

Martial Unity 1121

Chapter 1121: Suit

One of the challenges that Rui had at the moment was that he didn't have the best compatibility for poison. He recalled when he tried creating a technique that involved poison but failed because his aptitude for poison techniques was not the best.

It was unfortunate, but Rui did not know what constituted poison aptitude. He had temporarily been resigned to this limitation but did not abandon the possibility of using poison techniques.

As someone who aimed to be able to adapt to defeat any foe in the world, he needed to have poison techniques. After all, there almost certainly was a Martial Artist out there who, perhaps, could only be taken down with poison.

In that case, Rui would be unable to adapt to them without a poison technique.

That was unacceptable to him.

Of course, Reaper's Dew was not a poison that Rui intended to use offensively. Rather, he intended to use it supplementarily.

After all, the technique was such that it did not require much in the first place. Furthermore, Rui did not need to go out of his way to condition himself to be unaffected by the poison the way Squire Herea did. After all, he wanted to get affected by the poison. That was the whole point.

He needed the poison to affect him, or he wouldn't be able to generate the needed fuel to ensure that his healing factor was not slowed down due to a lack of availability.

('Adding the poison element to Weaving Blood will turn the technique into a cell redistribution system.') He mused.

After all, it was killing cells in certain parts of the body to turn into fuel for new cells in a wounded part of the body.

That was no different from transporting cells from one part of the to another.

It was interesting that the technique that allowed him to do this, Weaving Blood, was essentially combining a total of four different techniques that handle different parts of the mechanism to allow for the entire technique to function as a whole.

He immediately dived back into the Martial Library of the Floating Sect, looking for the poison technique in question.

Yet he couldn't help but skim through the various poisons and techniques surrounding the poisons.

Poisons were not limited to just one technique, a poison could end up providing multiple techniques to offer, depending on how versatile it was.

Rui found that Reaper's Dew was a poison that had only one technique it could be applied through. It was a technique where the poison was introduced into the epithelial tissue, would be passed on to anyone that the user touched, and would immediately begin causing cell death.

('Hm, I don't want that to happen.') Rui frowned. ('I'll have to edit that part out. Otherwise, it will be too much of a pain in the ass.')

He did not want to pass on the poison to those he touched like a poison-user. He wanted to use the Reaper's Dew for his own body, not for his opponent.

He quickly opened the technique book as he scoured through the training method.

('...Interesting.')

Many poison-oriented techniques involve conditioning the body to be able to handle a poison without any ill-effects, but also to host, and contain the poison. The principle by which this was accomplished was actually quite interesting to Rui.

It was sort of a highly washed-down version of the evolution breakthrough process to the Squire Realm in a way. It did rely on a certain degree of small scale and limited evolution of the cells to be able to accommodate a new substance to the body.

It was nothing compared to the sheer amount of evolution that the breakthrough to the Squire Realm gave the body, but it was still just enough to change how the body interacted and reacted to a single poison.

Because that was the only change that occurred, it was possible to make it occur with relatively limited means.

('Interesting... So poison-users rely on the potential to use poison techniques to grow stronger.')

He had recently had some epiphanies about the Martial Path, and he was able to understand poison-oriented Martial Art better than he had been able to before.

Humans possessed immense potential, and the Martial Path, among other things, was a journey to actualizing that potential through Martial Art. Even as a Martial Apprentice, every technique that one learned maximized the efficiency and effectiveness of the energy generated by the human body.

For poison-oriented Martial Artists, that probably meant the potential of the human body to employ poison by successfully withstanding it. Once the poison element was incorporated into the body, it too had the potential to be used through poison-oriented Martial Artists.

It was just an unusual form of potential that most people did not possess, but those that did ended up having a Martial Path and later on, a Body, that was attuned to poison.

Rui immediately began going through it in detail, he wasn't too concerned with compatibility with the poison. He could just minimize the dosage that he would be incorporating into his body, regardless, he just needed to be able to release it into his flesh whenever he needed to get an extra boost for stamina or healing.

Because it would cause cell death across his epithelial tissue, it would naturally mean that his flesh would be getting weaker, but it would come with the benefit of better regeneration, and more stamina.

He immediately took a copy of the technique before heading back to his chamber, ready to train the technique immediately. The sooner he mastered it, the sooner his Weaving Blood technique would be perfected, and the greater the step forward towards achieving Project Metabody.

Thankfully, the training was a lot less uncertain than he had expected and hoped for. It was training such that as long as he had endurance and perseverance, he would be able to succeed in it just fine eventually. All he needed to do was figure out how to alter the training best to suit his needs.

Chapter 1122: Conditioning

The conditioning technique was a little different from the ones that he had seen in the Apprentice Realm.

As far as he could seem, the reason for this stemmed from the fact that the Martial Body was able to acclimatize to stimuli that were harmful to them far better than the normal human body could. This too was a trait that the human body lacked, but the Squire evolution breakthrough process was one of the few things that could grant the body this ability even if it didn't have it before.

By subjecting certain parts of his body to the poison over and over again, using both healing potions and his own innate healing factor, he could eventually create a generation of cells in a localized area that possessed the ability to resist and contain the poison until the time he wanted it to.

As for the exact mechanics, he would have to work things out, but as long as he achieved a basic mechanism for releasing the substance into his flesh whenever he felt the need to amplify his healing or stamina, he would be fine.

Rui quickly got to work as he worked out the chinks of the technique.

Much to his surprise, there actually was quite some depth on how he ought to trigger the poison or where to store it and what the mechanics were.

This was not an uncommon problem, based on the degree of choice that he had in customizing this part of the training method.

Many poison-oriented Martial Artists stored their body in inactive pockets inside their body until it was time to use them.

This allowed them to deploy their poison if and when they felt like it.

People like Squire Herea did not necessarily employ that solution though. Given that she felt the need to bandage her arms, it was clear that her poison was active all the time.

Rui definitely did not want to go that route. He couldn't afford to have the poison active all the time.

Even putting aside the fact that it would weaken his constitution too much all the time, something that he did not desire. He wanted to be in control of when it happened rather than simply allowing it to happen all the time.

The whole point of the Metabody project was to allow him to choose and control what his Martial Body would look like, he could not tolerate something that could not be controlled or directed.

That was his biggest issue.

Thankfully, it was something that could be avoided.

He began training immediately after he finished refining how he wanted the technique to look and function.

The poison was stored beneath most of his skin such that it couldn't possibly be applied to his opponent upon contact. As for the trigger, he managed to find a way to set the trigger of deploying the poison with a simple electric shock, which would loosen up the pockets created by tissue, allowing the poison to escape.

It was effectively no different from a normal nerve impulse instructing muscles to move in a certain way.

Once he had established that, it was simply time to begin that process as soon as possible. He began the conditioning and acclimatization process of the training immediately. This involved subjecting targeted parts of his body to Reaper's Dew. Specifically, he only wanted enough of a specific area of tissue to gain immunity towards Reaper's Dew so that those areas could store and host the poison.

The process was actually more painful than he had imagined. It seemed like the initial big exposures of his body to Reaper's Dew made it quite susceptible to pain and damage, as well as a lot of death.

It was one of the hurdles of the training process, it required the body to undergo an immense amount of pain and death in order to eventually be able to handle the introduction of poison substances into his body.

Rui had undergone a similar procedure when he was getting esoteric material substances inserted into his body, as well as that of Kane's, in order for them to be able to wield their lightning techniques.

However, that substance was not anywhere nearly as toxic or poisonous as an actual poison, and thus neither of the two of them had had too much trouble eventually learning the mechanics of the technique very quickly after that.

He hoped it would be the same for poison techniques, but alas, it didn't seem to be nearly as easy or quick as it was the last time.

('Oh boy, this is not going to be easy,') Ruki mused one day when he began coughing blood up due to overexertions.

Poisons were not to be messed with. He realized that getting enough resistance to the poison such that it could be contained and ensured that it would not harm his performance while it was contained was not going to be easy.

Formulating the technique was actually easy for some of his caliber once he understood what could or couldn't be controlled, but mastering a poison technique when it was clearly outside of his specialty

meant that he was going to have a much harder time mastering these poisons compared to a poison specialist.

This was true even when he was a Martial Apprentice, poison-oriented Martial Artists had a far better time adapting to poison than non-poison-oriented Martial Artists did even at the Apprentice Realm even though their body was that of a normal human body.

Rui had suspected that the subconscious brain was the reason, those with a Martial Path centered around a field like poison, their bodies were prone to suffering to poison as well, but their brains exerted an influence on the body as far as the endocrine system went, regulating hormones and other things that would allow them to handle an external intruding substance that was highly toxic substance.

This meant that their bodies dealt with poison itself before the pain kicked in.

Chapter 1123: Result

Thankfully, he got to skip one of the hardest parts of integrating poisons into one's body, which was general resistance. Because he needed the poison to work, he couldn't gain general immunity or resistance against it.

Thus, his training time was greatly shortened due to the removal of this step.

Despite that, it took quite some time. Mastering poison techniques took longer than he expected because of the time it took to master a new poison technique because not only did the technique surrounding them need to be mastered, but the poison itself took time to be integrated into the body.

With normal Martial Art techniques, only the technique itself required mastering. It canceled out with the reduction in training time that Rui got by skipping a step.

In the end, it was only four months later that he finally mastered the poison as well as the technique that allowed him to deploy the poison into his own body when he needed to.

One of the biggest hurdles was conditioning his body cells to release the poison when he sent enough of an electric shock through his own nerves.

By setting the trigger for the deployment of the poison as the Lightning Tap technique, he could make sure that he didn't inadvertently release the poison when he didn't need it. That would be quite catastrophic, if he ever was facing a Martial Artist against whom the defense was extremely important, activating the Reaper's Dew poison into his body would weaken his constitution, and therefore his defense.

That was why he spent extra effort to ensure that such a thing could not happen.

After a lot of time and hard work, his efforts finally paid off.

After four months, it was finally time to test his technique.

He exhaled deeply, trying to calm his anticipation.

TAP!

His thumb flew to the side of his neck, sending a pulse of current into the auricular nerve on his neck. For a moment, he partially felt the brief effects of Lightning Tap, numbness, and mild paralysis.

In the next moment, he felt a surge of pain across his entire body as the trigger was activated and Reaper's Dew was released across his epithelial tissue.

('And now...')

SPLAT!

He relaxed the muscles of his left arm...

SPLAT!

...Before inflicting a deep gash into it with a swing of his right arm.

What ensued happened so quickly that he almost didn't even react in time.

The wound began healing before it was even completely inflicted!

The starting points of the gash were already finished in their healing by the time the wound was completely inflicted.

"What?!" Rui blurted out in surprise.

He hadn't expected it to be so effective. It hadn't even been this effective when he fought guardian Herea.

('Then again, Squire Herea did not actually inflict any physical wounds for me to see the visible speed of tissue regeneration.') Rui realized.

Because the Reaper's Dew poison was something that she used routinely and was her only way of inflicting damage, he hadn't actually gotten wounded at all.

Still, even he felt that his technique was a bit too successful!

Wounding him was like trying to wound the surface of water, even if one struck at water very hard, the displaced area would be restored with water before the motion was even over.

('It's incredible,') He realized. ('This is only possible because of the combination of autophagy and the Reaper's Dew poison. These two together can essentially replicate the mechanics of a healing potion!')

This meant that with the addition of the Reaper's Dew poison in his body, he effectively had a healing potion in his body permanently.

The implications of this were massive. For one, he probably didn't strictly need to carry healing potions ever again. It also meant that if he ever came across a Martial Artist whose Martial Art was focused on hyperlethality at the cost of everything, he would simply be able to adapt to him with extreme perfection simply by activating Weaving Blood.

He didn't think that there was any offense in the Squire Realm that could possibly overwhelm his healing and regeneration.

If he stacked the pattern recognition system of the VOID algorithm onto that body, then it would be game over.

It took half a year, but he had finally finished the first step of Project Metabody.

('Currently, at the moment, I have a Martial body centered around super-healing, as well as one centered around super-speed.') Rui noted.

Both Weaving Blood and Void Forestep were his strongest techniques. And in hindsight, he realized that it was for a reason.

He hadn't created Void Forestep with the intention of it being a piece of a much larger and more ambitious project, but he now understood why it was so effective.

The technique itself was powerful, no doubt, but what made it so powerful was the fact that the technique had immense synergy with Rui's Martial Path and Flowing Void Style. It fundamentally catered to the idea of changing to adapt and evolve.

He just hadn't realized it.

The technique changed his spec configuration to adapt to the Root, and in turn, allowed him to beat it.

Weaving Blood was also similar, in concept as well as potency, of the same caliber of technique as Void Forestep.

Now, he needed to find similar techniques for offense and for defense. Once he got those two Martial bodies out of the way, he would have completed the first iteration of Project Metabody.

He didn't necessarily think that this would be the end of Project Metabody forever, everything had areas for improvement after all. He didn't just declare Project Water complete when the first iteration of the VOID algorithm rolled out. Many iterations of the VOID Algorithm came out even after the first iteration that were improved and far superior to their predecessors.

Perhaps Project Metabody would also be the same.

Regardless, he did look forward to the day that he succeeded with the first iteration, even if it wasn't necessarily the last.

Chapter 1124: State

In the past six months that Rui had set out to master Weaving Blood, and then improve it with the Reaper's Dew, much had changed on Floating Island.

The war had not ceased, nor had it ended. The Kaddar Treaty Organization had rolled out assault after assault chipping away at the strength of the Floating Sect

They deployed nearly a hundred Martial Squires each time, forcing the Floating Sect to deploy a similar number of Martial Squires each time to defend and prevent the Kaddar Martial Artists from reaching the surface of the island.

The conflicts around the island often affected the island, yet it never destabilized or showed any concerning signs as the Kaddar Treaty Organization deployed their mysterious long-range weapon that affected the esoteric substance that served as the gravitational core of the island to hold the island together, making it impossible to destabilize.

The Floating Sect didn't even need to bother too much with active surveillance because they already knew that the Kaddar Treaty Organization was coming ahead of time. Every time the gravity on the surface of the island fluctuated and reduced, they knew that the Kaddar Treaty Organization had employed its weapon to get rid of one of the greatest deterrents that the Floating Sect had against the Kaddar Region; the collapse of the island onto the Kaddar Region.

The Floating Sect had considered the possibility of getting rid of the weapon once and for all with a targeted covert attack. But unfortunately, that was almost impossible to do. The Kaddar Region would see such an attack coming from a mile away.

Covert operations required bypassing awareness by definition, and there was simply no way for the Floating Sect to hide their approach to the Kaddar nation at this point. The fact that it was so physically, economically, and socially isolated from the Kaddar Region meant that there was no way to disguise its operations to the Kaddar Treaty Organization.

That was why the plan to destroy the weapon was temporarily put off.

It wasn't as though there was absolutely no way this was possible whatsoever or anything, after all, there existed people like Kane who would be able to bypass even the intense surveillance of the Squire patrols that the Kaddar Treaty Organization had set up to ensure that nobody could enter or exit.

It was unfortunate, but the Floating Sect was running out of options. It was forced into a defensive position where it could not do much.

A war against the Kaddar Region on its own soil was out of the question. The net military power of the Kaddar Region far outstripped the Floating Sect when it came to their home turf, the Floating Sect would suffer a devastating loss if they moved out of their home turf and attacked the Kaddar nations on their home turf.

All they could do was weather the attack and make it extremely costly for the Kaddar Region.

As long as they could make the disincentives much greater than the incentives when it came to waging war against the Floating Sect, they could deter the Kaddar Region from waging war against the sect.

There were considerations on how to go about this.

One of the ideas that they had was simply escalating the battle to the Senior level. Perhaps one day when the Kaddar Region had sent a particularly large platoon of Martial Squires with some of their most powerful Squires, the Floating Sect could choose to annihilate them all with a Martial Senior.

This would put the Kaddar Region in an extremely difficult position since it was clear that they were unwilling to escalate the battle to this level easily.

The internal division, as well as external pressure from states outside but around the Kaddar Region, were one of the weaknesses that the Floating Sect could exploit this way, it meant that they would have to make a strong decision then and there, whether to bite the bullet and move forward, or whether to give up and end the war.

It could work, but if the Kaddar Region decided to go all out and deploy all their Martial Seniors, then there would be big trouble. Three Martial Seniors simply could not defend against the might of more than a dozen Martial Squires, regardless of the environment.

However, those three could kill a few Martial Seniors each at the worst, even if they did lose.

It was fear of that outcome that was the biggest reason that the Floating Sect did not escalate.

It was a messy situation where both sides were limited and restricted, and both sides were bleeding due to the war. Yet the Kaddar Region refused to give up so easily.

From the very start, it was the Floating Sect's victory if they could make the Kaddar Region cease. As long as they could do that, it would not only be a victory for this war, but it would also make future wars more unlikely.

If the Kaddar Region could not get what it wanted despite the presence of a weapon that got rid of the deterrence of the island, then there probably was no way for the Kaddar Region to ever get what it wanted.

Unless, of course, they got a Martial Master, in which case it would be game over.

Regardless, the Floating Sect spent half a year gritting its teeth and putting up a heavy guard to withstand the assaults from the Kaddar Region.

Guardians died inevitably. Every attack and every assault killed many guardians inevitably, as a result.

Unfortunately, there wasn't much that could be done about that. They increased the number of Martial Squires that fought back in order to give their guardians a numeric advantage, but the Kaddar Region simply threw even more Martial Squires to attack the sect, forcing the Floating Sect to bleed even more as huge chunks of the sect were forced to go out there and defend against the incoming waves of attacks.

Chapter 1125: Offense

Rui, however, didn't mind the war all that much. Whenever he wasn't fighting deployed, he simply trained.

Now that he had obtained three spec configurations for healing, stamina, and speed, he was looking forward to expanding that offense and defense as well.

These two were arguably the hardest of them all.

The reason for this was because both offense and defense were too broad. Offense included collision-based techniques like strikes, throws, and projectiles. That could further be divided into two exclusive categories blunt force and piercing. It also included other forms of inflicting damage such as heat, friction, mental techniques, sustained pressure-based techniques like holds and locks, blunt force brain trauma, etc.

It also included a wide variety of ranges from super-close-quarters forms of offense with grappling and wrestling offensive maneuvers to close-quarters striking, to long-range attacks. It included damage based on external elements such as poison, symbiotes, or weapons. There were also different media of damage such as one's own body, as well as the atmosphere.

There were many layers, and dimensions of depth to offense as a broad category or concept.

It was far from a monolithic concept, and far more of a loose label that simply referred to any and everything that could be done in combat to hurt one's opponent'

It was simply far too broad of a concept for him to develop a single Martial Body that universally catered to all of the forms of offense that existed at the moment. It was impossible because the Martial Body needed to cater to forms of damage that were either mutually exclusive or even principally opposed to each other, like heat and cold.

That was why forming a Martial Body that was principally catering to the offense as a whole was impossible.

('I'll need to narrow it down to my offense,')

Although he did plan to eventually encompass all fields, for now, he needed to cater only to the main forms of offense that he relied on.

Striking.

Long-range air-based attacks.

Grappling offense.

If he needed to amplify these by altering his body in some way, then he needed to either find three different mechanisms to amplify each of them separately or one mechanism that amplified all of them.

('There are advantages to both,') Rui decided.

If he picked three different mechanisms for all three forms of offense, then he would probably end up being able to adapt better to all of them.

On the other hand, it increased the difficulty by at least a factor of three. Furthermore, it was highly suspect whether it would be possible to use in one Martial Body.

('Separate Martial Bodies for sub-categories of offense is something I should save for future iterations.') Rui decided.

For the first iteration of Project Metabody, he had decided that it was best to stick with being simple and straightforward, rather than trying to overcomplicate things

('One mechanism to amplify my offense in general...') Rui narrowed his eyes.

He needed to identify a way in which he could amplify all offense. It wasn't so straightforward, as they relied on different ways to inflict damage.

('The only thing that they have in common is inflicting damage with a great power output...') He noted.

That didn't make it easier. If anything, it made it harder. It was true that those means of offense relied on the power output of his body, but it also meant that if he wanted to empower all of those forms of offense, he needed to increase his power output.

Void Forestep appeared as if it increased his power output, but the decrease in mass was perfectly balanced out by the increase in speed, so it amplified speed for the most part, as opposed to power.

As for how he was to increase power? He had no idea at the moment.

He had gotten a bit lucky with Weaving Blood in that he didn't need to do much research for means and ways to find a way to empower his healing. It worked out with the knowledge that he had and techniques that he could easily access.

But he had the inkling that this was going to be much harder.

For one, he didn't really know how he was supposed to massively improve the power of his Martial Body. He knew it couldn't be an ordinary supplementary method because that didn't alter his spec configuration, it just gave minor upgrades to his power.

However, he wasn't interested in obtaining that at the moment.

What he wanted was a way to alter the spec configuration of his Martial Body, a simple power supplementary technique like Fire Breathing was not going to do that. Just like how Wind Breathing could not become the speed Martial Body, only Void Forestep could.

If he wanted a Martial Body that was focused on power, he probably needed a technique, or multiple techniques like in the case of Weaving Blood, that improved power by increasing his body mass.

Martial Bodies with greater power output usually had an immense amount of muscle mass. It was that mass that gave rise to their great power. If there was a way to improve his power without increasing mass, he didn't mind using it, but the point of Project Metabody was to sacrifice physical parameters that he didn't need like speed and agility, for parameters that he did need, like power from extra muscle mass that would slow him down.

For now, he had no idea how to go about the increase in power. Sure, he could think of some plausible avenues to explore, but he had nothing concrete the way he did with Weaving Blood.

This was going to take some good old-fashioned research. He couldn't just idly think his way through this one. And he had never expected to be able to, he always knew that Project Metabody was going to be a long-term project that was going to take some serious ground-up effort by the time he was done with it.

Chapter 1126: Conditions

Time passed as the war waged on.

Rui's life began to quickly fall into a routine.

He partook in the war, doing his part in defending the Floating Sect, he trained in his high-class chamber, reaping the benefits of the environment of Ajanta Island, while he also researched ways in which he could create a Martial Body whose spec configuration was slanted towards power.

He realized he couldn't rely on a solution that increased specific kinds of power or only worked in some ways. He needed something that could universally amplify muscle output.

Once he got that to work, he would be doing quite fine in regards to making a Martial Body centered around power. Given that all of his attacks relied on power from different muscle groups, it needed to be a universal solution.

He had already begun exploring the Martial library for supplementary techniques that could help in being one part of the total solution. He had also begun exploring the symbiotic Martial Art techniques as well, but he hadn't found anything just yet.

He considered conditioning techniques that could help as well.

He had also put his knowledge of esoteric substances to good use as he explored substances that could potentially help with the solution as well.

During the remaining parts of the day, he made sure to train hard under the environment of Ajanta Island.

He had already decided that he wasn't leaving Ajanta Island until it strengthened the foundation of his body enough that it could handle his Martial heart.

He was at the stage where he was seriously thinking about his path into a higher Realm of power.

He knew what it was, he also knew what was required for the most part.

He needed a strong body that could handle that power, but that wasn't the only thing. In order to actually even possibly activate his Martial Heart, he needed a Martial Art with enough individuality that had enough of a synergy with his Martial Body to bring out its true power.

Reaching the necessary individuality threshold was important, techniques with individuality were naturally synergetic. And synergetic techniques were able to bring out the true power of the body while a non-synergetic Martial Art could not.

It was similar to how sports athletes would not be able to bring out their best if they wore attire that was not suited to their physical frame. The individuality of the techniques progressively brought out the best of the Martial Body, the more the individuality, the greater the synergy, and the greater the power of the martial Body the technique could extract and use, including the Martial Heart.

He had already deduced that Martial Art was simply the process of actualizing human potential through a system of movements and training. The Martial Heart also has the potential for power that the human body could not tap into ordinarily. Thus Martial Artists used Martial Art techniques, with individuality and synergy, to tap into the potential of the body and eventually dig up the deeply hidden potential of the martial Heart.

However, Rui knew that just individuality wasn't enough. It was necessary, in that it built the path down to the Martial Heart, allowing the Martial Artist to reach it, but the Martial Heart was locked behind a final door even if one reached it. The key to the lock in this analogy was the trigger to the breakthrough to the Senior Realm.

Senior Xanarn had refused to go in-depth into it, but Rui had already made inferences and deductions about what the trigger to the Senior Realm was.

('A strong force of desire that pushed them to become Martial Artists... and dire circumstances that push a Martial Squire to the limit by threatening that desire...')

It made sense given everything that he knew about the Senior Realm and the fact that it was the evolved version of the hidden true strength of humans that have come into light in the face of a crisis.

He was certain that, unlike for humans, the conditions for activating the Martial Heart were high. Its power had evolved with the Squire evolution breakthrough process, but so had the difficulty of tapping into it.

Given that Martial Artists used Martial Art techniques to unearth the potential of the Martial Body, only if their desire for Martial power was strong enough could they cross the boundary and unearth a whole well of hidden power.

It all depended on why they became Martial Artists and how strong their desire for Martial power was. It was only that desperate desire for power, in circumstances that threatened one's desire, could possibly be able to tap into the full potential of the Martial Body; the Martial Heart.

If those circumstances didn't occur, then the intensity of their desire for power would not reach the needed levels. Rui suspected that only the sheer mental distress, as well as the extreme physiological parameters that came with being mentally distressed, could trigger the tachycardia that unleashed unprecedented power hidden within the Martial Heart.

It made sense with multiple different lines of logic, and he suspected it was probably true even if he didn't receive any confirmation on it from Senior Xanarn.

If that was the case, then he could certainly see why so few Martial Squires broke through to the Senior Realm.

Just how many Martial Squires had a burning desire for power for whatever reason? and just how many of them could craft individualistic techniques that could deepen their Martial Path, and unearth hidden potential within their body like the Martial Heart, bringing them closer to the Senior Realm the more the full potential of the Martial Body was unearthed? Just how many of them would run into circumstances where their underlying motivation for more Martial power was challenged such that the intensity of desire reached a critical threshold sending the body into a hyperactive overdrive state to trigger the Martial heart and unleash new power? Just how many Martial Squires would acquire a body that could withstand the power of the Martial heart?

('Very few,') Rui narrowed his eyes. Most Martial Squires could not fulfill even one of the four conditions.

Chapter 1127: Challenge

Rui intended to meet all of the conditions for becoming a Martial Senior, and he had a plan for almost all of them.

He wasn't far too concerned with the condition of building up enough individuality to be able to bring out the true potential of the Martial Body; the Martial Heart. Individuality was something he rocked at as a Martial Artist for various reasons.

A lifetime of experience, a lifetime of knowledge from another world, and a particularly sharp mind meant that he could exercise his creativity and produce something that was not only original but quite unique as well. It meant that as long as he didn't grow overconfident or lazy, and continued applying and exerting himself to add more individuality to his Martial Art, he would certainly cross the threshold where his Martial Heart would have been unearthed, and needed to only be triggered.

As for the condition of the body, that was to ensure that the Martial Body was strong enough to withstand the flood of power that would be released by the Martial Heart. Rui recalled the story that Senior Xanarn had told him about her grandmother. She performed incredible feats to save her life but died very soon after.

This was because her body was simply unable to withstand that power. In fact, that was the reason why the untapped well of power was hidden and locked away. It was because it would severely harm the body if used, and could even lead to death in the worst-case scenario.

That was why he needed to improve the internal constitution of his body. This would normally be impossible for the human, but the Martial Body was an evolved form of the body and could do almost everything the human body could do to a far greater degree.

This included a passive adaptation factor of healed tissue to old stimuli that damaged tissue. It was like how bones could be strengthened under sustained pressure, damage, and force through repeated conditioning.

Over time, the Martial Body would simply grow stronger, and its ability to improve under stress had also evolved.

Thus, as long as a Martial Squire never ceased to train and fight, they would probably eventually obtain a body that was capable of withstanding the Martial Heart.

('Is that why all Martial Seniors are quite old?') Rui wondered.

It made sense, they simply were unable to activate their Martial Hearts at all prior to reaching that level of internal constitution.

Rui had taken the initiative to remain on Ajanta Island to hasten that process, thus he wasn't worried about the Martial Body condition either.

He was driven enough in his pursuit of his Martial Path as well, he was not unmotivated, and he had a tremendous drive towards pursuing his Marital Path.

He was driven by both his desire to fulfill Project Water, and also his desire to protect his family.

Both of those were powerful force drivers.

The one that he couldn't control was being put in circumstances where that would challenge those strong desires. He couldn't do that, nor did he want to do that, it would require putting the objects of his desire at risk.

In order to challenge his desire to protect his family, circumstances where they were put at risk were necessary, and required. However, he did not want to willingly put his family at risk just to trigger the breakthrough to the Senior Realm.

('If I was willing to sacrifice them to get more power... Then protecting them wouldn't have been such a big deal at the moment.')

That was why he didn't even consider putting his family in danger on purpose and then challenging himself to protect them as some way to trigger the activation of the Martial Heart.

That was the biggest problem, he simply didn't know how he could be sure that he would run into some circumstance that would somehow challenge in him in exactly the right way for his Martial Heart to be triggered.

That seemed like it relied entirely on luck. And that was something he seriously disliked. He did not want the probability of his breakthrough to hinge on dumb luck, that was something he did not want to tolerate.

One of the things he had been pondering recently was whether he ought to find a way to trigger the Martial Heart actively and voluntarily.

The very thought of it made him grow excited. Yet he wasn't sure if it was achievable at all. After all, he was sure that many people had tried increasing the rate at which the breakthroughs occurred at all Realms, but for the most part, no one had succeeded.

The reason he could be sure of this was that only a small minority of the Martial Artists of each Realm broke into a higher one. Had anyone made any major breakthrough in that regard, it would have been quite different.

('Unless they chose to hide it, like I did,') He mused.

He had not forgotten the fact that he had discovered a way to increase the probability of breakthroughs in the Apprentice Realm through his Martial Art. He wondered if it was possible to do with higher Realms.

He sighed, putting the matter aside for now.

He had too much on his plate to think about such matters for the moment. Project Metabody was currently his greatest project, and it took a lot of his time and attention, such that there was little to no way he could possibly focus on an ambition of such a magnitude.

Just as he was about to return to working on Project Metabody, he heard the bell outside the chamber ringing, someone had arrived.

"Oh, Kane, what's going on?" Rui asked when he opened the door only to find Kane outside.

"Uh, something very strange happened to me just now," Kane replied with a confused expression.

"Hm?"

"Guardian Tokugawa Ieyasu challenged me to a duel," Kane revealed. "Honestly, I have no idea what to make of it at all."

Chapter 1128: Motivation

"What?!" Rui frowned with incredulity, widening his eyes.

"Yeah, I couldn't believe it myself when I first heard him, but he made it quite clear," Kane sighed, tired. "But he approached me when I was eating lunch in the cafeteria. And then he challenged me out of nowhere from the blue."

"And then?"

"Well, I had to accept since I hadn't accepted any challenge in the past ten days at all," Kane replied. "I'm so glad that killing has been prohibited ever since the war began, I would be a lot more nervous if it wasn't."

Kane had seen Ieyasu fight and had absolutely no intentions of ever getting into a fight with the man if he could just ignore and reject his challenge.

But unfortunately, he simply couldn't.

"But why?" Rui frowned for a moment before he arrived at an answer almost immediately.

"I don't know, honestly," Kane replied, sighing. "Why would the number one guardian challenge me, who's not even in the first class? Why even challenge anyone at all? It makes no sense."

('His Martial Art is imitative evolution...') Realization dawned on Rui almost immediately. ('Could it be that he wants some of the techniques that Kane has?')

If that were the case, it would make a lot of sense. After all, some of Kane's techniques were highly unconventional, and also extremely powerful.

Kane had displayed both Void Step and Fulminata when he first challenged a guardian for their spot.

Could it be that word had finally traveled to Ieyasu, who wasn't present there, and was extremely isolated in the matters of the lower?

Perhaps he had become interested in what he had heard about Kane and wanted a piece of it.

This was pure speculation at the moment, but he could not think of another reason for why the man would be challenging Kane. Kane was not a threat, he had nothing to gain from beating Kane in a duel.

He had nothing to gain from beating anybody in a duel, he was the highest-ranked guardian at the moment.

So the fact that he still challenged Kane meant that he was gaining something from fighting Kane, something or the other. Rui considered various intangible potential benefits that he gained from fighting Kane, but almost none of them were realistically viable.

However, if the man's goal was to copy Void Step and Fulminata.

That was quite ambitious on his part if that really was the case.

If that was the case, then it meant that he had the confidence to break down powerful grade-ten techniques as easily as he did other techniques.

However, Rui was actually skeptical of him being able to copy Fulminata.

That technique not only required an esoteric substance that could generate charge and current and integrate it into one's body, but it also required having an affinity for a technique like that, for lightning.

Which meant that the only thing that he would be able to copy and improve was Void Step. However, in order to be able to copy the technique, he needed to be able to sense it in the first place.

That was not something just anybody could do. The only reason that Rui could thoroughly sense Kane despite the technique was because his senses were extremely powerful, having a mind powerful enough to resist the misdirection, and having a technique that bypassed the mechanism of misdirection.

That was why Void Step was simply never effective against him. He could deal with it even though other Martial Squires seemingly never could.

The question remained to be seen whether he would even be able to sense past it, and whether merely sensing Kane would be enough to replicate the technique that he was using at the time.

Unfortunately, Rui did not know much about the mechanics by which he copied techniques, and improved upon them. Until he learned about that, he did not know whether he would be able to copy techniques like the Void Step technique.

Regardless, he was quite curious about how the fight would go.

It was unfortunate, but it was quite unlikely that Kane would be able to beat him if he managed to get a chance to fight him during such a fight.

It wasn't that Kane was weak, certainly not.

It was that Ieyasu was just monstrously powerful, capable of putting people of Kane's caliber down.

However, nonetheless, he was quite interested in seeing how it went down. It was always interesting to see two powerful Martial Artists got at it.

Regardless, Rui had underestimated how popular Ieyasu was.

The entirety of all guardians had gathered to witness the man fight against Kane.

That was something that blew Rui's mind. The fact that everybody was willing to drop whatever they had just for this was honestly shocking.

That was the kind of attention that Martial Seniors might receive from Martial Squires, but it was absolutely unprecedented for Martial Squire to be able to gain such kind of attention unperturbed.

The two of them got into the arena

Kane put on an extremely serious expression. It appeared that despite his prior confusion and uncertainty, he was able to project his severity.

The two of them stood at a distance from each other.

"Challenger; Guardian Ieyasu."

Ieyasu stepped forward.

"Defender; Guardian Kane."

As did Kane.

"Take your stances,"

Kane adopted his usual light maneuvering stance.

Ieyasu adopted a similar stance, much as Rui had predicted. If he was going to copy someone's Martial Art, he needed to begin with their stances.

Stances were the opening position with which Martial Artists began a battle through, they were quite important and usually were the best possible position to seamlessly execute their Martial Art.

Although he was worried for Kane, he was quite hyped to see Ieyasu hopefully demonstrate the manner in which he coped with techniques that were different. This was something he had missed in Senior Xanarn's sparring session rounds where Ieyasu had beaten her relying on his own prowess.

Chapter 1129: Information

He actually wondered if that was how Kane entered his sights, through the story of the two of them beating Senior Xanarn the same way he did.

If that was the case, Rui could definitely understand why the man had turned his attention to both Rui and Kane.

('Does he intend to challenge me next or anything like that?') Rui's eyes narrowed.

Of course, he didn't mind it.

In fact, he intended to challenge guardian Ieyasu at some point himself. However, he did not intend to do so immediately. For now, he was still in the middle of his journey of getting stronger, once he achieved the first iteration of Project Metabody.

Once he did that, the VOID algorithm would have undergone a qualitative upgrade that would allow him to adapt with a degree of proficiency that was unlike anything else before.

However, he wasn't confident that even the pattern recognition system alone was enough to deal with someone of this caliber.

Part of the reason definitely had to upgrade the VOID algorithm was because the man's Martial Art was simply too large and too potent. Rui knew that he was in trouble because he could not compete against the sheer number of techniques that he was competing against.

He had a feeling that if the two of them had the same quantity and quality of techniques, there was a chance that he could win with a more potent Martial Art, but it didn't matter because the man almost certainly had more and stronger techniques and a stronger Martial Body.

('For now, let's observe,')

Rui had to truly push down the temptation to form predictive models based on the movements and patterns that he saw from Ieyasu down.

To a certain degree, it was a bit useless given that the man copied Martial Art, and presumably the patterns he would use came with the patterns of the original users of the Martial Art that he copied from.

His attention was drawn back to the arena as Squire Ieyasu narrowed his eyes. A maelstrom of pressure rose from him as it washed over every single Martial Squire in the stadium.

Many of the guardians shivered with horrified expressions on their faces.

This was not peril within the Squire Realm.

Rui was the only one who could replicate this, and he could do it well. He could to a much degree with the power of cultivation of the technique.

('He's the real degree,') Rui grinned.

Rui did not know whether his aura was based on real power, or whether it was a projected image or a projected impression through some kind using a mental technique. Regardless, it didn't matter.

"Begin!"

Kane immediately rushed forward.

He immediately activated the Fulminata technique. He generated a change in his body using the esoteric substances that Rui had introduced to the body.

He deeply exhaled, getting rid of redundant mass while increasing the sheer speed at which he moved.

The Fulminata technique had been activated.

Kane flashed across the battlefield at speeds that beggared the minds of many who bore witness to it.

Kane moved at speeds that they didn't think was possible within the Squire Realm. Not even Tokugawa exhibited such speed.

That was why he wanted to obtain the Fulminata technique, or so it seemed that way to Rui.

Kane's attacks were well-timed and well-aimed.

Yet, they were ineffective.

They simply did not hit him.

WHOOSH!

Squire Ieyasu moved so fast that he disappeared in the face of an attack, appearing right behind Kane immediately after. The two of them proceeded to have almost a childish back-and-forth about who could go back and forth on who could get the other's back.

Rui wasn't sure if it was more impressive for Kane, or for Ieyasu, but the level of speed that he was witnessing was absurd.

The two of them were no different from blurs in the eyes of everyone else.

Still, that did not mean they were equal.

('he's holding back on other parameters and aspects of the fight,') Rui narrowed his eyes.

He hadn't had the opportunity to pay too much attention to the man's fights during the war, but he knew that he was not short on offensive lethality, and passive defense.

He did not need to allow the match to proceed in this fashion, but he did.

This convinced Rui even more that the man was after Kane's techniques, as opposed to seeking victory.

If he wanted to win, he could have been able to kill Kane with a single lethal attack and it would have been game over.

Yet he deliberately chose to engage in a match where both sides employed speed to their best. They evaded each other's strikes while looking into possible avenues of opportunities and weaknesses.

Kane could not spot a single thing. Both Rui and Ieyasu were able to spot several flaws, shortcomings, mistakes, and problems in Kane's movements. Rui was able to do so because of the sheer depth of the predictive model he had on Kane. This was the most robust and deep predictive model that he had ever made, after all.

As for how Ieyasu seemed to operate, he wasn't entirely sure. He did not have the degree of limitations that he would have faced had he been relying on a system that focused on gathering information in the middle of combat.

This was quite interesting to Rui because it meant that he may very well be relying on an entirely different form of gathering information. If that was the case, then Rui was even more curious about how he got the information that he needed to mimic or imitate.

He wondered whether it was possible for him to overlap such a method with his own way of gaining information. It was possible that this could potentially solve one of the chronic problems of his VOID

algorithm which was the time it took to adapt and evolve to its opponent, shortening it was a new area that he hadn't yet touched.

Chapter 1130: Show

While Rui was absorbed in his thoughts about the fight, the reactions of the crowd were not nearly as calm and collected.

Everybody was shocked.

Guardian Ieyasu had not challenged anyone ever since he challenged his predecessor, taking his spot as the number one Martial Artist.

He didn't feel the need, there was no one in the Squire Realm above him. He was the target of challenges.

Yet very few people challenged him, he was too powerful, and he showed no mercy. His opponents simply died.

The only one who did challenge him and managed to survive without dying was the second-ranked guardian, formerly the first-ranked.

Yet for some reason, Guardian Ieyasu had gone out of his way to challenge a guardian. Not only that, but the guardian that he did end up challenging was actually a really low-class guardian who was in the tenth class.

Of course, many knew that the truth about guardian Nake wasn't nearly as weak as his rank and class would suggest. It was said that he along with another class-ten guardian had managed to force Senior Xanarn to use a portion of true power as a Martial Senior. Something only guardian Ieyasu had managed to do prior to that.

Many of the lower class Martial Squires did not know that much about the most powerful Martial Squire of the Floating Sect. After all, not all guardians had been there five years ago when he claimed the title and status of the strongest.

Very few actually had a good understanding of what guardian Ieyasu did. Those who had a first-hand account of what he did, had already gained a good understanding of what the motivation behind guardian Ieyasu's actions were.

Nobody dared to blink while Ieyasu and Kane clashed against each other.

They shuffled, dashed, and darted around at incredible speeds!

So much so that many of the low-class Martial Artists were unable to even perceive their movements beyond hazy blurs.

In just the briefest of moments, both Ieyasu executed hundreds and thousands of movements in a matter of seconds. Their speed was so high, that they left after-image clones across the entire battle arena!

Yet the Martial Squires that were able to follow and were qualified to evaluate the battle all quickly came to realize something.

('Kane is losing,') Rui tutted.

It was a matter of just a single beat, but he was decisively inferior to Squire Ieyasu despite using Fulminata to his absolute best.

He did his best to evade Ieyasu's offensive maneuvering, but step by step, it was not working out well for him.

Rui could not help but admire Squire Ieyasu's maneuvering prowess. He had sealed off all the other Martial Art that Rui had seen him use and limited himself to the one field where Kane was incredibly powerful, and he was outperforming him in that regard.

The arena was silent as everybody who could or couldn't, did their best to keep up.

WHOOSH!

Kane gritted his teeth as he barely managed to evade a powerful kick. He was sweating profusely, bruised all over his body as he did his best to avoid all of Squire Ieyasu's attacks with mixed success.

Yet he wasn't able to hurt his opponent whatsoever.

Whether he landed a strike, or whether he didn't. It was clear that he was not a threat to guardian Ieyasu.

He knew.

He had always known. Any man who could accomplish by himself what had taken the full power of both himself and Rui was not someone he could take on by himself.

He knew.

Yet, he didn't.

He was able to understand the fact on a logical level, but only now was he able to actually feel it.

It was a distinct sensation. How small he was before the might of Tokugawa Ieyasu.

He felt deeply disturbed every time he looked at the man. His black hair and eyes eerily reminded him of Rui.

It wasn't just their feature that they had in common. They were probably the only two Martial Squires in the world that could make even Kane feel inadequate.

('Are people with black hair and eyes just overpowered?')

The thought left his mind as quickly as it had entered.

He couldn't afford to get distracted.

POW POW POW!

He grimaced as guardian Ieyasu blitzed him, landing three swift short jabs on Kane.

Yet they were light, lighter than Kane's strikes.

Kane had the sinking feeling that Ieyasu could have easily killed with just a single strike but chose not to.

Was it out of kindness? Why even challenge him if he was going to hold back as much?

"Argh!" Kane coughed as he quickly leaped back, expecting Ieyasu to exploit the opening.

Yet he didn't even bother.

Kane gained his bearings, catching his breath for a moment before gazing back up at guardian Tokugawa Ieyasu with knitted eyebrows.

He simply stared at Kane before opening his mouth.

"Is that all you can do?" He asked with a strange accent that Kane had never heard before.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Kane stalled, catching his breath.

"You have more," He murmured. "Show me more."

He walked nonchalantly towards Kane. "Show me everything."

"Hmph," Kane snorted.

"If you don't..."

The world around them grew perilous.

Every guardian felt an abysmal sense of dread.

The air grinded to a halt as the atmosphere was wrung taut.

Bloodlust.

Kane gritted his teeth as he did his very best to maintain his composure.

The sheer magnitude of pressure that he experienced from the man before him was almost unlike anything he had ever felt.

At that moment, he knew that the threat was real, he could feel it. The man would probably kill him if he didn't oblige.

"Jerk." He muttered under his breath as he deactivated Fulminata.

The technique was quite powerful, but it could not allow him to defeat guardian Tokugawa Ieyasu.

He considered resigning, but he had already realized that the man probably would not leave him alone if that did happen.