

## Martial Unity 371

### Chapter 371: Solution

Rui racked his brain as he thought of a solution. He couldn't rely on the VOID algorithm. He couldn't really rely on his techniques alone. Their physical parameters were identical.

WHOOSH

Rui barely managed to evade a strike. ('The only difference lies in mind that is controlling the mental bodies if the second hypothesis is correct.')

If that was the case, then Rui very well might have a tactical advantage. If not, then he could reasonably be assured that the first hypothesis was true. After all, what were the odds that the symbiote that was not supposed to be genuinely intelligent or actually sentient had the same degree of tactical intelligence as him?

He highly doubted that it was able to somehow gain access to his tactical capability either. That would require a degree of supernatural absurdity that was too ridiculous even by the standards of this world. His tactical capability was a product of his consciousness operating on his memories and senses. If the symbiote was able to access that, then it would no doubt have already won by now.

BAM!

Rui reeled from a powerful Flowing Canon crashing into his guard as he was marginally outmaneuvered by the shadow clone. ('But how can I possibly out-strategize a superior version of myself?')

It didn't help that he was truly not accustomed to the VOID algorithm being this ineffective in battle. Because the VOID algorithms being used by both sides were identical, they more or less canceled each other out and their effect was not really felt. This meant that this was a fight where Rui was practically fighting without any help from the VOID algorithm.

When was the last time that genuinely happened? He couldn't even remember. He had always used the VOID algorithm in at least a minor capacity ever since he discovered his Martial Path nearly three years ago.

The psychological discomfort and inexperience with such a situation were also hindering him. At this rate, the disadvantages would snowball and he would most certainly lose.

('Tsk.') He tutted mentally. ('This is even worse than when the VOID algorithm is incompatible with my oppon-')

Rui's eyes widened as an idea flashed across his mind, taking root as he began fleshing it out. ('Interesting, this might work.')

He leaped backward, immediately chased by the shadow clone. Then he paused before rushing straightforwardly at the shadow clone. Rui threw a targeted sweeping kick at his shadow clone.

The shadow clone stepped back, avoiding it.

Yet;

BAM!

An invisible Tempestuous Ripple slammed into it, flinging it far away. It swiftly got up, yet Rui had immediately arrived. He launched a low sweeping kick, which the clone leaped to avoid.

Yet the sweeping kick disappeared.

It was a feint.

BAM!!

A powerful blow from Rui crashed into the symbiote midair, flinging it into the distance.

All of a sudden, the tables had turned!

('I was right!') Rui grinned. ('It can borrow my Martial Art. But it cannot borrow the intelligence or the tactics that I use to compensate for the flaws in my Martial Art!')

Rui's Martial Art had not yet achieved maturity. Despite having mastered twenty-three techniques, it was still not yet mature. Furthermore, there was the matter of the VOID algorithm. Although he had made significant progress with the VOID algorithm's viability thanks to his extreme mastery of the Mind Palace technique, he had yet to make significant progress in the other major problem of the VOID algorithm.

Its incompatibility with the fantastical Martial Art of the world of Gaia. He had yet to fix the issue. There were times when the VOID algorithm was largely helpless. In those times, he compensated for its shortcomings with improvised corrections in the calculations and estimations that were roughly accurate enough to work decently enough, albeit still far from what the VOID algorithm was supposed to be capable of ideally.

Using the VOID algorithm blindly could potentially be dangerous. Rui never mindlessly accepted the results spat out by the adaptive evolution model. He relied on quick thinking and instincts, Primordial Instinct, to judge how compatible the VOID algorithm was and how accurate the adapted style it outputted was.

This was not something that could be copied or stolen by the Mindmirror Symbiote, in all likelihood. And he was being proven right by the second.

If that was indeed the case, then it could be exploited. Rui knew the VOID algorithm inside-out, and upside-down. He knew exactly where all of its shortcomings were, and what all the risks due to those shortcomings were. The shadow clone of himself did not compensate for the shortcomings the way Rui did when he fought with it.

That meant as long Rui used the right moves at the right time, he would be able to cause a disadvantage to the shadow clone.

The key was to use techniques that were the most supernatural and impossible by Earth's standards. The more it diverged from anything Earth had, the less accurate the counters the shadow clone used were, as far as being the most suited to countering and adapting to his moves.

Moves like Tempestuous Ripple, Phantom Step, and Stinger were most effective because they diverged significantly from anything on Earth. There was no such thing as a wind blast caused by launching a dense pocket of air that was caused by a combination of breathing techniques and body movements in the combat sports of Earth.

Likewise, Phantom Step and Stinger were also absolutely otherworldly by MMA standards. His other offensive techniques were much closer in concept to MMA techniques, unfortunately. Techniques like Blink were also absurd by Earth standards, but it wasn't useful against the shadow clone. Neither of them had blinked in the battle.

Still, these three techniques gave him a fighting chance. He had already taken significant damage and his mental fatigue and strain were only snowballing. These three techniques were the only thing between him and inevitable defeat. He would need to apply them to the very best he could.

#### Chapter 372: Climax

Rui did his very best to exploit the flaws and shortcomings in the VOID algorithm. Exchange after exchange, he abused them to the best he could. The disadvantage he had accumulated prior was slowly starting to get mitigated.

The biggest problem was that his shadow clone self didn't really seem to be capable of taking damage. Even if Rui pounded it with a barrage of powerful attacks, it would get up, walk it off and continue as if nothing happened. Whereas any damage Rui took didn't magically disappear, he retained all of it. Even if his new tactic allowed him to outplay his opponent, the lack of damage and fatigue on his opponent's part meant that none of it ever stuck.

Rui had to work harder and harder each time he wanted to overwhelm his opponent.

But what did it matter? His opponent simply got back up and continued fighting with the same ferocity as before. Rui's combat kept getting duller and duller.

It only snowballed even further as time passed.

BOOM!!

Rui grimaced as a powerful Flowing Canon flung him away. He crashed into his immediate surroundings, getting up quickly.

An eternity had passed. He felt as though he was going insane with all this endless fighting. He was bleeding profusely and panting heavily in exhaustion. He felt his mental body going limp with fatigue.

Yet, he didn't give up.

He grabbed the incoming attack from his shadow clone, using Flow Flux to throw him off. He launched a Tempestuous Ripple, blasting the shadow clone of his with a wind blast. His shadow clone swiftly recovered launching another attack.

BAM!

Rui grimaced as the attack crashed into his abdomen, unguarded.

PEW!

The Stinger slammed into his clone's head. Yet, Rui wasn't done. He launched a barrage of attacks that bypassed the VOID algorithm via its flaws and shortcomings.

BOOM!

A final attack landed on the shadow clone, flinging him away.

Rui collapsed to the ground, exhausted. Every ounce of his mental body was in pain, he could barely move as he gasped for air.

WHOOSH

The shadow clone had arrived, launching a powerful attack at Rui.

('Shit... Is this how it ends?') He struggled to put up a guard.

The attack warped the very world around them with the sheer power it had. Rui could feel the tiniest hint of haste and panic from the shadow clone.

As though it didn't have any time left.

The attack was just about to crash into him.

Rui had gritted his teeth with his head tucked, bracing for the impact.

...

Nothing happened.

"Huh?" His eyebrows knitted in confusion. He raised his head as he leaped back.

There was nothing.

He looked around in suspicion. ('Where did he go?')

Then, the illusory work crumbled as darkness enveloped his senses yet again.

He opened his eyes. An expression of shock molded onto his face as the familiar white ceiling of the operating room entered his field of vision along with doctor Heela and a set of nurses tending to him.

"Apprentice Quarrier?" She asked as she flashed his eyes with a flashlight device. "Pupils are reactive. Apprentice Quarrier? Are you feeling alright?"

"I'm back!" He exclaimed with elation and ecstasy.

"Congratulations." Doctor Heela said to him. "The procedure was a success. You successfully resisted the mental takeover phase."

Rui felt exhausted beyond anything he ever had.

"We'll be conducting a few tests just to make su-" She paused when she heard a snoring sound.

He had fallen asleep on the spot. His eyelids were too heavy and his mind was too tired to even try staying awake after it had confirmed it was safe. He didn't even experience a single dream as his mind tucked away silently, taking some much-needed rest.

He woke up later feeling fresher than he ever had. Not even potions were this invigorating. He got up in his bed slowly, before looking around.

('I've been moved to a different room.') He mused as a nurse popped into his room, noticing he was awake.

"Apprentice Quarrier, how are you feeling?" She asked.

"Great." He replied. "How long was I asleep?"

"Fourteen hours." She replied. "Your mind needed an immense amount of rest after the incredibly strenuous ten minutes. We've steadily injected highly nourishing and healing potions into your body that would allow your brain and mind to naturally recover."

"I see..." He murmured before perking up at something she said. "Wait, ten minutes? You mean the bonding procedure lasted ten minutes?"

"Correct." She replied.

Rui squinted in confusion. His sense of time must have been extremely messed up. That fight had lasted many days, at the very least.

To think that all of that had actually happened in ten minutes tops.

"Doctor Heela has been notified of your awakening. She'll be here shortly." The nurse informed. "Would you like anything? A glass of water?"

Rui nodded absentmindedly, absorbed in thought. "Please do."

Soon, doctor Heela entered his room with a smile. "I heard you had woken up. Feeling good?"

"Much better than I expected, yes."

"That's good news." She nodded. "We conducted a few tests, and there is no abnormality. The secondary brain is still dormant, acclimatizing to its circumstances. Soon, it will become active and you will be able to feel it. It is recommended you do not begin training with it for at least a few days. Your mind is still not done recovering and the once you begin training and the flux of information exchange between the brains increases it will strain your brain more than it normally would be."

Rui nodded. "Will do."

Soon the conversation ended after the doctor rattled off some instructions and answered some questions.



"You'll be discharged tomorrow after some more supervision. Be sure to rest as much as possible, do not strain your mind in any way."

Rui nodded, bidding her goodbye as she left the room.

He closed his eyes, turning his attention inside himself. He flinched when he felt the presence of a dormant entity connected to his own.

"This... is the secondary brain?" He murmured in wonder.

Chapter 373: Embed

He simply observed it, trying to get a better feel for it.

('It doesn't feel like it's conscious in the same way my brain is.') He mused.

Even its mental takeover was not something that the Symbiote was consciously doing, but rather something that was part of its biological programming. This matched the information that he had learned about it.

As time passed, the dormant brain began showing more and more activity. He felt excited at the prospect of mastering the extra brain capacity. However, that was not something that could be done quickly. The symbiote had grade-ten difficulty for a reason, and that reason wasn't purely due to the risk of being mentally taken over by the symbiote.

Currently, the brain was an empty slate. Neurons alone weren't enough for them to be of immediate use. It was like a computer without an operating system. There were training techniques that he would need to undergo, and planned to undergo in this training session.

There was only one training technique that was associated with the Mindmirror Symbiote. It was called the Mental Embed training technique. Even though it was only one, it alone was versatile enough to allow the user to accomplish a multitude of things.

It allowed the user to embed thought patterns into the secondary brain. These thoughts did not need to be limited to conscious thoughts; they could also be subconscious neurological patterns as well.

It essentially allowed the user to program the Mindmirror Symbiote like it was a computer. In order to get the Mindmirror Symbiote to aid the user in combat, one needed to embed all of one's combat thought patterns into the secondary brain using the Mental Embed training technique.

Once that was completed successfully, the secondary brain would then be able to function identically to Rui's main brain as far as combat processing went. It would be able to aid Rui in combat by doing so. With two brains processing data, his combat mental processing would boost tremendously.

Essentially, the secondary brain's primary purpose was to function as a parallel processor to the main brain, aiding all cognitive and neurological processes. This would boost all mental parameters such as battle cognition, spatial awareness, reaction speed, reflexive speed, kinetic vision, and other such phenomena vital to combat.

This boost would put Rui's mental parameters far beyond the limits of the Apprentice Realm!

He strongly suspected that he might even reach quasi-Squire level as far all mental parameters went with just this basic application alone!

There were even further ways it could be applied. After all, the Mental Embed technique was a technique that allowed the user to embed conscious thought patterns as well.

('This means I can embed the VOID algorithm and my Mind Palace into the secondary brain as well!') Rui grinned, eager to start training. Yet, at the same time, he didn't want to complete it too soon. The mental burden of the Mindmirror Symbiote only came after a successfully completed mental embed into the secondary brain.

After all, until then, the Mindmirror Symbiote didn't particularly interact with the main brain. That's why it wouldn't interfere with his training growth speed until after the mental embed was fully completed, which would only happen by the end of the training stage.

Once he embedded the VOID algorithm and Mind Palace, his utility of those would skyrocket. The best part about that was that he didn't need to constantly update the embedded thoughts, the secondary brain's cognitive capabilities were high enough to ensure that it was capable of growing based on the growth of the corresponding original thought patterns of the main brain.

He wanted to test the training technique right away but the doctor had instructed him to take it easy as far as straining the mind went, thus he had to abstain. The technique was important, but his literal mental health was even more so.

A day passed by and he was finally discharged.

"All your tests have come back fine." The doctor informed him as she skimmed through medical reports that had come back from the tests. "Again, make sure you get enough rest when get back, got it? No mental rejuvenation potions, make sure you get normal sleep, alright?"

"Will do." Rui nodded. "Thank you, doctor."

Once he bade her goodbye and finished a bit of paperwork, he immediately set back for the Martial Union, thinking back to the last few days he had spent in the Martial Union.

At the end of the day, he had never figured out which of the two hypotheses regarding the shadow clone was true. Was it really just a dream his mind had conjured up representing the state of the mental battle between the symbiote and his brain or was it genuinely the actual conflict itself?

He didn't know, but regardless, he had made a lot of gains from the conflict, unexpectedly. What he hadn't experienced, and didn't ever expect to experience, was fighting against the VOID algorithm. He hadn't realized how much of a blessing it was at the time, because of the things that were at stake at the time.

Fighting against the VOID algorithm gave him a perspective about it that he had never had before. He was able to appreciate and admire its prowess with pride, but he also gained a clearer perspective on its flaws and shortcomings. He understood them much more intimately than he had before. If it weren't for this experience, it would have taken him a long time to gain the understanding that the experience had yielded to him.

Rui had gotten several new ideas on how to partially solve the incompatibility issue of the VOID algorithm with the Martial Art of Gaia. Ideas that he likely would not have considered this early had he not fought against his clone. It was a rich and an unexpected gain that had come from the mental battle, and that alone justified the purchasing of the Mindmirror Symbiote.

"All in good time."

Chapter 374: Difficulty

WHOOSH

Rui dashed from one point to another, before pausing and looking at Kane. "How was that?"

"You're messing up the maneuvering part." Kane shook his head. "The misdirection needs to be in precisely the opposite direction you're going, otherwise it won't work."

"Yeah, true." Rui sighed. "I know that in theory, it's not easy to get the hang of it in practice."

"It does take a while to learn." Kane agreed. "You need to burn the technique into your bones with repeated practice. Or at least that's how I did it."

Several months had passed since Rui began his sixth training stage. He had made significant progress with all techniques and was in the final phase of getting rid of all of his flaws and shortcomings. He had reached out to Kane for help with the Shadow Step technique. Although he hadn't mastered that technique, he had mastered the Void Step technique which was the original technique that the Shadow Step technique was an inferior version of.

Kane merely needed a few tries to get the hang of it since he had mastered the Void Step technique. He only needed to understand to what degree it was inferior before he could use it masterfully, making Rui green with envy.

"Man, it's crazy how good you are at this." Rui sighed.

"I mean." He shrugged. "One can say the same thing with you and a number of things. The most recent being the second brain you got."

Rui smiled, he couldn't argue with that.

He hadn't finished mentally embedding his combat thought patterns or the VOID algorithm and the Mind Palace technique into the secondary brain yet. The best part about the Mental Embed technique was the fact that he could use it while training physically as well. In fact, the Mental Embed technique worked most efficiently when the combat information that the user of the technique was actually being used in combat.

The secondary brain learned the information faster when there was actual execution of the movements that were being learned by the secondary brain.

Thus, he could embed the five other techniques he was learning into the secondary brain while he was training them. Thankfully, he wouldn't need to go through another training stage just for that alone, that would have been incredibly wasteful.

Once he wrapped up his Shadow Step training with Kane, he returned back to the Mindmirror training session. He had only very recently gotten accustomed to the feeling of the active secondary brain. It felt like a force with untapped potential. He could constantly feel that he wasn't able to use it to its full potential, which was frustrating.

He continued the Mental Embed training technique process, which was harder and more mentally taxing than he had expected it to be. But in hindsight, he should have expected that would be the case. He was trying to copy and transfer all the data centered around his combat, every speck of it, into the secondary brain.

The size of the data and information that had to be embedded into the secondary brain was gigantic! Although the Mental Embed technique was not weak by any means, it still took an immense amount of time and effort.

The good news was that he was extraordinarily compatible with the technique unlike anything before. It was actually quite surprising initially, but it made sense. His enhanced mind as well as the accumulated concentration that came from days of using the technique straight without any breaks thanks to the mental rejuvenation potions allowed him to use the Mental Embed technique with extraordinary proficiency.

This allowed him to speed up what would otherwise become an ordeal of years into just a few months. Rui was glad he had chosen to master the technique sooner rather than later because mastering it sooner allowed him to automatically transfer future information via the Mental Embed technique into the secondary brain.

This was because of the phenomenon of neuron plasticity. A phenomenon that was responsible for memory and associations. Neuron connections, that corresponded to particular thought, that were activated time and time again would grow closer and be bonded stronger. The same thing was happening when the Mental Embed was used to transfer particular information from his brain to the secondary brain, the act formed strong neuron connections between the brain and the secondary brain that allowed the automatic transfer of newer information from his brain to the secondary brain in the future.

By mastering it sooner, he was reducing the amount of information that needed to be manually transferred. After the initial manual transfer, the secondary brain would naturally and automatically learn newer combat information. By executing the initial manual transfer as soon as possible in his life, he was ensuring most of the combat information and thought processes transferred across his life would be learned automatically and not manually.

This was the reason he had chosen to master the Mindmirror Symbiote sooner rather than later. As time passed on, the difficulty of mastering the Mindmirror Symbiote would simply rise continuously, far beyond the already peak grade-ten difficulty.

As painful as it was parting ways with his enhanced growth speed, he ultimately found that the benefits outweighed the losses. He did not want to deal with a technique whose difficulty of mastery was extraordinarily high, at something like grade eleven or grade twelve.

It was especially desirable that he made the transfer of the VOID algorithm as soon as possible before he adapted and expanded it. The VOID algorithm was already a giant system with many sub-systems within it. If he dumped all the information into the Secondary Brain, then any complicated changes made to the VOID algorithm needed to be done only once as the Secondary Brain would follow suit automatically.

Still, the process was extremely tiring and difficult despite his extreme affinity with the techniques involved. This along with the mental invasion of the technique as well as the mental burden that would be incoming once the mental embed was complete made the entire process truly worthy of having its difficulty being graded ten.

## Chapter 375: Improvement

Six months passed. Rui worked day and night, literally, mastering his new techniques. The first technique he had mastered among the six was the Mind Mask technique. His mastery of the technique was immense and he could either amplify or reduce his presence and the sense of danger he evoked in sentient minds depending on what kind of image he projected on himself.

The second technique that he had completely mastered was the Fauna Flow technique, it was a rather unique technique the learning process of which he had enjoyed thoroughly. The technique was rather bizarre but he enjoyed the process of it. His growth speed and cognition allowed him to master it rather swiftly. He embedded the language into the secondary brain as well, using the Mental Embed technique.

The remaining techniques followed suit quickly. He attained mastery in the Reverberating Lance, the Final Breathing, and Shadow Step techniques one by one.

The final technique that followed was the Mindmirror Symbiote technique. It took a whole extra month after the remaining five techniques until he was finally ready.

CLICK

Rui gasped in disbelief after he finally embedded the last bit of combat information into the secondary brain. The embed was complete and the secondary brain was finally ready to be used in combat. He closed his eyes as he felt the secondary brain exchanging a massive flux of information with his mind.

Time slowed down as the world became sharper. It was as though someone had lowered the playing speed of a video. The secondary brain had been embedded with the sensory processing neurological protocols. It processed the information parallelly alongside his own mind, producing much better results much sooner.

"So, this is what the Mindmirror Symbiote does?" Rui muttered aloud as he brought his hands up to his face.

His eyes widened in shock as he realized he was both hearing his own voice and seeing his own hands in slow motion.

('I see, because my cognition speed has risen while my physical speed has declined, even my own body appears slower to me.') He realized.

He closed his eyes as he applied the Primordial Instinct and the Seismic Mapping techniques. Seismic Mapping had also slowed down in his mind, the incoming seismic radiation had a lower frequency. This was within his prediction.

What was a little outside his prediction was how Primordial Instinct interacted with the secondary brain. Primordial Instinct was merely the instinctual subconscious sense of danger and risk trained to an extremely high degree. It worked better out than he had ever expected.

The Primordial Instinct sense had become more accurate and precise. Or at least, that's what Rui felt like. Before, it was merely limited to vague feelings, but now Rui could feel it was more tangible and concrete information regarding the dangers and risks.

"Man, I wonder what the VOID algorithm is like now?" He muttered with an excited grin. "I need to test it immediately!"

The problem was, he needed an opponent in order to test out the VOID algorithm against. But this had already become a major problem at this stage.

"I'm too strong." He murmured. He was already considerably stronger than his friends, who were extremely powerful Martial Artists themselves even before his last training stage. At his current level, even other grade-ten Martial Artists were no longer much of a threat to him.

"Squire Kyrie again then?" He wondered, before shaking his head. "I already have a predictive model for Squire Kyrie."

One of the reasons he had chosen to master the Mindmirror Symbiote in the first place was because it was a symbiote that allowed him to speed up the process of forming the predictive model. If he wanted to test the actual increase at the speed at which he formed the predictive model thanks to the secondary brain, then he would need to fight someone he didn't have a predictive model on.



He had already formed one when he fought against Kyrie, so he couldn't fight for his purposes.

"If not Squire Kyrie then... I guess I'll have to make do with Squire Dylan." Rui murmured. Ideally, he would liked to have fought an all-rounder since those were the hardest for the VOID algorithm, but alas, Kyrie was the only all-rounder Martial Artist in the Academy as the combat training Squire instructor.

He didn't waste any time, choosing to immediately head towards the offensive training facility. He quickly consumed a few potions on the way. He wanted to be at his peak when he fought Squire Dylan. He spotted Squire Dylan mentoring several Martial Apprentices practicing techniques when he arrived.

Yet the moment he stepped in, he drew everybody's attention.

The sheer pressure he exerted was eye-drawing. Not a single person could avoid throwing a glance his way. One thing was clear to all of them.

He had grown stronger.

"Well well well." Squire Dylan said, addressing him. "Lookie who we have here."

"Squire Dylan." Rui replied.

"You know, there's a reason we Squire instructors put a tight lid on our minds when we're in facilities training." He said. "It's to ensure we don't disturb the Martial Apprentices training. Although you're not a Martial Squire, you're no ordinary Martial Apprentice either. Turn down the pressure a bit, will you? You're disturbing the other students."

"Ah." Rui glanced around before nodding. "Alright, my bad."

He closed his mind before activating the Mind Mask technique, completely concealing every ounce of mental pressure. The people around him grew startled as all the suffocating pressure disappeared into thin air instantly as Rui appeared to be no more than an ordinary sixteen-year-old boy.

Squire Dylan's eyebrow raised at the sight. "Huh. You've mastered some interesting Martial Art techniques. Speaking of which, why are you here? You'd already mastered the Reverberating Lance technique a month ago. Don't tell me you've already purchased more techniques?"

"No." Rui shook his head. "I've come here because I wish to spar with you."

"Ah..." Squire Dylan pondered the matter as he scratched his chin, before shrugging. "Sure."

### Chapter 376: Clash

"But." He said. "Not now. As you can see, I got Martial Apprentices to instruct over there."

He gestured over to some Martial Apprentices who were listening.

"No no sir, no need to bother with us."

"That's right, we can practice on our own for a while."

"You should also help other students out, not only us."

They quickly chimed in, insisting Squire Dylan spar with Rui then and there. Dylan sighed as Rui smirked. In the three years that he had been in the Martial Academy, he had earned a large fanbase among the newer batches of Martial Apprentices that had come along.

Furthermore, everyone could see that he had gotten much stronger than he was before. They were all curious to see how much stronger, and how far he could push Squire Dylan. It was a very rare event that they probably wouldn't get to see again. And they got to take a break.

"Hmph." He snorted as Rui smirked. "Popular, aren't you? Been here for only three years and you're more popular than I am."

Rui shrugged. He didn't give a damn about such things, never had and never would. "So, can we spar now?"

"Sure." He shrugged. With the other Martial Apprentices agreeing to put off their training to witness the spar, he had no reason not to agree.

Suddenly, a heavy pressure mounted onto Rui.

"Be warned though. I'm not nearly as gentle as Kyrie is." A small grin cracked on his face.

Rui smiled wryly. "I couldn't ask for more."

It wasn't long before they stood facing each other.

The sparring facility slowly morphed into a spectator stand as all the Martial Apprentices mysteriously took breaks at that moment together, and mysteriously gathered around the ring that Squire Dylan and Rui were in.

"Take your stances." A referee instructed with a much softer tone, considering he was instructing the head instructor, his superior.

Squire Dylan took an aggressive offensive stance with no care for defense. "I suppose limiting myself to grade-ten Apprentice level is good enough?"

"No." Rui replied, shaking his head.

"Oh?" He raised an eyebrow. "Well, we'll see. I'll just keep hitting the pedal until you can't take it anymore."

Rui nodded. "That works for me too."

He exhaled, closing his eyes.

His concentration accumulated as his mind converged. The secondary brain revved up as a flux of information flowed between both brains. He dispelled the mask he had placed earlier, it consumed mental energy that he couldn't afford to waste.

The Martial Apprentices shivered as a horrifying avalanche of mental pressure washed over them, suffocating them.

"This..." One of them muttered. "Isn't something that belongs solely to the Apprentice Realm."

"Huh..." Squire Dylan paused, his eyebrow rose as a grin cracked onto his face. "I guess you weren't exaggerating."

He said as Rui took a defensive and evasive stance. He did not want to engage with Squire Dylan's offense head-on if he could.

"Begin!" The referee commenced the battle.

The hairs on every Martial Apprentice's body stood as Squire Dylan shot forward. The sheer force with which he pushed forward, churned the ground beneath him.

BOOM!

He zoomed forward with a single step. He launched a powerful blow at Rui's face.

WHOOSH

The blow crashed into an empty illusion.

It was a feint.

BAM!

Dylon barely blocked an attack to his vitals, skidding backward. He rushed forward instantly, unleashing a wave of attacks.

Yet he could only widen his eyes in surprise as every single attack missed.

And it wasn't even close.

Just a few centimeters.

That was it.

That was all Rui moved to avoid each blow. His graceful soft movements contrasted with Squire Dylon's aggressive and loud movements.

Yet none of them touched so much as a hair on his body.

It was effortless.

('I see...!') Rui noted. ('Even peak Apprentice grade offensive specialists are obsolete against me?')

The secondary brain in combination with the Primordial Instinct technique was so potent that Dylon's movements were comfortably easy to keep track of. He had plenty of time to consciously track, process, decide and then act on that decision and still evade every strike.

He wasn't even using feints!

WHOOSH

('What about the speed of the predictive model construction?') He wondered as he smoothly evaded yet another strike.

The Mind Palace had been firing at an extremely smooth speed as both his mind and the secondary brain processed and inputted data into it at an incredible speed.

('I'm a little over twice as before!') Rui gaped. A more than one-hundred-percent increase thanks to one technique was a ridiculous improvement.

Yet before he could look deeper into the matter.

BAM!!

A tremendous blow landed on him, flinging him backward as he grimaced in pain.

The atmosphere grew taut as an oppressive aura flared across the facility.

"Focus." His voice was soft, yet it drowned out the world. Forcefully drawing Rui's attention towards him. "I'm not someone who can be defeated by a distracted boy."

Rui got up, heightening his alertness and awareness as he took a stance.

WHOOSH

Squire Dylan shot towards him in the briefest of moments, throwing a blow with untold power. His fist shredded the very atmosphere as plummeted towards Rui.

Rui swerved to avoid it, like he had been doing, yet;

WHOOSH

BAM!!

He grimaced in shock as an invisible force pulled him back toward the attack, preventing him from dodging it.

He gritted his teeth as the powerful attack crashed into a hastily construed guard, launching him backward.

('He used a wind-manipulation technique to pull me back towards his attack and prevent me from dodging. It's a more refined version of what Fae has!') He immediately realized as he scrambled, regaining his bearings

Squire Dylon had already arrived, but this time Rui was prepared.

What followed next shook the entire facility. The Martial Apprentices watched with expressions of awe as the two Martial Artists engage in a furious exchange of attacks with each other.

PUNCH

KICK

PARRY

DODGE

A wave of exchanges decorated the arena as the conflict obtained a momentary balance.

Chapter 377: Proceedings

WHOOSH

Rui avoided a strike successfully.

Squire Dylon had been using some a wind-manipulation technique that pushed Rui back into the way of his attack every time he tried to dodge it. But Rui had already found a solution.

Fight fire with fire.

Fight wind-manipulation technique with wind-manipulation techniques.

He used Tempestuous Ripple to counter the wind-manipulation technique that Squire Dylon was using to obstruct his evasion.

WHOOSH

BAM!

Rui smoothly dodged an attack he cleanly landed a powerful attack on Squire Dylon. Squire Dylon lashed out once more, yet, the same outcome recurred.

Rui countered every single move he made, almost as if he knew it was coming.

Rui grinned. The initial predictive model had been completed sooner than he had expected. Furthermore, the increase in effectiveness had been remarkable. He could obtain much more accurate and precise results much more quicker.

WHOOSH



BAM!!

He comfortably evaded yet another jab as he simultaneously landed a powerful hook at a vulnerable hole in Squire Dylan's defense that he had exposed during his attack.

It was the perfect counter.

('This is amazing. The VOID algorithm's execution is perfect!') He grew excited once more. He was able to see more than just one move into the future, something that was actually beyond his expectations.

But by processing the data much more than he ever would be able to in that brief period of time, he was able to statistical evaluations of the likelihood of the target of the predictive model making a certain move.

Yet the battle didn't return to the previous domineering advantage that Rui had held.

Squire Dylan wasn't done yet.

Rui felt a sharp sense of danger through the empowered sense of danger and risk of the Primordial Instinct.

BAM!

An incredibly swift and powerful straight punch crashed into his guard.

He skidded away, as he glanced over to Squire Dylan. ('He's no longer limiting himself to the conventional Martial Apprentice Realm.')

Squire Dylan had come to recognize the truth in Rui's words. Limiting himself to grade ten wasn't enough. He would need to exceed the Apprentice Realm.

And exceed it he did.

The pressure he exuded wasn't extremely far from that of a genuine Squire-level aura.

Rui's expression broke into a grin as he heightened his reactions, awaiting yet another attack.

He didn't have to wait at all.

WHOOSH

Dylon had crossed the distance between them at a speed that exceeded the perception capabilities of most Martial Apprentices spectating.

WHOOSH

Rui avoided a flying knee kick empowered with the full momentum of his charge, as he swiveled around, launching a swift high-kick at Dylon's head.

POW!

He blocked the attack before launching a flurry of attacks at Rui. Rui's extreme mental processing along with the Primordial Instinct and the VOID algorithm allowed him to counter every strike accurately and precisely.

High kicks were met with perfectly-timed spinning sweeping kicks.

Strikes were met with other strikes that dodged the attack naturally as a part of its form. Every move had its perfect counter.

This was until Squire Dylon began demonstrating the reason he was hired.

FLICK

A stinging sensation extended across Rui's hand from a nick from one of his strikes.

DRIP DRIP

A few drops of blood hit the ground as Rui's eyes widened. ('He has piercing techniques too!')

This meant Rui had to dedicate even more resources to be careful.

Yet he wasn't careful enough.

His vision blurred for just a tiny bit, confusing him. He glanced at Squire Dylan's nails, they had not only extended into razor-sharp claws but also had a sickly purple color to them.

('Poison!') Rui's eyes widened.

He had fused both a piercing and a poison technique so that the poison could be injected directly into his bloodstream!

"There is a reason they made me the head instructor of the offensive-training facility, you know." He smirked.

Squire Dylan began unleashing his versatility, hindering Rui's predictions of him. Rui needed to continuously update his prediction model with every new technique that Dylan used. Thankfully, with the help of the secondary brain, he was able to perform these data-intensive calculations and estimations rather swiftly.

Still, the sheer diversity that Squire Dylan dished out was truly impressive. He seemed to have techniques in nearly every offensive field that Rui had ever come across!

Furthermore, his physical parameters had risen ever since he decided he couldn't afford to hold back. His parameters had long since risen beyond the general limits of the modern Apprentice Realm.

They were in the quasi-Squire Realm.

Yet, Rui did not falter. Move after move, exchange after exchange, he incorporated all the data into the VOID algorithm and began forming even more accurate and precise predictions of Squire Dylan. The Martial Apprentices were struggling to even visually keep up.

Yet the tidbits that they could perceive and comprehend properly were so shocking that they almost wished they couldn't.

How could a Martial Apprentice operate at such a level of power?

How could a Martial Apprentice react to speed far above the general limits of the Apprentice Realm?

How could a Martial Apprentice force someone with a durability of a mighty mountain to block his attacks?

They didn't understand.

They simply took the liberty of being beheld to the magnificent battle between the two Martial Artists as they watched a Martial Apprentice attain power that perhaps no single Martial Apprentice had ever obtained prior.

BAM!

Squire Dylan blocked a powerful uppercut empowered with Vital Pressure, Outer Convergence, Flame Breathing, Adamant Reforging but also the Reverberating Lance technique. Many powerful Apprentice-level techniques had pushed the sheer force of the collision with the attack beyond bare basic human parameters.

Yet his opponent was one of a higher Realm. Even if the defensive techniques he used were not truly Squire-level, his evolved body alone meant he could withstand an immense amount of punishment. The strike ultimately didn't inflict any meaningful damage.

('Damn, I can't win using ordinary attacks.') Rui cursed. ('I'm going to have to create an opportunity where my trump cards may be able to take him down.

Chapter 378: Unshackled

BAM BAM BAM!

Rui somersaulted away as he evaded wind blast attacks from Squire Dylon. The speed at which they were launched and propelled as well as their power all exceeded the conventional limit of the Apprentice Realm. Yet Rui had been able to predict and react to all of them with the help of the combination of the secondary brain, the VOID algorithm, and Primordial Instinct allowing him to cleanly evade a majority of Squire Dylon's attacks.

CLASP

Dylon grabbed his arms holding them in place, yet instead of grappling, he simply took in a deep breath.

Rui's eyes widened as he ducked sharply while executing Flux Flow to destabilize Dylon. Dylon staggered a bit as he spat out a blazing fireball that just narrowly missed Rui thanks to the sabotage.

WHOOSH

The flames dispelled harmlessly as Rui broke out of his grip and leaped backward, wiping off sweat from his forehead, as he glanced up at Squire Dylon warily. His offense was genuinely diverse and versatile. Despite the fact that it was easier to adapt to specialized Martial Artists, Dylon couldn't be considered a specialist with how many various offensive options he had.

WHOOSH

Rui cleanly evaded a powerful haymaker swing, as he carefully maintained his distance. Even though Dylan was operating with a speed and power that was at a quasi-Squire level. He was unable to gain a sustained advantage against Rui!

He knew Rui was special, but this was genuinely surprising to him. He couldn't believe how powerful he had become. His reactions were almost closer to what one might expect from a Squire than what one would expect from a mere Martial Apprentice. There were moments where it felt as though he had seen right through completely, these were times when Rui began moving before Dylan to counter moves that came after.

It was thoroughly bewildering.

BAM BAM BAM!

He guarded as Rui pummeled over and over with body blows empowered with the various offensive techniques he had mastered over the years. The power of his offense was staggering. The combined power of Vital Pressure, Outer Convergence, Flame Breathing, Adamant Reforging, and Reverberating Lance boosted the impact of every single one of his strikes. Squire Dylan had a flash of nostalgia as recalled having trained Rui with every single one of these techniques, as the head of the offensive techniques training facility.

('He's come far.') He noted. ('But it's right about time to begin ending this.')

BAM!!

Dylan managed to land a swift and powerful haymaker, as he held back by one less degree.

Squire Dylan lashed out as he began launching an avalanche of attacks against Rui. The sheer speed gap between them was not small. Rui pushed the secondary brain as it furiously aided him with the VOID algorithm and the Primordial Instinct heightening his reaction speed to the absolute limit that was possible.

Yet, even it had limits.

Squire Dylan was operating at a tier of power that would have killed any other Martial Apprentice within three seconds, and all of the Martial Apprentices that were spectating were extremely aware of this fact. They even spectated from a distance out of fear.

The ring that was bolstered with esoteric technology meant to withstand battle even at the peak of the Apprentice level had begun to be quite damaged by the battle.

Rui grimaced as he did his best to mitigate the speed gap between them. Yet, the odds were truly stacked against him. The damage he had suffered throughout the battle had begun to adversely affect his combat parameters. Every attack of Dylan that landed on Rui left lasting damage. But, in turn, Rui's attacks didn't inflict nearly as much damage against Dylan's hyper-evolved body and constitution. Even with Reverberating Lance permeating the impact through Squire Dylan's body, the effect was minimal.

Still, Rui wasn't done yet.

('I still haven't used my trump card yet!') Rui gritted his teeth as he struggled to maximize the number of blows that he successfully evaded while preparing the Stinger. If he could pull off a Stinger as he did against Squire Freelia Caela, he might be able to at least inflict some damage on Squire Dylan.

The biggest problem was that Squire Dylan was operating at a level even above what she had when he and his friends had fought her in the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana.

He had only one chance, he needed to use it wisely.

He evaded and endured Squire Dylan's onslaught.

Blow after blow.

Technique after technique.

('Now!') Rui's eyes sharpened as the moment arrived.

He swiveled to the right of Squire Dylan, launching a powerful blow. Dylan promptly responded by riddling him with attacks.

WHOOSH

Rui's image disappeared.

Dylan's eyes widened in surprise.

It was a feint.

His awareness spread as his sharp senses immediately located Rui behind him. Yet, a shiver ran down his spine as he felt immense danger.

A Squire-level aura.

In the briefest of moments, as he turned, a heavy Squire-level aura descended onto the facility as every Martial Apprentice, froze at their spot, shivering in fear.

Squire Dylan's long-buried instincts awakened as the reflexes of a veteran who had killed many a Squire lashed out in a heightened sense of danger. For a moment, he forgot he was fighting a mere Martial Apprentice.

The sensation of ceding his back to a Martial Squire generated a fear that bypassed all reason, instinctively taking over his body. It was this instinctive fear that had saved his life in the Martial World. Rui had reawakened one of the most powerful Martial Squires of his generation.

His speed and power surged as he broke all restraints on them. The might of a Martial Squire had bared its fangs against Rui.



The very land beneath them shook as the air boiled. The sheer power of a Martial Squire warped the world around them.

And yet;

PEW!!

The Stinger soared through the air, unperturbed, striking Squire Dylan's eye.

In exchange?

The unshackled might of a Martial Squire crashed into Rui.

BOOM!!!

#### Chapter 379: Outcome

It wasn't often that Rui's plans went wrong. But not even he was omniscient, anything could happen. His plan had been straightforward. He had feinted a swivel to the side using Phantom Step, but that wasn't what he had limited himself to. He had also used Shadow Step in conjugation with the Mind Mask technique to misdirect Squire Dylan's attention to the feint while his own presence was heavily reduced thanks to the Mind Mask technique. Furthermore, he had used the VOID algorithm to predict the moment when he would be in Dylan's far-end peripheral vision where the Shadow Step technique was at its most effective.

Neither technique would have been effective against Squire Dylan individually. But together when used at the perfect moment with the help of the VOID algorithm, he was able to successfully elude Squire Dylan's attention.

He had circled back behind and aimed a Stinger for when Squire Dylan exposed his eye. Normally, this alone wouldn't be enough to successfully land the Stinger on his eye when Dylan turned to prevent his back from being exposed.

That was where the Mind Mask technique had come in. It was a technique that generally allowed a Martial Apprentice to be perceived and sensed as much more or less dangerous and attention-drawing than they really were using self-hypnosis. In this case, Rui had used it to startle Squire Dylon and impede his reactions with shock, which would decrease the probability that Squire Dylon would defend accurately against the Stinger.

Rui's mastery of the Mind Mask technique had been extraordinary. This was especially true even after he had embedded it into the secondary brain. He had been able to project an image of danger and presence far above that of reality even before the mental embed had finished.

It had been a good plan, quite effective.

There was only one problem with it.

He had underestimated how much stronger he had gotten thanks to the Mental Embed and the activation of the secondary brain. Of course, part of the point of the fight was to discover exactly how strong he was. But he hadn't expected he would have grossly underestimated the boost the Mind Mask technique would get thanks to the secondary brain.

He had simply tried to create the strongest Mind Mask he could.

How could he have known it would end up becoming a Squire-level mask that made him indistinguishable from a Martial Squire?

He couldn't!

What was worse was that he had completely failed to predict the effect it would have on Squire Dylon. When Squire Dylon had felt the sudden Squire-level mental pressure flare from behind him, it had completely bypassed his conscious mind and triggered his survival instincts, he simply reflexively lashed out backward with a Squire-level attack.

It was only after the attack had landed had he realized what he had done.

Rui's enhanced Primordial Instinct had felt a terrifying amount of danger from Squire-Dylon, informing him that Dylon had become serious and a Squire-level was incoming. The Stinger was already too far gone and couldn't be stopped. Instead, an instant before Squire Dylon's attack had begun, he had brought his guard up and dipped backward swiftly, hoping that the backward and downward motion would reduce the damage inflicted.

The VOID algorithm went into overwork as Rui predicted the exact trajectory of the attack, doing everything he could to minimize the damage.

BOOM!!!

Rui had thought he knew what it was like to be hit hard, but he had realized how naïve he had been. A Squire-level haymaker had landed on his guard.

CRACK CRACK CRACK

The sheer initial impact had mangled his arms as Squire Dylon launched him flying. Rui blasted past the walls of the facility violently as he flew past it, crashing and breaking multiple trees until his momentum had finally been bled out.

The last thing he felt before he lost consciousness was excruciating pain.

And somewhere within all that pain was immense awe. He was in awe of the power of a higher Realm. ('Damn... I'll obtain that power someday...')

His eyes closed as he lost consciousness due to the blunt force trauma, still managing to use Final Breathing.

Squire Dylon flew out of the facility as he Sky Walked in the air, looking for Rui with one eye. His other one had been bleeding due to the attack, but he didn't seem to care in even the slightest. He spotted Rui in an instant as he instantly reached him.

"What have I done?!" He gritted his teeth as he immediately pulled out a healing potion, allowing Rui to consume it.

This was against medical protocols for serious injuries since there could be complications at times, but Dylan didn't care. Everything could be fixed as long as Rui was alive, but everything was lost if he died from profuse blood loss or some internal organ rupture. The potion healed the wounds, but the bones in his arm were still bent unnaturally. The sheer force of the blow had completely broken them immediately. In fact, Dylan was surprised it didn't do more damage. Rui wasn't even a defensive Martial Apprentice, he wondered if he really had grown weaker over the years.

Once he had stabilized Rui's condition, he finally exhaled in relief as he studied Rui in confusion and surprise.

('What the fuck was that thing he did?') He wondered. ('It's as if he became a Martial Squire magically.')

He shook his head after thinking about it for a while, sighing. "I'm probably going to get fired."

Not that he was particularly resentful of it, he knew the gravity of what he had done. If he had done it against almost any other Martial Apprentice student in the Academy, they would have died on the spot and that would have been absolutely catastrophic for the Martial Academy.

He glanced back at Rui with a look of admiration and pride.

"Hehehe, the world isn't ready for when this kid climbs up the Realms." He chuckled.

## Chapter 380: Aftermath

Funnily enough, this hadn't been the first time Rui had been defeated by a Squire-level technique. He, along with Kane, had been knocked by Squire Kyrie with a Squire-level technique. Although, she had done it in an extremely safe manner with the precision of a surgeon while Squire Dylan had done it in the most extreme way possible.

Of course, their circumstances had been extremely different.

Rui had woken in the medical wing of the Academy later. The first thing he did was glance at his arms.

"All healed up." He sighed with relief. They had been crushed by a single attack from a Martial Squire.  
"Man, he's so strong."

Rui muttered, sighing as he tried to squash his increasingly intense desire to break through into the Squire Realm. But alas, it wasn't time yet.

He closed his eyes as he directed his thoughts toward his Martial Art. He didn't quite feel the instinctive certainty about the maturity of his Martial Art that he had been told he would feel once his Martial Art reached maturity.

He shook his head. "Perhaps it will come once I cement my current level of power with experience."

It wasn't impossible after all.

He put those thoughts aside as he considered his situation at the moment. ('What to do from here?')

His immediate goals were, of course, still Squire candidacy and the Squire Realm, but he still had to plan and take steps to reach that level.

"For now... it's time to leave the Martial Academy." Rui murmured.

He had long anticipated the arrival of this milestone; his graduation from the Academy. It had been nearly a perfect three years since he first joined the Martial Academy. He had already become sixteen years old. "So much has happened since I joined."

He thought back to his journey within the Martial Academy. From the time he had joined, entering the Foundation Stage that had honed his body and bare basic hand-to-hand capabilities. The Exploration Stage had given him a taste of what Martial Art really was like and soon after he had discovered his Martial Path with Project Water.

What followed was an exciting journey of training and growing stronger while experiencing the world through his many missions. The Martial Contest had been a highlight, allowing him to compare himself with his many peers across the Kandrian Empire. He had stepped outside the Kandrian Empire for the first time only when he had accepted his very first international commission, learning more about the world outside the Kandrian Empire.

And now he had come to the stage where the Martial Academy could no longer provide him any meaningful value. He did not want to continue being a student if that was the case.

"Apprentice Quarrier?" A nurse noticed him awake. "I see you're awake. How are you feeling?"

"Perfectly fine actually." Rui replied. "My arms are fixed."

"Indeed." The nurse replied. "We've completely treated and healed all your wounds. We'll just conduct a final check-up, and then you'll be discharged immediately."

It wasn't long before Rui left the medical wing in his sparring uniform, heading straight to the offensive technique training facility.

"You're back!" Squire Dylan exclaimed when he saw Rui walking in.

Rui smiled in response. "Instructor Dylan."

"I'm really sorry for what I did, my boy." Dylan sighed as he apologized. "I lost control there for a second."

Rui shrugged. "No worries, sir. In hindsight, it gave me a much better understanding of what Martial Squires actually are capable of. Squire Kyrie has always held back and the Martial Squire my friends and I defeated could not be considered a genuine Martial Squire. In hindsight, I'm glad that you did what you did."

Rui nodded, consoling Dylan.

"I'm glad you feel that way." Dylan sighed in relief. "Though I wouldn't hold it against you if you were resentful. A direct hit with a Squire-level attack would kill most Martial Apprentices."

Rui shook his head, chuckling. The two bantered some more as Rui revealed that he was going to be leaving the Martial Academy very soon.

"Is that so..." Squire Dylan sighed, with a mixed smile. "I might be joining you very soon."

"Did you plan to retire as an instructor?" Rui knitted his eyebrows in confusion.

"No." He shook his head. "But, the accident in our spar might lose me my job."

Rui's eyes narrowed at those words. "I see... Don't worry, I'm sure that the Martial Academy will recognize that this isn't something worth losing a Martial Squire instructor of your caliber. I have learned a lot from you, and I'm grateful for all of it. I'm sure there are many Martial Apprentices who feel the same way."

"You're going to bring tears to the eyes of this old man." Squire Dylan chuckled, before gesturing Rui away. "Good luck, and goodbye."

Rui left the training facility after bidding him goodbye before immediately heading to the reception of the Martial Academy.

"Excuse me?" Rui asked one of the support staff.

"Yes? How may I help you?" She asked.

"May I have a sheer of paper and a pen?" He asked, promptly accepting them from her.

He sat down at one of the tables and began writing a letter. It took him nearly ten minutes before he was done. He walked over to the receptionist before handing her the piece of paper. "Could I request you to please pass on that letter to headmaster Aronian?"

"Of course, Apprentice Quarrier." The receptionist bowed towards him, carefully accepting the folded letter.

"Thank you." Rui turned around as he made his way back to his dormitory room. He had plenty to think about now that he had finished some smaller matters. Yet immediately, a staff member came to inform him that the headmaster had summoned him.

"Right now?" Rui asked.

"Yes." The staff member replied.

"Alright." Rui nodded. ('That was quick.')

It took him a while, but he reached the headmaster's office shortly.

"Headmaster Aronian." Rui bowed deeply as he expressed the respect earned by a Martial Artist of the upper Realms.