwards, learn when it was best to work would be utterly inefficient.

Thus, the Martial Academy had aimed to sought the best balance. After a month of mission grinding, Martial Apprentices could generally buy a handful of techniques. This was a good balance because it just enough that it would force Martial Apprentices to go through several months of mission grinding across their time in the Martial Academy without hindering their training too much.

Once he bought the techniques, he sat down at a table in the library. He could only read the techniques in detail only after he bought them, after all. He soon began opening each scroll, taking his time as he went through all the data.

As always, the training regimes for the techniques were interesting.

Flame Breathing and Wind Breathing required the usage of a training breathing apparatus that aided in helping the user master the timing and degree of inhalation and exhalation. To Rui's surprise, there was also a light amount of conditioning required for the master of the techniques.

It required the user to increase the flexibility and the strength of the diaphragm allowing for greater amount of inhalation at a much faster rate.

"Interesting stuff." Rui muttered as he brought up the other scrolls.

Adamant Reforging had a rather straightforward training regime. It was a combination of torture of the skin combined with healing potions. Healing potions merely sped up the human body's natural healing and regenerative properties. It only preponed the process in most cases, as long as a sufficiently low-enough graded potion was used during the process, the healing potion would not undo the effects of the conditioning training.

This had been the case for the Stinger technique's conditioning training as well.

The Mind Palace technique was surprising, because it was surprisingly grounded the least fantastical out of all them. Part of the reason for this was because a similar technique existed on Earth, known as the memory palace.

Essentially, it was a technique that trained the user to be able to easily imagine a certain location, such as a building or a street perhaps, any location that the user was very familiar with. Once the user was consistently able to imagine said location with great accuracy and detail after practice, then they could begin to store information in different parts of that location. Such as storing certain facts inside a cupboard inside the house that the user chose as their memory palace.

The next time the user imagined the house and went to the location inside their imagination where they had previously stored information, they would be able to perfectly remember whatever information they stored their perfectly, as long as they had mastered and executed the information perfectly.

This was also how the Mind Palace Martial Art technique worked as well.

The reason this technique worked so well was because it stored memory via conscious association rather than subconscious associations.

Normal recollection worked by relying on the automatic subconscious associations created between thoughts and memories. If a student writing a physics exam was trying to memorize a simple equation of motion such as

$$V = u + at$$

Then they would repeat the equation over and over. The next time they would even think 'v...' the remaining part of the equation '= u + at' would appear in their head because of the association created by saying the equation over and over again. This was due to the subconscious association mechanism that recollection worked on.

But this was flawed and limited. It often failed, which is why students failed exams, and had limitations to the amount of information that could be recollected. These two reasons were also part of why Rui was unable to master the higher-levels of the VOID algorithm.

## Chapter 298: Perseverance

The Mind Palace technique did not have these limitations.

The Mind Palace technique relied on conscious associations rather than subconscious associations. The imagined location that served as the mind palace was the association between memories and thought. It made the mind palace a mental databank and database of sorts that hosted all kinds of information that could very systematically be accessed.

The Mind Palace technique made the user's mind closer to that of a computer!

It was exactly what Rui needed.

The training regime focused on largely ensuring the mind palace that the user imagined inside their minds was absolutely perfect. There could be absolutely no room for ambiguity, vagueness, imprecision



and inconsistency. The user had to be able to quickly imagine it in high-definition, and it had to exactly the same each time otherwise the technique simply wouldn't work.

Rui nodded. It wasn't easy, but this technique was right up his alley, it was literally built for his enhanced cognition.

He put the Mind Palace technique aside as he read through the Tempestuous Ripple technique scroll. This was definitely the wildest technique in his roster thus far, he was quite curious to see what the training was like.

"Oh, it seems I'm lucky." His eyes lit up.

The first part of the training regime largely overlapped with a part of the training of the Flame Breathing technique, increasing the power of his respiration. The second part however, required him to master the body motions needed in conjunction with powerful exhalations and inhalations to create pockets of high-density solid-like air that could be launched with strikes.

He glanced at the Flow Flux technique after he poured over the Tempestuous Ripple technique.

He quickly realized that this technique might actually have been the hardest to master of them all. There were several training stages that involved growing familiar with balance and learning how to manipulate balance by applying the right amount of force at the right time, place and direction.

Once he finished reading up on all of them, he immediately headed to the training facilities to get a taste for the training regimes.

The first training facility he went to was the offensive training facility, he looked forward to training with Squire instructor Dylan after a long time.

Yet he wasn't exactly the most ecstatic to see Rui.

"How many techniques is it this time kid? Spit it out." He said with a disdainful look.

"...Six."

"You-" He facepalmed, sighing. "It would be insane if it came from anyone else."

"I'm here to learn the Tempestuous Ripple and the Flow Flux techniques." Rui waved the two scrolls.

Squire Dylon whistled. "Good techniques. Good choices, especially for your Martial Art, it makes sense."

Rui nodded.

"Let's begin with Flow Flux." He said. "It is the harder one of the two. I presume you're familiar with the training regime?"

Rui nodded. "Yes sir."

"Flow Flux training requires you to develop an intuitive understand of the fragility of balance. Unfortunately, there's no singular trick to doing this. You'll have to start with the basics, understanding the best ways to imbalance your opponent via interceptions in the most basic positions, and master them. You should be able to execute the basic misbalancing interceptions maneuvers with zero delay, you'll have to engrave them in your very bones."

Rui nodded, already familiar with it.

The training regime forcibly hastened the process of developing up a strong intuition on how to imbalance one's opponents when intercepting attacks. To some degree, it was compatible with the maniacal manner in which Rui trained.

The training regime soon began and Squire Dylon had him training in basic misbalancing maneuvers. A lot of these maneuvers resembled a fusion between Aikido and Krav Maga techniques from Earth. It had taken him a while to be able to get the hang of the interception maneuvering forms. Furthermore, he was still too slow in his identification of what manner he needed to imbalance his opponents.

"It's going to take you a while to be able to develop the reflexes in the execution of this technique." He said. "A few months at least, I imagine. Actually, considering you're training six different techniques, maybe even half a year. Your potions tolerance can only help you so much. You're in for the long grind."

"I know." Rui squeezed out between his huffs, having completed hours of training. "I knew that when I chose six techniques, I've set the second condition of Squire candidacy as my most immediate and important goal. Developing my Martial Art is what I'm prioritizing now."

Squire Dylan shrugged. "You do you. Anyways, four hours are up. Are you ready to move onto the Tempestuous Ripple technique?"

Rui had given each technique an equal amount of training timing across a day; four hours.

He nodded as he consumed a rejuvenation potion quickly.

Squire Dylan tossed him a breathing apparatus.

"Wear that and breathe." He told Rui. "Try not to pass out."

The breathing apparatus hindered breathing to a rather large degree, even more than it did when he trained for the Helical Breathing technique long ago.

Rui could feel his diaphragm straining as it struggled to push air in and out of his lungs.

This feeling reminded him of when he used to have severe asthma attacks back on Earth, it was truly an unpleasant training regime that brought back unpleasant memories.

"You're not going to be able to master the Tempestuous Ripple technique unless you're breathing returns to normal despite having the apparatus on." Squire Dylan told him. "Keep pushing yourself, the harder you push, the less time it will take for your breathing to be strengthened to the point where you can even begin mastering the actual Tempestuous Ripple attack."

Rui could barely hear him as he struggled to breathe in the necessary amount of air his body needed to sustain himself. He felt as though if he stopped for even a handful of seconds, he would simply lose consciousness and pass out.

('This is going to be one hell of a training stage.')

## Chapter 299: Experiences

In the span of twenty-four hours, Rui experienced the training regimes of all six techniques. Once he finished training with Squire Dylan for the Tempestuous Ripple and Flow Flux training, he had immediately headed for the training sessions of the remaining four techniques.

He immediately headed to the mental technique training facility to begin training the Mind Palace technique. He was fascinated by the process.

"Your mind palace needs to be based on locations from your memories that you know quite intimately." A squire instructor of the mind technique training facilities told him. "You need to be able to visualize them with extreme precision and accuracy consistently. That is why it is best to use locations you are most familiar with. The most common kinds of mind palaces involve using your home, the Academy, since you've spent years living here. Your hometown maybe, whatever works. The more mind palaces you have, the better."

Rui nodded.

Thankfully, he wasn't short on such locations. In this life alone, the Quarrier orphanage and the Academy could serve as viable mind palaces. In his previous life, he had his parents' home, his home, the research institute he worked at, and even the hospital he spent a lot of time in, later in his life. Those were six locations that he could begin polishing his imagination of to serve as six mind palaces eventually.

What he discovered, however, was that the Mind Palace technique was more compatible with him than he had ever imagined. One's visualization capabilities was the most important ability needed to master the Mind Palace technique. It was the one area where his mind, that had undergone two lifetimes of development, could shine the most, showing off its cognitive capabilities.

Rui had begun making frightening progress as he began dedicating himself to the technique. In merely the span of four hours, he accomplished what most Martial Apprentices accomplished in an entire month. He had never experienced such affinity with any Martial Art technique.

The Squire instructor who was guiding him even refused to believe this was the first he was learning the technique!

He merely shrugged, letting him believe what he wanted. Merely being smart would not explain his progress with the technique and he did not want to be asked sensitive questions that he did not want to answer.

Besides, he was genuinely elated at the results of his training of the Mind Palace technique and was far too distracted with the matter. Although he had initially been optimistic when he had the revelation that the technique could solve the problem of the VOID algorithm's viability, he did not get ahead of himself and considered the possibility that it wasn't sufficient.

However, his high affinity and his rate of mastery of the Mind Palace technique allowed him a greater degree of confidence and optimism than before. At this rate of mastery, the probability of at least partially solving the VOID algorithm's problems was not low.

The key was to ingrain the activation and usage into muscle memory and into his reflexes, only then would it become viable to use it mid-battle. He would need to restructure the way he stored data amidst battles, and that wouldn't be possible until he ensured that using the Mind Palace in this manner became as easy and natural as breathing.

He had come out with an immense degree of satisfaction and elation once he exited the training session at the end of four hours. Although he would have loved nothing more than to continue with the Mind Palace technique forever, the other techniques were also quite important.

Just not quite as fun.

"Aargh!" Rui grimaced as he finished a rep of the Adamant Reforging training.

"Here." The Squire instructor tossed him a low-grade healing potion. Rui immediately consumed the potion as an indescribably sense of relief filled his body as his body healed the wounds on his flesh, but only enough to ensure that the conditioning effects of the training would not disappear. High-grade potions would undo everything and return his flesh back to how it was before. Only after his conditioned flesh became the normal state of his flesh could he use high-grade potions.

The conditioning training began with his torso. It involved inflicting damage onto his torso with a combination of blunt force, piercing and heat. The healed skin after he consumed a healing potion would have greater and denser layers of epithelial tissue each time. At the end of the training regime for the technique, his flesh would be far harder to inflict damage on.

The training would be deemed complete only after the conditioning training was no longer able to inflict meaningful damage on him.

Rui left that training session having completely lost the enthusiasm he had from the Mind Palace technique training.

As much as he loved growing stronger. He had no masochistic tendencies, and that training was pure torture, even the Stinger technique's training couldn't compare to it.

The last two training regimes of the Flame Breathing and Wind Breathing techniques were fairly normal, they also overlapped with the training of the Tempestuous Ripple technique, so he was also making progress on that front. He was effectively going through the training regimes of five-and-a-half techniques instead of six thanks to a significant overlap in diaphragm training.

He was also certain that the first three techniques to be mastered would be those three due to this reason.

At the end of twenty-four hours, he returned back to the dorm. It had been a while since he had organically slept. He had been far too busy with missions prior.

"Hey, where've you been?" A familiar voice called out to him.

"Just began my training." Rui replied. "What about you Kane?"

"I just came out of training." He told Rui. "I've actually just completed the maturity condition of Squire Candidacy."

Rui's eyes lit up. "Congratulations! As expected."

Kane had been working hard in training, filling up the holes in his Martial Art. The fact that he had elevated his Martial Art to that level this quickly was something Rui found amazing.

Chapter 300: Sparring

BAM!!!

A powerful Flowing Canon crashed into Nel's guard. His eyes widened in shock as the sheer power of the technique launched him skidding away. Rui immediately chased after him, moving blurringly fast as he reached Nel in the briefest moments.

He launched yet another Flowing Canon. The very air trembled as a strike amplified by Parallel Walk, Balanced Direction, Wind Breathing, Outer Convergence, Vital Pressure and Flame Breathing.

BOOM!!

The two clashed as they exchanged their most powerful strikes. The sheer power from their clash sent reverberations across the sparring arena.

The Martial Apprentices who were also occupying the facility were all frozen, gaping at the ridiculous prowess that Rui and Nel displayed.

It was hard for them to believe the two were even in the same Martial Realm as them!

POW POW POW!

Nel basted Rui with a combo of strikes, pushing him back. Yet when he tried to follow up with a strike;

WHOOSH

Rui cleanly swiveled out of the way with remarkable speed and agility.

BAM!

He landed a powerful blow on his ribs, pushing him back.

Nel endured the damage as he threw a sharp kick even before Rui had finished his own attack.

WHAM!

Rui blocked, twirling away as he launched for an upper takedown maneuver.

And yet;

WHOOSH

It was a feint.

Rui coiled his arms around Nel's legs as he successfully used Mirage Dive to topple him to the ground. The two boys wrangled on the ground furiously as they tried to get an advantageous position.

POW!

Nel managed to break free with a timely strike just as Rui aimed for a chokehold.



Eventually the two boys separated, getting to their feet.

Yet, they wasted no time.

The two spuriously exchanged blows with each other. Every once in a while, one of them would gain a momentary advantage, yet the battle stalled to a rough stalemate.

The spar went for some time until the two exhausted enough stamina to call for a break.

Rui smiled in elation as he drank some water. Just four months had passed, and he had gone from being significantly inferior to Nel in all physical parameters, to be able to rival and even overwhelm him in head-on combat.

"You've gotten stronger!" Nel laughed. "Let's do that one more time!"

"Sure thing." Rui replied.

Rui had recently gained satisfactory mastery Flame and Wind Breathing. He had begun sparring with Nel, who was also an all-rounder, to refine his application of the techniques in combat. He left out the VOID algorithm, and his other trump cards to gain a more objective understanding of his growth, and he was remarkably pleased with the results.

His offensive power had risen to a level that perhaps only Fae could overwhelm, and speed had risen to a level that only Kane and Vyoming could outpace. He couldn't ask for more from the two techniques.

Of course, it wasn't solely because of these two techniques that he had grown this strong, but he had come to have accumulated this power thanks to multiple techniques.

Vital Pressure was the first technique he had learnt, and it was a foundational technique almost every Martial Apprentice learnt. However, Rui had mastered Outer Convergence and Flame Breathing, two powerful techniques that boosted the raw power to extremely high degrees. Each of these techniques

were in the upper echelons of techniques that boosted raw power, and the only people in his generation who could match him were specialists in this particular field.

Similar things were true for other fields as well. Rui's agility, speed and maneuvering had also reached another level. With Parallel Walk, Balanced Direction, Wind Breathing and Phantom Step. Rui could quite literally run circles around more than ninety-five percent of his peers!

His defense would soon follow suit. Although the Adamant Reforging conditioning training was not yet over, it would take serious power and lethality to inflict meaningful damage on him. He would probably be able to walk through normal attacks like they were nothing at that point. The average Martial Apprentice had zero chance of overwhelming a defense of four Apprentice-level techniques.

For an all-rounder like himself, these were incredible feats. There was a reason he had asked Nel to be his sparring partner. One was, of course, that he was an all-rounder. But the other reason was that Nel was one of the very few Martial Apprentices in the Academy who could stand up to him. He was literally the only all-rounder Martial Apprentice who could allow Rui to test all aspects of his newly empowered Martial Art equally. Rui was only one step away from straight up fighting with a Martial Squire because almost no one else was qualified.

He no longer needed to adapt, nor construct complex strategies with his trump cards to be a powerhouse. Even if just used his existing techniques in the most straightforward manner, he would easily be almost unbeaten in the Academy. He could not even imagine how strong he would go on to become once he completely finished this training session.

And he couldn't wait to experience that power.

He couldn't wait to launch powerful air blasts!

He couldn't wait to flip fools off-balance!

And most of all, he couldn't wait to apply the Mind Palace technique to apply the pattern recognition data science-based systems of the VOID algorithm.

Just how powerful would his Flowing Void Style become?

It was hard to even predict. The six new techniques wouldn't just add to his technique straightforwardly, the boost they would produce was greater. Each of the six new techniques had great synergies with some of the others, as well as the existing techniques in his Martial Art. These would result in a large number of permutations and combinations of techniques that could be applied in combat.

Even he couldn't accurately compute all that data to land at the right answer.

He would need to find out by actually experiencing it.

He turned to Nel.

"Let's go another round."