

## Martial Unity 1181

### Chapter 1181: Choice

Now that Rui had decided to partake in the Virodhabhasa Martial Contest, he needed to make sure that he was properly equipped for it. Otherwise, he would not only not achieve what he needed to, but he would embarrass himself too.

Given that he had decided that Project Metabody needed to be completed before the contest began, he had a lot of work to do. One year was not a luxurious amount of time given the magnitude of the difficulty of the task that he had assigned himself.

He had developed the conceptual basis of the Hypertrophic Surge technique, the technique he developed to serve as his offense-oriented Martial Art.

Now he needed to develop a practical training technique for it, which was its own challenge. Injecting the Herenal's Virus into his body was not the hard part. That was actually the easiest part, the hardest part was training his body to normally release enough of the myostatin protein to ensure that there was little to no way that the Herenal Virus could cause his muscles to undergo rapid hypertrophy unless Rui allowed for it to happen.

He wanted to be able to trigger the ceasing of the production of myostatin so that the virus could quickly gobble the protein up and accelerate the growth of his muscles very rapidly due to that.

Normally, this would be quite challenging to do, after all, how could he possibly control the production of myostatin when it was or wasn't convenient?

It was only then that he came up with a solution to his dilemma. A technique that he had used in the past a long time ago. The same mental imprint technique that he had used to create the Hungry Pain technique.

The Hungry Pain technique was a technique that triggered autophagy every time the user felt pain, regardless of the will of the user of the technique after the training was complete every time they experienced hunger.

This was because the technique was a self-hypnosis technique that hypnotized the user into associating a sensory stimulus as the trigger for whatever metabolic or neurological phenomenon was to be triggered.

In the case of Hungry Pain, it was triggering autophagy with pain. In the case of Hypertrophic Surge, he would need to develop a unique trigger to cease the production of myostatin which in turn would make all the myostatin in his body disappear due to the virus consuming the protein, which would remove the limiter on muscles, causing them to inflate significantly.

In order to sustain the massive consumption of energy that would follow, he would need to use the Reaper's Dew poison to cause cell death to provide enough energy for the inflated muscles.

Thus he would be sacrificing defense, and stamina for power as a result. He would also be sacrificing speed since his mass would grow faster than his power output making his body less agile and average and peak speeds much lower than normal.

All in exchange for offensive power. Rui predicted that once he got the Hypertrophic Surge technique to function properly, he would become so powerful that every attack of his would be incredibly heavy and devastating.

He predicted that his normal sonic bullets would become on par with his Transverse Resonance attacks each. That would mean that he would be capable of unleashing an onslaught that was multiple times more powerful and potent compared to what he would be capable of on his own.

He definitely couldn't wait to start working on the training. He would begin by employing the mental imprint training technique to associate some action or the other as a trigger for the complete ceasing of myostatin production while training his body to produce far more myostatin on average to counter the virus that he would be introducing inside his body.

('It's definitely going to be a tough training regime,') Rui winced.

Conditioning his body to produce more myostatin than normal was normally horrible for his development. Myostatin inhibited muscle growth, adding more to one's body would destroy one's gains. Not only was Rui going to add more of it, but he was also going to force his body to be the one adding more of it, which would only be balanced out by the virus after he added it to his body.

('It's ironic how the virus will be the cure as opposed to the disease by the time it is added to my body.')  
Rui mused.

That was one of the reasons that he was sure that this would work out. He was only going to add the virus into his body by the time the training was completely finished, and by then his body would have changed to need the virus, making sure that none of the things that happen with virus infections would happen this time.

He could not afford to get a permanent fever due to Herenal's Disease, and the only way to do that was to ensure that the virus was merely a piece of a puzzle by the time he introduced it into his body.

He also needed to consider the fact that he needed to purchase a sample of the virus, and he also needed to purchase training resources to ensure that he had everything that he needed to make his Hypertrophic Surge, which would certainly not come for free.

('...Missions...') Rui considered the prospect of doing missions to fuel his training.

Unfortunately, he recalled his days in the Kandrian Empire where he would phase between missions and training, training was expensive enough that it required many weeks' worth of missions to fund months of training in the Martial Union.

If the cost of training was similar here, then it probably meant that it would take months' worth of missions before he could begin training for the rest of the remaining year before the Martial Contest commenced.

('That's too much,') He shook his head.

Fortunately, he had a much better idea. ('Selling my lesser techniques is the better solution this time. They cannot purchase the absurdly expensive potion, but they can purchase me a year of training.')

However, he had to set very hard rules and boundaries for what he sold.

('Nothing related to the VOID algorithm.') This was a no-brainer. If the Virodhabhasa Faith found out anything about the VOID algorithm, Rui could not even begin to imagine the sheer scale of the shitstorm that he would be bringing to himself.

That was why techniques that were necessary for it like the Mind Palace were things that he disqualified off the bat. As well as constituent techniques like the pattern recognition systems that he built the predictive model through, or the adaptive mode which he adapted to them.

He did not even want to hint that there was a complex mental aspect to his Martial Art. This was something that people could never actually find out unless he himself told them, after all, it was happening inside his mind outside the sight of other people.

('Definitely nothing related to Project Metabody either,') Rui noted to himself.

Project Metabody was also something that would give him away if people understood the depth to which it aligned with the Virodhabhasa Faith, so he crossed any technique from there off the list as well.

However, unlike the VOID algorithm, the execution of Project Metabody could not be physically hidden from spectators.

His speed physically increased through the Void Forestep technique, or his stamina lengthened through the Hungry Pain technique, or his healing accelerated through the Weaving Blood technique, or his offense visibly increased with the help of Hypertrophic Surge, or his defense visibly strengthened with whatever technique that he would be creating for it.

Still, that did not mean that the element of adapting to the optimal Martial Body to adapt and evolve to his opponent was something that could be detected, thus he was still fine.

Regardless, spreading the VOID algorithm and Project Metabody techniques was an absolute no-no.

This left the rest of his Martial Art techniques that he had developed from scratch himself.

Flux Earther, Gale Force Breathing, Pathfinder, Transverse Resonance, Riemannian Echo, etc.

These were all mostly grade-ten techniques barring Gale Force Breathing and Flux Earther which were grade-nine.

Regardless, he knew that grade-nine and grade-ten techniques were extremely prized and valued. There was absolutely no way that he wouldn't get many concessions from the church when it came to these techniques.

He immediately got to work, purchasing some booklets and some basic stationery as he began extensively documenting these techniques one by one, creating training manuals as well. He made sure to organize the data that he needed to convey as efficiently and concisely as he could.

At the end of the day, it was quite likely that the Virodhabhasa Church measured a technique's value the same way that the Martial Union did, or in an extremely similar way as it did.

The Martial Union looked at originality and uniqueness, which together constituted individuality. It also looked at potency grade, difficulty, and dissemination viability.

The latter were variables that were ideally as minimal as possible, but unfortunately, those were not something he could reduce too much.

His techniques were difficult, this was true without a doubt, they were also difficult to spread since they had such low dissemination viability in the first place.

Still, this was not far from the norm, so he did not think it was much of a negative. It wasn't every day that genuinely new and genuinely powerful individualistic techniques came to the doorstep, thus he was sure that the church would at least be appreciative of the fact.

He quickly finished writing the technique and training manuals for each of the techniques that he had deemed not dangerous for selling or spreading, before heading to the church.

"How may we help you?" A staff member greeted Rui by bowing to him when he reached the merit redemption counter of the church.

This was where martial Artists could apply to sell personal contributions to the church in an easy and effective manner.

"I'd like to sell some techniques to the church and earn some merits or Virodhanas."

"Understood, have you familiarized yourself with the protocols in place for submitting Martial Art-centric contributions to the church?" She asked courteously.

"I have," Rui nodded. "I need to demonstrate the technique that I'm selling while also presenting an acceptable method of training to the church, the judgment of which is up to the discretion of the Martial Artists of the church."

The staff member looked surprised that Rui had nailed it smoothly on the first try. It was clear to him that she was accustomed to having to explain it to Martial Artists from top to bottom each time a technique was submitted.

It was remarkable that she still was able to maintain a strong sense of religious faith towards Martial Artists despite having to witness their idiocy and thick-headedness day in and day out.

Regardless, thanks to him being prepared so well, the process went smoothly and he quickly began demonstrating technique after technique as he was led to different facilities where he could show off the full power of his techniques one by one without having to worry about anybody else.

And he did.

The supervisors who were tasked with recording and thoroughly documenting the outcome of the techniques were unable to hide their shock at some of Rui's techniques.

Like when he retained his perception of the heaviest anti-espionage measures that the church was able to muster up using Riemannian Echo, sending a small alarm through the church as they realized a single grade-ten technique could bypass all their measures of privacy.

They were also beyond shocked when Rui began hitting bulls-eyes on targets that were more than two kilometers away from himself!

The supervisors needed to verify on three different occasions whether he truly was a Martial Squire and not a Martial Senior playing as a Martial Squire, and they were still not satisfied with his words or the results of their own investigations.

Everything pointed to Rui being a normal martial Squire, but his feats were simply too shocking to believe that.

#### Chapter 1183: Bishop

Rui sighed as he stood in place after having finished the final technique that he was selling.

Much to his surprise, the Virodhabhasa Church deployed a Martial Senior to verify the veracity of his techniques and his identity.

It took many a stubborn hour before they were finally tired of investigating the same matter, and ceased the issue as a whole.

"How much will I be remunerated for my techniques?" Rui asked the supervising head of the evaluation team in addition to the Martial Seniors that had been brought to evaluate Rui's technique. "How long will the evaluation take?"

The supervisor twitched his face. "I do not know how much you will be remunerated, nor do I know when you will receive your result."

Rui frowned.

What was the point of having a supervising team that was also doing such basic tasks regularly if they couldn't even supply him with such basic answers?

"How long does it normally take?" Rui asked.

"A few hours," The man replied. "However, sometimes it can occur sooner."

"Good," Rui nodded.

"However, your is not a normal case, so I cannot say. The verification of your Realm is still being concerned"

Rui sighed with exasperation. "This again. I just want to sell my techniques, is that too much to ask?"

Apparently, it was.

The church genuinely suspected that Rui was a Martial Senior trying to masquerade as a Martial Squire due to the resulting techniques appearing stronger in grade, and thus trying to fake a high-grade Squire-level technique, instead of an ordinary Senior level technique that would not fetch him as many prices as possible.

What irked him the most, however, was what came later; days of nothing.

He waited a total of four days with absolutely no insightful response from the church.

He was starting to think that he had perhaps the church was scamming him!

After all, they took the commodity that he was selling, and then they did not remunerate him. Then essentially ignored him when he asked them for what he owed.

Yet, he kept patient.

He did not think the church was incompetent, nor did he think it was so shamelessly deceitful.

And he was right, on the fifth day there was finally a change.

"Squire Falken," A messenger one day reached out to him. "I am pleased to inform you that the technique application that you have submitted extremely recently."

"And?" Rui asked impatiently. "What was the result?"

"I'm afraid that is not something that I am here to convey," The man shrugged. "I am here to convey an invitation by Bishop Master Deivon."

"What?" Rui frowned.

"Bishop Master Deivon is the bishop of the Master Realm that oversees this town and its management."

Rui narrowed his eyes with some nervousness.

This was not a simple invitation. It may very well have been a summon. Regardless of the decision made, defying a Martial master in a room where they had actual authority. A Bishop Master was a Martial Master within the religion that had an immense amount of political power and influence over the religion.

He was a man who possessed power that was just one step below the Cardinal Sages, Rui could not even imagine the sheer amount of effort and time it must have taken for the Martial Master to reach this spot.

He suspected that even becoming a Martial master was not enough to be eligible for such a role. It most likely was something that took an immense amount of power and loyalty, more than anything.

"May I refuse?"

The man simply stared at Rui.

"...Never mind,"

"You are invited today, approximately fifteen minutes from now."

"You could have told me earlier," Rui snorted as he quickly prepared himself, accepting the invitation envelope before immediately begin traveling to the specified location.

The resulting place was one of the most gorgeous residences that Rui had seen anywhere in the town. It was extremely luxurious, yet it wasn't so absurdly large to make it egotistical as a choice.

Yet it was heavily guarded.

The first thing he came across was powerful Martial Seniors serving as guards at the entrance.

Yet they easily let him pass once they verified the invitation that he had received.

A set of servants quickly ushered him to take seat in the guest room.

The place was luxurious enough to quickly elucidate the sheer amount of wealth that the religion received. It made him more weary of the religion even if it could benefit him.

That was when he felt it.

A profound sense of pressure. One that did not weigh down on his senses as much as it did on his psyche.

It was a pressure that pierced through a veil that he had never even noticed before.

It was a pressure that seemed to brim on a level that he had never experienced before.

It was as though the pressure from the Martial Senior existed across three dimensions while this particular pressure was one that existed across four dimensions.

It was just unfathomable.

"Squire Falken," He heard a soft but commanding tone.

Rui turned to meet the source of the greeting.

"...Bishop Master Deivon," Rui bowed his head, expressing respect to a fellow Martial Artist who had managed to break through a total of four times and had pierced into the upper Realms.

"Raise your head, Squire Falken," The man smiled. He had a sense of serenity and peace to him one would perhaps not expect from a Martial Artist, especially a Martial Master.

Rui stood straight as he got a good look at the first Martial Master he had come across in a long time.

The last time he stood before a Martial Master was when he was a Martial Apprentice and a Martial Squire. Headmaster Aronian was the last Martial Master that Rui had interacted with before leaving his home.

And now he stood before one again, he came to realize that he had never truly captured the magnificence of a Martial Master back then.

Chapter 1184: Origin

It wasn't that Masters did not exert more pressure than Seniors. They most certainly did.

However, today, Rui was able to distinguish the origin of the aura.

What he meant by that was the fact that the fear that Martial Seniors were able to inspire from Martial Squires was something that came from the power of the Martial Body. Rui could sense that the origin of the fear that they inspired from lesser beings was the power of the Martial Body and the Martial Heart buried deep within it.

Of course, their Martial Paths, and Art too inspired a great amount of fear, but that was something that was true even for Martial Squires, what set them apart from Martial Squires was the latent sense of pressure that the presence of the Martial Heart exerted. That was what made the auras of Martial Seniors distinguished from Martial Squires.

However, Rui was unable to identify what it was that set apart Martial Masters from Martial Seniors.

They were scarier, sure.

Just standing before one made the hair on Rui's body stand up. Rui could truly sense that the bishop could erase his life with contemptuous ease if he wanted to.

But where did that power come from? Where was the deep sense of peril that not even Martial Seniors had coming from?

('It's... not his body,') Rui concluded.

Primordial Instinct, in addition to his ordinary senses, allowed him to gain a lot of insight into the man's Martial Body.

Was it stronger than any of the Martial Seniors he had ever come across? Most certainly.

However, was the difference in the power between his Martial Body and those of the Martial Seniors he had met massive?

Surprisingly, the answer was no.

('The Martial Heart is proportional to the power of the Martial Body, if his Martial Body isn't too much stronger, then his Martial Heart also cannot be much stronger than a Martial Senior.

Yet Rui knew from his instinct and senses that this man was vastly more formidable than any Martial Senior he had ever met.

Rui had reached the stage where he was no longer psychologically suppressed by Senior-level aura due to how strong he had become.

Yet when he laid eyes on the bishop, he felt as though someone had put a gigantic boulder on his head. There was no doubt that this man was the single most powerful Martial Artist Rui had met in a long, long time.

It was because of his strength that Rui couldn't help but be mystified by the source of the strength behind his aura.

Martial Apprentices had their Martial Paths, Martial Squires had their Martial Bodies, and Martial Seniors had their Martial Hearts.

What did Martial Masters have that put them so much above the Lower Realms?

Was there another well of power that was hidden even deep inside the heart and the rest of the physical body?

Instinctively, Rui knew this was not the case.

The human body did not have limitless power. Neither did Martial Bodies. The Martial Heart was the well of untapped power, and the true might of the Martial Body locked away inside. There was nothing left in the body after the Martial Heart was depleted.

So where else could the sheer power of the Master Realm come from?

Rui didn't know. Of course, this wasn't a surprise. How could he possibly figure out the nature of the Master Realm just by studying a Martial Master for a few seconds?

It was impossible, the best he could do was speculate.

He had a feeling that there was a profound difference between the fundamental natures of the Upper and Lower Realms.

He just didn't know what it was.

"You're quite the curious one, aren't you?" Bishop Master Deivon threw an amused smile at Rui. "Trying to peer into Realms far beyond reach, are we?"

Rui's eyes widened in shock.

He had made sure to display no outward sign of inspection, yet the Martial Master saw right through him and even called him out on it.

For half a second, Rui worried whether his thoughts were exposed. He immediately put on a Mind Mask of composure. He hoped that it would hide his surprise, and also perhaps make him more difficult to read.

"That's a nifty little trick you have there," The man smiled even more. "You're an interesting man, Squire Falken."

"Thank you... sir bishop," Rui warily responded. It appeared that he was easily able to observe the technique, which was quite impressive because the technique was executed inside Rui's mind.

He felt that he had underestimated Martial Masters, perhaps it was because Headmaster Aronian was always quite gentle.

"Hah," the man snorted. "You can address me with my Martial Artist honorific, young man. Now come, we have much to discuss."

Rui cautiously sat beside him on the couch. "What is it that you wish to discuss with me, Master Deivon? Is this really just about the techniques?"

Frankly, it was a little absurd for the effective mayor of the town to personally look into the techniques sold by a Martial Squire. While Rui certainly was selling some impressive techniques that the Virodhabhasa Church would certainly love to get their hands on, it was not something that warranted the personal attention and intervention of a Martial Master like Master Deivon.

Yet the fact of the matter was that a Martial Master had not only sought to intervene in the matter but also personally sought out Rui himself.

Rui had instantly realized that this was more than just about the techniques. There was no way that a Martial Master would lower himself to personally handle a case about techniques that were two Realms below him.

"Sharp," The man smiled appreciatively. "You're actually right, your techniques have been approved as legitimate Squire-level techniques, since I have just confirmed that you are indeed a Martial Squire and not a Martial Senior. That means those impressive techniques of yours are accepted by the Virodhabhasa Faith."

## Chapter 1185: Proposal

Rui frowned inwardly.

Then why did the Martial Master summon Rui if the verification was that simple?

He schooled his body strictly despite his confusion. The Martial Master had already demonstrated a scary amount of insight with his remarkable observation skills.

"You must be confused as to why we're even speaking in this manner if the verification was that simple," The Master remarked. "It's simple really, I came to learn about your techniques by coincidence, and happened to look into the profile of you that we created, and I have to say, I'm impressed."

He studied Rui with interest. "So young, yet so strong, so individualistic. I have never ever seen someone of your youth with a Martial Path as deep as yours."

He leaned forward. "This depth... It far surpasses anything I've ever seen from any Martial Squire ever. The depth of your Martial Art given your age, is profound!"

Rui recalled Headmaster Aronian remarking the exact same thing many years ago when he was still a Martial Apprentice.

Could it be that Martial Masters in general were able to gain an immense amount of information from any and everything with just a simple glance?

He didn't know, but that only made him more nervous.

The air grew more tense as Rui grew deeply uncomfortable under the penetrative eyes of the Martial Master. It appeared that he was quite interested in whatever about Rui's Martial Path.

Rui was caught a little off-guard. He wasn't entirely sure yet whether this was a positive or a negative thing. It was a shame that he couldn't just get up and excuse himself from the place. But alas, what happened had already happened.

For now, he remained silent. He had already asked, and the Master had already replied. Right now it seemed that he was quite content simply observing Rui and learning more about him that way.

He grew more moved by the second, his eyes widening with amazement. He didn't make any effort to hide his emotions.

Rui winced as waves of pressure pressed onto him, making his head ache painfully. He had already grown accustomed to Senior level pressure, able to handle it with no pressure. But the pressure that the Master exerted on Rui was far harder to resist.

In fact, if not for the fact that his mind had undergone two rounds of rapid growth, and his Martial Path was quite deep, as the Master pointed out, there was a good chance that Rui would have experienced far more negative effects from the pressure that the Martial Master's emotions and exerted on Rui.

Rui felt even more uncomfortable as the man eyed him from top to bottom. It took him a while before he finally looked Rui in the eye.

"I have never seen someone like you," The Master spoke with a more serious tone. "The hidden power that you lock behind that mask, the depth of your Martial Path, the sheer amount of individuality in your techniques, that too merely the ones that you have chosen to supply to us. It's frankly unheard of."

His eyes narrowed.

Rui on the other hand gritted his teeth.

A new wave of pressure washed over him, as though it compelled him to answer that very question.

"What is your Martial Path, son?" The man asked straightforwardly.

Any ordinary Martial Squire would have wholeheartedly responded with the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

But not Rui.

He shook his head. "I'm afraid I cannot divulge that."

Normally, he would have considered lying. Perhaps he could lie that his Martial Path was centered around a dynamic Martial Body, but he ultimately decided against that.

This Martial Master had proven to be an extremely sharp individual. Lying to him was probably impossible for Rui as he was now. He would most likely instantly see through any shallow lie that Rui cooked up while also proving to be a pain in the ass once he learned that Rui had lied to him.

"I see. That's a shame, but no matter," He shook his head with a resigned smile, much to Rui's surprise. It appeared that he was gracious enough to acknowledge and accept Rui's unwillingness to divulge too many details about himself. "Those were interesting details that I just discovered. I did wish to talk to you about something else entirely, though these new insights I have made are relevant to what I called you here for."

"And what exactly would that be for, sir?" Rui asked with curiosity.

"You have registered for the Martial Contest, haven't you?" The Martial Master asked.

Rui narrowed his eyes. "That's right."

"I believe you are also interested in obtaining a high-grade esoteric detoxifying agent, and the surrounding medical treatments, correct?" The man asked.

Rui was not shocked that the man had access to this information. After all, he managed the entire town, which meant he could access any and all information within it, including the few interactions that the Church had had with him. That would explain how he knew what Rui was after.

"If I had to hazard a guess, you intended to partake in the Martial Contest in order to win enough times to gain enough of a favor from the church to redeem that potion and that treatment, correct?" The Martial Master asked.

"...Yes," Rui sighed.

He wasn't surprised that the Martial Master had gone as far as to figure even this out.

"Then I have a proposal for you," The Martial Master smiled. "Allow me to become your patron, and in turn, I will lower the threshold of success you need to accomplish in order to get your hands on the medical treatments that you need."

Rui frowned.

That was not what he expected. It appeared that the Martial Master found Rui worth bargaining a seemingly mutually beneficial deal with. Rui lacked too much context to even understand the true meaning of what the man was saying. What he did know was that he was interested in pursuing a working relationship with Rui.

Chapter 1186: Sharp

"I'm afraid I do not understand what it means to become your patron," Rui frowned.

"It's simple, really," The man began explaining. "It just means that I will be acknowledged as one who is partially responsible for your successes and your failures to a certain extent, and it means that I will be contributing to your performance by lending you the wealth and resources you need in order to become stronger."

Rui narrowed his eyes as he considered the man's words. What he said sounded strange to Rui, like it made no sense. But he thankfully appeared to have been able to withhold his incredulity this time.

"So simply by accepting your patronage, you get to claim a portion of the credit for my success?" Rui frowned. "On top of that, you're going to lower the difficulty of me getting my hands on the treatment that I need?"

The man nodded. "You'll still need to win considerably, but don't worry too much about that part. As long as you do well enough, you'll be fine, most likely. At the very least you need to win in the Preliminary Contest of this church town to pick a representative for the town. If you cannot even do that much, then I'm afraid you simply were not cut out to be able to earn the rewards that you spoke about."

Rui was absolutely confident that he would be able to get past any kind of preliminary contest. Preliminary eliminations and filters were meant to scout players who were capable of doing much more and filter out players who were simply unworthy of going any further.

As strong as he currently was was enough to make sure that no preliminary event could possibly be able to hold the likes of Rui back.

They both knew that.

Rui because he obviously knew what he himself was capable of, and the Martial Master had also learned about Rui in a small amount of time, just enough to know that such a thing couldn't possibly stop Rui.

"What exactly do you gain out of all of this?" Rui asked with a suspicious question.

From what Rui could tell, there was very little to no benefit when it came to offering to be someone's patron.

Thus there had to be a good reason that someone like a Martial Master was going this far to try and get Rui as a patron.

He knew that Martial Artists who had patrons generally did better than Martial Artists who didn't have any patrons. He would gain rich access to many growth and training resources that he would otherwise be forced to either compromise and avoid, the tests directly, However, Rui did not have access to such goods and commodities.

One thing that Rui needed to make sure that he fully understood was why this man was choosing him.

"I am firmly of the opinion that you will make it remarkably farther than anyone would normally admit," The Master immediately clarified.

"I appreciate the vote of confidence," Rui grew more serious. "However, how does that help you in any material fashion? You're a Martial Master and someone with a pretty high position all things considered. Why in the world would seek to become my patron even if you think I will make it far?"

"Because the Virodhabhasa Martial Contest is special, young man," The Master continued. "Its purpose is not just an avenue for Martial Artists from across the world to join and show off their Martial Heart."

Rui frowned. "I'm afraid I don't get it."

Yet he understood what the martial Senior was going to say immediately after, and why he was going to say it immediately after uttering those words.

"This Martial Contest isn't just for the people have fun watching," The Martial Master clearly stated. "It is an endeavor that our Faith takes to further our Divine Mission."

Rui's eyes narrowed as the Martial Master essentially confirmed what Rui had sharply come to realize on his own.

The Divine Cause of the Virodhabhasa Faith was to find the Virodhabhasa before the catastrophe destroying humanity even has a chance to materialize. He could imagine how the entire Virodhabhasa Martial Contest was simply an attempt by the church to be able to keep an eye on promising Martial Squires and offer them to join the church early on. This way if they were the Virodhabhasa, they would most likely have already indoctrinated to not betray the faith no matter what.

"Religious leaders are allowed to become patrons of various contestants, aid them with preparations and growth and other variables, before then allowing them to apply them into the contest. If it turned out to be the case that one of the bishops patroned the actual Virodhabhasa, then your status within the Virodhabhasa Faith would become absolutely boosted. That is something that I strongly desire, thus I am asking for your aid."

Rui briefly considered the implications of his statement with widened eyes.

"Are you saying...?"

"No," The man smiled. "Of course, I'm not saying that I think you're Lord Virodhabhasa. However, there are some Martial Artists who possess Martial Paths and Martial Art that superficially resemble the

Martial Art of Lord Virodhabhasa according to the Virodhaveda. They are considered to be seeds of the Virodhbhasa, this can work out as long as you demonstrate a dominant victory."

Rui narrowed his eyes. "Seeds of the Virodhabhasa?"

"That's right," The Martial Master nodded. "They believe that Martial Artists that possess Martial Paths that are effective against all kinds of Martial Art and Martial Paths, are blessed by the Virodhabhasa and are Virodhabhasa seeds that have the potential to be the object of the Divine Mission of the Virodhabhasa Faith."

Rui picked up something that stood out to him from the way he spoke about this.

"Master... Can I ask you something?"

"Why, go right ahead," The man smiled.

"Are you truly a devotee of the Virodhabhasa Faith?" Rui asked with a suspicious expression.

The man smiled. "Sharp, aren't you?"

## Chapter 1187: Progression

In the brief time that Rui had spent here, he had already spotted patterns of traits in the behavioral psychology of those indoctrinated by the Virodhabhasa Faith. This allowed him to develop models that predicted not only whether someone was indoctrinated by the faith, but also allowed him to predict to what degree they were indoctrinated.

This was partially based on the same principles of the predictive model of the VOID algorithm, thus he was able to effortlessly execute it even though it had been the first time that he had done this.

Of course, the accuracy and precision left much to be desired, and it was not flawless. But it worked well enough.

Although he wasn't super confident about how effectively he would be able to read Martial Artists that had ascended to the Higher Realms, it appeared that at the very least, he could tell when a Martial Master wasn't the most devoted subject of a faith.

"You're not entirely wrong," The man grinned. "I am not the most loyal follower. It's not that I denounce the faith or anything that extreme, it's just that I've come to be more agnostic about it. I'm open to anything, and it helps that I do not reject the Divine Revelation."

He shrugged nonchalantly as if that wasn't a big deal.

Rui furrowed his eyebrows. He was confused. How could someone who wasn't even a believer in the faith come to become a bishop in the religious organization? How did someone even become part of the religion, let alone ascend to such a high-level position?

"Surprised, are you?" The man smirked, amused. "It's because the allure of the power of a Martial Master is just that high, young man. Not even a religion as large and powerful as the Virodhabhasa Faith can reject the might of a Martial Artist who has transcended the Lower Realms."

Rui furrowed his eyebrows.

That did make sense. He knew that even the Martial Union treated its Martial Masters as strategic nukes. The sheer amount of value and utility that these beings offered to any organization was so high that even significant transgressions could be forgiven if it meant retaining their power.

With that context in mind, Rui could easily come to understand why the man was so high and successful within the Virodhabhasa Faith despite not being the most theistic.

It was sheer and raw power. As long as the man did not blatantly act against the theistic faith, the Martial Sages that ran the Virodhabhasa Faith were most certainly inclined to overlook his lack of personal religiosity.

"Still, you should be careful, young man," The man remarked. "Your tone and line of questioning can be considered quite offensive within our Faith. A more dedicated and serious religious leader would have you executed for the question that you asked me. You're fortunate that I am not one of them."

"That is why you're the only one that I've asked this question to, Master Deivon," Rui replied nonchalantly.

"Hmph," The man snorted with a hint of amusement and annoyance.

"Besides, with all due respect, Master" Rui continued. "You're the one who desires my cooperation, something you haven't yet convinced me of necessarily."

The man stared at Rui with an intent expression. "It was a miscalculation on my part. I did not expect that you would not have succumbed to me by now. I have never met a Martial Squire who has been able to maintain composed resistance before a Martial Master like myself."

Rui simply stared at him.

"Then allow me to cut straight to the point. I am willing to offer you the very best of the growth and training resources we have. We have means to accelerate your growth and allow you to fulfill one of the key and easier conditions to breaking through to the Senior Realm," The man began.

Rui narrowed his eyes. "You mean the durability of the constitution of the Martial Body needed to withstand the power of the Martial Heart?"

"Ah, it appears you have been informed about the Senior Realm and the conditions needed to break through. Good. You have most certainly reached the stage where that information is relevant to you," He remarked. "But to answer your question, yes. My senses tell me that your body is significantly closer to the threshold internal durability needed to withstand the Martial Heart. You're ahead by almost ten years, in fact, it's actually ridiculous."

Rui shrugged, refusing to elaborate on it. The reason for this was that he did not want to prematurely reveal his connection with the Floating Sect since it was the environment of Ajanta Island that allowed him to achieve such rapid progress in the strengthening of his body.

However, there was also a deeper reason for why this was the case.

The Hungry Pain technique that he had mastered as an Apprentice allowed him to achieve a stronger body well ahead of his time. He had essentially started out with a grade-two body when a grade-two body usually took a couple of years to achieve.

That along with the nourishing growth from Ajanta Island had helped him achieve a rate of growth of his body that was incredible. The same was true for Kane.

These were things that Rui was unwilling to reveal to the Martial Master. The Hungry Pain technique had widespread implications for Martial Art. Being known as the creator of the technique would involve him in a storm with powers far greater than what he was capable of handling.

He would enter the eyes of predators so powerful, that even Chairman Deacon would pale in comparison as a threat.

This was not true for his other grade-nine and grade-ten techniques. They were powerful as well, but their low dissemination viability and high difficulty meant that only a highly limited number of Martial Squires could master them, this limited the impact they had on society. This is why they were quite valuable, yet not completely groundbreaking.

#### Chapter 1188: Conceal

The same was not true for Hungry Pain. The difficulty of the technique was grade-six. It took immense perseverance, but any Martial Squire had the ability to master the technique fully. Meaning it could instantly boost all future Martial Squires by forty-fifty percent compared to the previous generation.

That was massive for a single technique.

Rui was willing to share it with the Martial Union even as a Martial Squire because he had a greater amount of trust in the organization. He understood it well enough that it was, by design, remarkably meritocratic. The Hungry Pain technique was just valuable enough that it would massively increase his value to the organization, but not to the degree that it would be harmful to him.

This was in sharp contrast to accelerating the breakthrough rates of Martial Apprentices. Rui did not trust anybody with that information. It was beyond revolutionary.

Thankfully, it appeared that Bishop Master Deivon respected his privacy as a Martial Artist. This was the norm within the Martial World, as one's Martial Path and Martial Art were deeply personal to Martial Artists. It was an unspoken rule that one did not cross any lines when inquiring about them.

"Regardless of the cause behind the abnormal progression of the Martial Body, it is not quite yet at the stage where it can withstand the power of your Martial Heart," The man explained, before smiling. "We can aid with that."

Rui grew interested in his offer, just like Master Deivon had hoped he would. Power was everything to Martial Artists, after all. Offering to bring Rui one step closer to a higher Realm power was something that he could not ignore.

"Go on..." Rui relented.

The bishop grinned. "We have potions capable of accelerating the progression of Martial Squires. You're close enough that we can get you past the threshold in one go. Once that happens, you may very well break through any time. They are quite valuable and expensive and are made from ingredients that are acquired by Martial Seniors and Martial Masters from high-danger zones across the continent and in the Beast Domain, we generally do not sell them outside of the faith all that much since they are too powerful a resource. But I am willing to arrange some for you if you agree to become my heritor in the Martial Contest."

Rui stared at him with a deep expression.

He had to admit, that that was a deeply alluring offer. Of course, he was aware that he did not need the potions to break through and become a Martial Senior of his own merits. Still, that did not mean that he was unwilling to save time.

He didn't know how much time it would take for him to naturally reach the threshold. Perhaps Ajanta Island could dramatically reduce the time period, however, even then, diminishing returns were

something that was very real when it came to conditioning treatments. The first remaining ten to twenty percent of the journey could last almost as much as the time it took to reach eighty percent.

That was why the potion was alluring, it would allow him to skip through all of that time, and allow him to avoid wasting a few years.

He was always cognizant of the fact that he was running out of time.

Roughly two years had passed since he escaped from the Shionel Confederation. He had made a lot of progress in those two years, no doubt, but it did mean that he only had eight years left before it was game over for his family.

At that time, he needed to become strong enough to protect his family with just the fear of his power. He was far away from reaching that stage.

Even breaking through to the Senior Realm wasn't going to be enough in and of itself. He was simply going to be a newborn Martial Senior. He knew that Chairman Deacon was guarded by two Martial Seniors at all times, a single young Martial Senior was not enough.

He would need to take strides even within the Senior Realm until he was finally ready to return and put an end to the saga that drove him away from his home in the first place.

Rui heaved a sigh as he considered the matter.

"That's not all," Master Deivon keenly recognized that he was close. "You may have unrestricted access to the Squire library of the Virodhahasa Faith."

Rui's eyes narrowed.

That was a considerable offer as well. He was relatively certain that the Virodhahasa Faith surpassed even the Martial Union when it came to collecting reservoirs of techniques. It was larger, and more widespread, and had a far greater number of Martial Artists in it. That was saying much since the Martial Union was better than basically every other organization that he had ever seen. He could be assured

that the quality of the techniques was remarkably high and they were probably well-rounded in every field of Martial Art there was.

Of course, he did not intend to mindlessly master techniques created by others. The fact that they were not created by him meant that they could not make the most efficient use of his body and Martial Art, they were sub-optimal.

However, they could serve as powerful building blocks for new techniques that Rui would build in the future.

It was the final straw.

"Alright, fine," Rui sighed. "I'll agree for now. I wish to hash out the details to make sure that there are no devils in them."

"I knew you'd make the right choice," The Master grinned. "You will come to see the wisdom in the choice that you have made soon enough."

Rui hoped so. He was still a little nervous due to his perceived connections with the Virodhabhasa Faith. He knew that he had nothing to do with it and it was all an unfortunate coincidence, but it didn't matter if the religious cultists disagreed and tried to shackle him.

#### Chapter 1189: Seed

Before Rui fully accepted the patronage of the Master, he had several issues to clarify.

"You mentioned something about me being a seed of the Virodhabhasa Faith. Can you please clarify that? I am very paranoid about getting deeply involved with a powerful religion for reasons I'm sure you can understand. I hope you can clarify what this is all about"

"Of course," The Master nodded understandingly. "As you are aware, the Divine Mission of the Virodhabhasa Faith is to find the Virodhabhasa before the occurrence of the Great Catastrophe.

However, while the religious zealots of this religion are very motivated, it is quite the tall task to find the so-called religious deity."

Even for the Virodhabhasa Faith, the continent was too large to make such a task anything short of herculean in difficulty.

"Even when we limit our search for our deity to Martial Artists, it is almost impossible to do a comprehensive search through every Martial Artist, for obvious reasons. Martial Artists do not take kindly to being thoroughly scrutinized, and are quite secretive about their Martial Paths and Art. That is why we take a more hands-off approach."

He paused for a moment. "The head of the religion may be a sincere devotee, but he is not stupid. He has created an incentive structure for the many leaders within the religion to find candidates that can potentially be the Virodhabhasa. They are known as Virodhabhasa seeds. The condition for being known as a Virodhabhasa seed is to have a Martial Art that is roughly speaking equally effective and successful against all Martial Artists. The more seeds that a religious leader like myself finds and patrons, the greater the appreciation from the religion."

He grinned. "Of course, that appreciation does manifest in material gains."

Rui understood what was going on.

The religion was essentially leveraging the desire for material gains and other resources of the religion to make the leaders of the religion like Master Deivon actually put effort into finding the Virodhabhasa Faith.

('Interesting, that means the Astral Deity is truly serious about finding the Virodhabhasa.') Rui mused.

It appeared that the Astral Deity understood that simple religious devotion was not enough to push the leaders of the religion to their very best to find the Virodhabhasa. He understood that simply faith was ultimately hollow. If he wanted leaders to exert themselves, there needed to be concrete benefits and incentives to get them to go all out.

This was especially true for the Martial Artists that were not as religiously motivated, such as Master Deivon.

Yet the fact that Master Deivon was fulfilling his duty showed that the incentive structure in place was working.

('That isn't the important part though,') Rui narrowed his eyes. "I want to know how this affects me. What does it mean to become a Virodhabhasa seed? How will my life be impacted by this?"

Rui was very nervous about being restricted by the Faith due to his status.

"Relax young man, becoming a seed does not mean you are halfway to being accepted as the Virodhabhasa. It's not even ten percent of the way. Hell, it's barely one percent of the way, if not being a seed is one billionth of a percent," The man explained. "It just means that your Martial Art is appreciated by the religion as holding a very minute amount of potential of being what the Virodhabhasa Faith is looking for. There are many, many seeds in existence. Thousands in the Apprentice Realm, hundreds in the Squire Realm, and dozens in the Senior Realm. There are too many to make a fuss every time a new seed is discovered. You do not need to be worried that your life is going to be derailed. All the other seeds have gone on their own way and are living lives untouched by the Virodhabhasa Faith. The religion merely hopes that the seeds will naturally bloom, that's all."

Rui relaxed a bit more. If he was one of the few seeds or something like that, he would definitely be more apprehensive about this development. But if even half of what the man was saying was true, then he probably didn't have much to be worried about.

"I want proof," Rui insisted, narrowing his eyes. "I cannot take your word on this."

He observed the Master's demeanor.

"It's all public information," The Master shrugged. "You can find proof as well, we have had publicized events featuring them."

This made Rui even more relieved. He would not utter such a lie if it could be disproved with contemptuous ease. He intended to fact-check it nonetheless, but he was inclined to take him at his word for now.

"One more thing," Rui was not done. "A Virodhabhasa seed is merely someone with a Martial Art that is supposed to be equally effective against all fields, right? Then how do you know that I am, or could be a Virodhabhasa seed? How can you even have a basis for suspicion if you do not know what my Martial Path or Martial Art are?"

Rui had not revealed any information about the nature of his Martial Art. He did not confirm that he was a Virodhabhasa seed. Thus he was curious about why the man concluded that he was a seed.

"The techniques you submitted," The Master smiled wryly.

"Ah..." Rui immediately understood. "The techniques I sold were varied across many fields. It can be inferred that I am a very diverse Martial Artist."

"Sharp," The man nodded.

Is that the basis for your concluding that my Martial Art is equally effective against all fields? That's a bit contrived."

"Perhaps," He did not deny Rui's words. He turned towards him, smiling knowingly. "But I have a strong feeling that I am right to suspect you as a seed. Do not underestimate the instinct of a Martial Master, young man."

Rui duly noted that. It appeared that while Martial Artists of the Lower Realms were mostly blockheads, the same could not be said for Martial Masters.

Chapter 1190: Details

Once Rui got those main concerns and issues out of the way, he was much less resistant to the idea of being patroned by Bishop Master Deivos. They quickly sorted through all the details, making sure they both got out of it what they wanted.

Rui quickly realized that what Master Deivos was getting out of their deal was rather flimsy, most certainly not as concrete as the benefits that Rui was getting. At first glance, it seemed like Rui was gaining more from the deal than the Master was, however, it was also true that Master Deivos was hardly losing anything.

The training and growth resources that Rui was gaining from the Virodhabhasa Faith were quite palpable, but they were also not that big a deal to the church. The losses were well within acceptable limits of what a Martial Master like Master Deivos could probably exercise with his power.

If Rui was indeed a Virodhabhasa seed, then it was worth every ounce of resource that the religion expended on Rui, if it helped him bloom and become a more powerful Martial Artist.

It was true that Rui was a Martial Squire, and there were many seeds in the Squire Realm when one considered the number in a vacuum.

However, in the grand scheme of things, with the number of Martial Squires that the faith constantly came in contact with, the fact that there were less than a thousand Virodhabhasa seeds meant that it was uncommon enough for a new seed to be found.

This was especially true in the Senior Realm. There were less than a hundred Virodhabhasa seeds in the Senior Realm, it made each of them quite precious.

Master Deivos knew that Rui was very young, even if Rui hid his appearance and face with a powerful anti-sensory mask that he had procured from Guildmaster Bradt back when he was leaving the Shionel Confederation.

The fact that Rui had reached the very upper echelons of the Squire Realm in his early twenties was an especially optimistic sign. That was one of the unspoken reasons that Master Deivos was interested in Rui.

Most Martial Squires that had reached the upper echelons of the Squire Realm were long past their youth. Rui had not missed the fact that he and Kane were by far the two youngest Martial Squires in the Floating Sect. Even Tokugawa Ieyasu, whom Rui sought to surpass, had achieved his power after spending more than a decade in the Squire Realm alone.

Rui had only been a Martial Artist for nine years in totality.

It made both Rui and Master Devos quite optimistic about his chances of breaking through to the Senior Realm.

"And... with that, we're done," Master Devos and Rui signed a couple of documents each after spending an hour hashing out all the minor details of their agreement.

Master Devos directed a smile at Rui. "I am now your patron, young man. I expect you to work hard to justify the investment of resources that I've invested in you."

"I always strive to make the best use of what I have," Rui replied. "I cannot promise anything about being qualified as a Virodhabhasa seed, but I will perform to my very best in the Virodhabhasa Martial Contest."

"Good," The man smiled. "Do you know how you are going to spend the next year training?"

"...I intend to complete an ambitious project that I have set out on," Rui reluctantly explained. "As long as I can successfully complete it, I will become far stronger."

The Master nodded. "You have displayed an abnormally high degree of productivity when it comes to developing the individuality of your Martial Body, that is a great sign. Developing individualistic techniques that make the very best use of the potential of your Martial Body is the key to bringing out the very best from your Martial Body; your Martial Heart. You do not necessarily need too much out of your way, but do not neglect it."

"I understand."

"Furthermore, given that I have invested in you as a patron. I don't mind aiding in your training if you are so inclined. From insights to corrections, a Martial Master is not to be underestimated."

Rui paused for a moment, before shaking his head. "I am not doubting you at all. However, I simply do not require such aid. I am accustomed to overcoming problems with my own merits. It is not beneficial to me if I develop a psychological dependence on external aid to overcome any problem."

To his credit, the Master graciously nodded in approval. "Spoken worthy of someone who has progressed their Martial Art at such a young age. Regardless, this option is always available."

The two of them discussed a bit more before they began wrapping their meeting up.

"I hope the Virodhabhasa Church will deliver the stabilizing treatment potion to the Floating Sect immediately," Rui pointedly told Master Deivos.

This was one of the agreements that Rui had managed to secure for Senior Xanarn. The church was to give the Floating Sect what it needed to make sure that she didn't inadvertently die before he got the actual treatment to heal her. This was something that Rui was guaranteed regardless of the upcoming Martial Contest.

"Of course, young man" Master Deivos nodded. "I will have that done immediately."

Rui nodded. "I suppose that concludes our business here. I appreciate your solicitation and your patronage."

The bishop smiled, getting up. "You most likely will not see me for a while, I have some external operations to tend to. However, the priests of the church will be made aware of our agreement. You may ask of them what you would of me during that time."

They bade farewell before Rui left his residence, heading out.

The streets were filled with Martial Artists across the three Lower Realms.

('Now that the annoying stuff is finally out of the way, I can focus on getting stronger,') Rui sighed.

He had sold some of his techniques to gain training and growth resources in the first place, and now that he had gotten it. It was time to focus on growing stronger.