

Martial Unity 1191

Chapter 1191: Commence

The first step he was to take now that he had already entered his training phase was to begin training his body to produce an excess of myostatin to counter the Herenal Virus when he infected his body with it. Myostatin limited muscle growth, thus training his body to produce an excess of it to counter the virus that consumed the protein was necessary to maintain his natural physique when he wasn't using Hypertrophic Surge.

The best way to do this was to simply train his body to be able to counter the virus in his body. Specifically, training it to produce excess myostatin to counter the shortage of myostatin caused by the virus. Only when the excess canceled out the shortage would his body be able to maintain its natural physique.

That was the first step. Introducing the virus into his body and ensuring the body learned to coexist with the virus by simply canceling its negative effects. The virus would eat myostatin, while the body would continuously produce it. This would create the balance allowing his body to remain as it was.

The second step was learning how to switch off the excess production of myostatin from the body.

After all, the Hypertrophic Surge technique required all the myostatin in his body to be gone. With that protein gone, the muscles would no longer be hampered and could grow bigger and stronger. That was the essence of the Hypertrophic Surge technique after all. It made his muscles grow larger and denser by getting rid of all the myostatin in the body by allowing the virus to eat or destroy all of it.

Thus, he needed a way to command the body to stop producing extra myostatin to counter the myostatin-eating virus, only then could the Hypertrophic Surge technique be activated by the virus eating up the myostatin.

This sounded extremely difficult, but he had found a viable solution for this in training methodologies that involved associating triggers with the desired triggerable effect. Unfortunately, this part required either the proficient use of self-hypnosis or hypnosis from another Martial Artist.

Rui definitely intended to learn hypnotic techniques in the future, but for now, Project Metabody took precedence. Thus he relied on the patronage of Master Deivos to get a Martial Senior to hypnotize Rui for him.

"Senior Cayne," Rui greeted the Martial Senior. "I appreciate the aid with my training."

"I wouldn't be doing it if not for Master Deivos' instructions," She grumbled. "Let's get this over with."

Rui smiled wryly. "It won't take more than a single execution of the necessary hypnotic technique."

The technique in question was simply a technique that put Rui in a mental state where he was open to mental suggestions that could take root in his mind. Subjecting himself to this technique would allow him to create new mental associations between trigger and effect events.

This could allow him to create a way to associate a trigger with the complete ceasing of the production of myostatin.

All he needed to was experience the trigger concurrently with the desired triggered effects while under the influence of the mental hypnosis technique that made him extremely open to accepting new associations subconsciously.

This meant that both the trigger and the desired trigger effects needed to be artificially generated simultaneously while under the effects of the hypnosis technique.

The trigger was a very specific breathing pattern. He found this to be the best kind of trigger. After all, he needed the trigger to be something that he could not pull by mistake. Because if it was something that could be triggered by mistake, then it would be disastrous mid-fight.

It was especially bad if it activated while he was using a different Metabody technique. He had already witnessed the outcome of using two Metabody techniques once. The idea that he could kill himself by mistake was unacceptable. Thus, he made sure to choose a breathing pattern that was extremely detached from normal breathing or any of his breathing techniques.

That covered the trigger part, but also needed to generate the zero-myostatin state in his body simultaneously to get it associated with the trigger.

That was why he was going to infect himself with the Herenal Virus, in order to create zero-myostatin states to associate with the trigger.

The two of them were in a training room with a seat armed with shackles and straps. A medical team stood nearby expectantly.

"We can begin," Rui nodded as he changed into special garments that were extremely flexible and could easily adapt to any size. Comfortably.

CLACK CLACK CLACK!

Rui heaved a sigh as the restraints on the seat strapped his body against the seat tightly. These were Squire-level restraints meant to be able to shackle even the strongest of Martial Squires.

Rui nodded to the medical team, they immediately procured a small syringe containing a translucent fluid in it.

This was the virus.

He held his breath as one of the doctors injected the fluid into Rui's blood before the medical team withdrew instantly.

Rui held his breath as if nothing happened for several seconds.

The tension in the air remained for a few minutes.

That was when it began.

"Urgh!" Rui grimaced as his body felt a ripple across it. His muscles began burning in pain as his flesh began screaming, as though it was being torn apart from the inside.

Yet he bore the pain, turning towards the Martial Senior.

"Please begi-!" CLAP!

A sound noise she produced before he even finished talking shook him, catching him off-guard, by the time he even fully became cognizant of what just happened, her technique had already taken effect.

Hypnosis as a field attempted to pass suggestions to the subconscious mind, bypassing the conscious barricades that existed in the way. Back on Earth, people were only capable of bypassing the conscious barrier to the subconscious mind if the targets allowed it to happen. However, Martial Artists were not bound by such limitations at all.

Chapter 1192: Drawbacks

Rui soon fell into a trance-like state as his subconscious mind absorbed his normal state as 'normal'.

Powerful gears began turning deep in his mind as the mental imprint technique by Senior Cayna took effect with full force. Both the trigger and triggered were in place, and the establishment of a causal connection between them in this new state was rapidly being formed.

Rui on the other hand became self-absorbed in his own body. The new state of his body had completely drawn his attention.

He could see what was happening to his own body. The outcome was shocking and terrifying, yet also highly exciting and promising.

His muscles grew larger step by step. This alone was one hell of a sight to witness. Every muscle group grew rounder and rounder as a result of the virus going haywire inside his own body. He could practically feel the virus consuming the myostatin reserves in his body while triggering rapid muscle growth.

He hadn't experienced pain like this since the Squire evolution breakthrough procedure. Frankly, he was shocked by the difference in his body. Out of all the Metabody techniques that he had created thus far, this one had surprised him the most. He had not expected it to be so jarring.

One moment he went from a body that was just muscular enough to have decent power, but also light enough to not be slow.

However, all of that went out of the window as he began resembling a mini-Hulk. He felt physical power that was unlike anything he had ever experienced in his life.

Yet at the same time, he felt heavier than he ever had in his entire life. He felt as though someone had strapped every muscle in his body with incredibly heavy boulders, forcing him to slug them around with every movement that he made.

It was tiring and energy-consuming. He felt his stamina slipping away like someone had poked a hole in the bottom of a bottle of water. If not for the fact that the autophagy of Hungry Pain supplied the body with vastly greater energy reserves compared to his normal base state, he would be exhausted extremely quickly.

He bore the pain and the alienation of his new state with a heavy mind. He felt as though he wouldn't like the Hypertrophic Surge technique more so than the other Metabody techniques that he had created.

However, its merits could not be ignored.

It was true that this Metabody technique offered him insane physical power. Just the sensation of his new muscles growing at the cost of the rest of his body told him that he was capable of unleashing power that was unlike anything that he was previously capable of as far as power went.

However, it came at the cost of defense, speed, and stamina. Just like the other Metabody techniques, it sacrificed the other attributes of his physicality in order to get a boost in the desired physical parameter.

('This is going to be rough.') Rui grimaced inwardly as he felt the onset of a fever coming.

His temperature rose dramatically as his body began fighting back against the viral infection in a way that is commensurate with how the human body deals with such infectious diseases.

Yet even as he began feeling delirious, he still maintained the abnormal breathing pattern that he had set as the trigger. In his current hypnotized state, he needed to make sure he didn't stray off-beat even a single time to make sure that his mind registered the trigger exactly the way he wanted to.

That was why despite his increasingly deteriorating health, he focused as much of his attention on ensuring that at the very least, the mental imprinting technique was not disrupted in any way.

It was a true test of patience as he suffered horrific pain, but also an increasingly stressed mind that did its best to deal with the failing mental conditions that came with severe infections and other things of the like.

('Ugh, I absolutely cannot allow myself to go through this every time I want to use Hypertrophic Surge.') He groaned inwardly.

If he grew mildly delirious and had a burning fever every time he had to use Hypertrophic Surge, then there were big problems at hand. One of the things that he needed to was deal with the fact that there were consequences to allowing a viral infection to infect the body.

Thankfully, he had long foreseen these outcomes. He had also naturally come up with solutions to them, but these would take time to implement. It meant that for the time being of the technique, he would need to suffer thoroughly in many ways in order to make sure that he nailed the technique.

The first session lasted six hours. He naturally broke out of the hypnotic state himself. He quickly injected his body with some myostatin to quickly stabilize his situation and return his body to its original state.

"Huff... Huff...." He panted heavily, wiping away his sweat-drenched body.

If a single trigger establishment session took this much of a toll, then it meant that he was in for truly rough times if he wanted to succeed in his goal.

Yet by the time Rui had finished recovering, all signs of dissatisfaction had all but gone. Hypertrophic Surge was most certainly a very powerful technique. Rui couldn't wait to perfect it and get rid of all the minor issues so that he could amplify his raw power to the very pinnacle of what the technique could offer and begin training in that form so that he could learn to exercise the devastating raw power that Hypertrophic Surge supplied him with. He couldn't wait to try out techniques like Flowing Canon and Transverse Resonance.

Both those techniques were extremely powerful even when they were used ordinarily, however, just how much would he be able to accomplish when they were amplified with Hypertrophic Surge, increasing their physical power much greater than their norm?

Chapter 1193: Scale

Now that the first session with the mental imprint had ended, he immediately shifted to the next step of the training. Which was ensuring that his body learned to accept the virus without making too much of a fuss, the kind of fuss that the human body normally made when it was infected by a virus.

He had already begun to experience it now that the virus was injected in his body. What he needed to do was make sure that his body did not kill the virus through its immune system. The Squire evolution process evolved all of the aspects of the body, including the immune system of the Martial Body.

What Rui needed to was make sure that the body adapted to the presence of the virus instead of fighting back.

Unfortunately, this would take quite some time. Until then, he was going to suffer. The biggest issue was getting the body to normalize the virus in it. Fortunately, such a thing was not unheard of.

In reality, this would not be the only instance where the human body cooperates with microscopic organisms. In reality, the human body greatly depended on a variety of bacteria that inhabited the body. A variety of metabolic processes would not occur, or would not occur as well as if these good bacteria were not present in the body.

The body had essentially evolved to engage in a symbiotic relationship with the bacteria inside it. Rui was merely trying to expand that to the Herenal Virus.

This meant purposefully not letting the virus be suppressed by the immune system. He needed to subject himself to some medication that would lower his immune system just enough to make sure that the virus was not wiped out by the body.

After that, it was just a matter of waiting for the body to naturally adapt to the effects of the virus and counter it with heightened myostatin production returning the muscle mass of the body from its hypertrophied state back to how it was naturally.

Once he completed both halves of the training, his body would be returned to normal because it would naturally counter the virus, until Rui executed the trigger, causing the body to stop negating the virus, allowing the virus to increase the muscle mass of his body.

Once that was done, the technique would effectively be complete.

Now that he had begun the training procedure for his offensive technique, he also needed to consider his defensive Martial Body. That was the final Martial Body technique in the Metabody project.

Unfortunately, he had yet to come up with even a concept for the technique. He intended to, soon. The issue was that he didn't have an idea in mind that he could work towards yet. That was the starting point for all technique projects.

For now, all he could do as scour the library of the church for techniques that were suitable for him. He didn't have too much time left, less than a year before he needed to be prepared with Metabody.

The issue was that he could not afford to finish the technique at the twelve-month mark. The fact of the matter was that he needed some experience practicing with the technique. He also needed to become proficient with partial execution of the techniques that he was developing.

The reason for this was that not every opponent will be most aptly countered by one of the Metabody techniques perfectly. That was simply not the case whatsoever. The fact of the matter was that most opponents required a combination of parameters to be adapted to. It was possible that some Martial Artists were more optimally countered by a combination of strength and speed than they were by even greater strength alone or even greater speed alone.

Rui needed to be able to use more than one technique to a lesser degree. He could not afford to use two Metabody techniques at once. He had already recently experienced the consequences of that. They were not pretty. If he tried pulling something like that off under normal circumstances, he probably would die on the spot.

Thus, mastering partial activations were also on the agenda as far as he was concerned. All of this needed to happen before the Martial Contest arrived.

('This is going to be a rough schedule.') Rui grimaced.

Aside from that, he had looked into the Martial Contest format, hoping to gain an understanding of its structure and rules. If there were any especially aberrant rules, he needed to make sure that he looked into that as well. One of the things that he was not the most inclined for was how long it was, but given the sheer size and scale of the contest, he was not surprised.

He was competing against nearly a million Martial Squires!

Each town had many hundreds of Martial Squires, and there were nearly a thousand church towns of the Virodhabhasa Faith across the entirety of the continent. That meant that whichever Martial Squire came out on top of this contest would have effectively beaten all of the other Martial Squires that competed.

It meant that whoever won this contest would have the capital to claim to be the strongest Martial Squire in the entire continent. Although this was not the only contest of this magnitude, and it still certainly did not include all Martial Squires in existence, it was still an extremely prestigious contest. Many people from across the continent would come to see it.

('Ah, I should follow through with Master Deivon about the mask that I commissioned as a part of my condition.') Rui mused.

Rui had asked for a mask with extremely high-grade anti-sensory properties. One that was armed with the most potent esoteric substances to ensure that it never fell off his face, or broke, and concealed his appearance to make sure that no one recognized him.

The Virodhabhasa Faith understood that drawing attention at this level was something that many Martial Squires were not comfortable with, and permitted the usage of masks and aliases.

Chapter 1194: Outcome

His training began to get into a rhythm as time passed and his body got increasingly accustomed to its new circumstances. That was a desirable outcome, as it meant that his body was slowly canceling out the effects of the Herenal Virus through changes in the metabolism of the body. It had almost entirely returned to a normal size a few months into the training.

That was a good sign.

It meant that it had learned to counter the presence of the Herenal Virus without making a big fuss, metabolically speaking. Soon enough, it was time for him to move to the next phase.

"Fuuu..." Rui closed his eyes as he began focusing.

In the past few months, he had been religiously working on the mental imprint technique for the past few months and had been associating the breathing pattern that he had developed with the state of zero myostatin count. It had taken some, but he had eventually gotten everything that he needed, mentally speaking, to begin testing the Hypertrophic Surge technique.

Rui concentrated, gathering his mind and honing it in one direction. He also had a medical team on standby, courtesy of Master Deivos.

('Alright, here we go.')

He executed the breathing technique strongly, making sure that everything was in order. Instantly, he could feel a profound change rippling across the entire body. He knew this sensation quite well.

He had subjected himself to it.

Then, it happened.

"Urgh!" Rui gritted his teeth as his muscles began slowly expanding in both volume and density. It was a slow but painful process.

Thankfully, the evolution breakthrough procedure to the Squire Realm had given every Martial Squire a remarkable degree of pain tolerance that they didn't possess prior. It came naturally after subjecting themselves to the hellish suffering that was the Squire evolution breakthrough procedure.

It didn't take even a minute for the entire transformation to occur, and it was still a sight to behold.

It was hard to imagine that such a thing was possible!

None of the other techniques made such a dramatic transformation to the body barring the Void Forestep technique. Even that did not feel comparable to the transformation caused by the Hypertrophic Surge technique

Rui clenched his fist hard once the transformation was complete.

POOF!

A shockwave emerged just from the gesture alone.

('This...') Rui stared in amazement. He was utterly speechless by the sheer magnitude of the enhancement to his physical by the Hypertrophic Surge technique. It was unbelievable to him that a single technique could cause such a titanic difference in the raw physical power generated by the Martial Body.

Giddy excitement washed over his body as he got ready to test it. Of course, he did not intend to go all out right off the bat. That was not safe, and it was best to take a more systematic approach to analyzing the boost given by the technique.

He needed to make sure that the technique did not have any unintentional side effects. If it did, he needed to make sure that he addressed them early on as opposed to later. This was essentially a sort of 'systems check-up' and a 'debugging' phase of creating a technique. It was impossible to account for every variable that came into play with the creation of the technique. There were generally going to be some oversights, especially when it came to more complicated and sophisticated techniques that deal with more complicated sophisticated matters such as the metabolism of the human body.

However, Rui soon discovered that while there were some elements here and there that were slightly off. For the most part, this technique worked the way he hoped it would.

RUMBLE!

Many pedestrians outside the training facility frowned, freezing on the spot as they felt tremors running through the ground, shaking them on the spot.

"Is this an earthquake?!"

"We need to get away from all infrastructure if it is!"

"Damn! This region has almost never experienced earthquakes! Where is this one coming from?!"

The entire district began panicking a little as minor, but definitely visible, tremors spread through the entire district. The town guard force even began mobilizing according to protocols, ready to evacuate if the situation escalated!

How could they have imagined that this was not caused due to seismic activity, but by the power of a single Martial Art technique?

"Hahahaha..." Rui chuckled subconsciously. "This..."

He gazed with widened eyes as he studied a target barrier in the distance. It was a barrier with circles on it and a bullseye in the center, a barrier meant for target practice. Rui had been informed that the

barrier was constructed out of quasi-Senior level esoteric alloys, and thus he did not have to worry about destroying it and could go all out.

"Hahaha..." He laughed weakly as he stared at the gigantic hole that he had blasted into the barrier. The same barrier that had withstood countless Squire-level attacks over many years had crumpled immediately under the sheer destruction that Rui unleashed against it!

He had just activated Transverse Resonance tier five. His most powerful long-range technique combined with Hypertrophic Surge had resulted in destructive power that was so utterly titanic that it completely overwhelmed the limits of the training facility that he had been assigned.

It was an unofficial statement that Rui had exceeded the limits of the Squire Realm. Even by the standards of the Virodhabhasa Church, Rui had exceeded a certain level that the church had never thought possible. Otherwise, the facility would have been designed to accommodate such power.

"Damn..." Rui scratched his head as he executed the deactivation trigger, returning his myostatin production to its heightened standard, immediately triggering muscle atrophy, bringing them back to the norm.

He heaved a sigh. He would love to immerse himself in his technique, but unfortunately, his actions had consequences. While the training facility that he was in was meant to be air-tight with its anti-espionage measures, all those measures were irrelevant in the face of Riemannian Echo, he could easily sense the consequences of his technique outside the facility.

Chapter 1195: Valued

"Tell me you are a Virodhabhasa seed without telling me that you are a Virodhabhasa seed." Master Deivos remarked with a wry smile as he gazed at the barrier that Rui had destroyed.

Soon after Rui had destroyed one of the long-range target practice barriers of the training facility that he had been assigned, he had immediately been stormed by the town guard force.

He did not like being treated heavy-handedly, but this time even he cooperated with the elite Squire officials who suspected an attack within the town.

However, they did not believe him when he said he had been the one to destroy the target practice barrier. Rui almost wanted to cry when they simply refused to believe the simple truth that he, a young Martial Squire had destroyed the barrier.

"Cease these lies. We will find you in contempt of law if you continue spouting that nonsense. Our record states that while you are abnormally strong for your age, you are only a twenty-three-year-old Squire. The estimated output that we see here is not possible from a Martial Squire."

"I can prove my statements." Rui declared.

And, he did.

It took Rui every ounce of self-control to stop himself from bursting out laughing after he saw the expressions of the Squire official heading the investigation.

The man's jaws dropped in a cartoonish fashion, dropping any and all elegance and bearing that he had been putting up.

Yet he quietly accepted everything Rui said with a humble expression, simply nodding and not saying a single word.

Thankfully, it wrapped quickly, and they left him alone after giving him an official warning for the public disturbance before retreating.

The incident could not be covered up. Nor did they particularly have any reason to. It spread like wildfire across the entire town instantly.

The tale of Martial Squire that busted up a quasi-Senior level barrier spread through the town. Squire Falken instantly became a legend in the town. What shocked people was that the officials of the town guard were the source of the rumors, it made the rumors quite credible as these were not untrustworthy actors.

Rui knew that the situation had gotten out of hand when Master Deivos stood before him half a day later.

"I had to cancel some engagements and appointments when I heard the news," He remarked as he stared at the barrier. "To think that it was not exaggerated even in the slightest..."

He turned towards Rui. "Is the technique you mentioned you had been working on?"

Rui nodded. "Yes sir."

"Hm," He scratched his chin. "Unless the circumstances of the technique are truly exceptional and non-replicable. I am certain that you'll easily be able to win the preliminary contest for the representative of the town, based on this technique alone. This is the kind of power that only Martial Seniors at their peaks, without their Martial Hearts, can possibly exert."

"Do you think I'll be able to win the main contest as well?" Rui asked with a curious expression.

"I can't say," The Master shook his head. "Trust me when I say that there are some monsters out there. The current reigning champion will be participating again this year, and she is nothing short of a monster in human form. She is not the only one that is beyond the norm."

He turned towards Rui. "My instincts told me that you are of the same caliber, and my instincts were correct."

The man looked appreciative of Rui's capabilities.

"I appreciate that," Rui blandly responded. "...What about my training facility?"

"Ah," The man considered the matter. "That's right, this is no longer fit for you to train. You'll just destroy everything eventually. Hm."

The man was immersed in thought, before eventually sighing. "No choice, I guess we'll have to assign you a Senior-level training facility."

Rui's eyes widened in shock. "But surely the Martial Seniors of this town are occupying them."

"They are," He nodded. "But it's fine, I'll kick one of them out and give their facility to you."

That was not a small gesture, Rui knew that. Master Deivon was attempting to convey that Rui was currently more valuable to him than a Martial Senior.

That was not a small gesture. While it did not mean that Rui was stronger, equal, or even remotely comparable to a Martial Senior employing their Martial Heart, it did mean that Rui served greater utility to the Master than a Martial Senior did.

The only reasons this was true was because of Rui's potential for growth, and the gains that he could bring not only Master Deivon but also the entirety of the Seonmun Town by performing well in the Martial Contest.

Motivating the bishops and the various religious leaders to find powerful unique Martial Squires that were also Virodhahasa seeds with resulting rewards was something that Rui already knew that the religion did.

Rui could not help but wonder what they were dangling in front of Master Deivon. Considering that the man was a Martial Master, he highly doubted any ordinary resources were enough.

('Could it be... something that would help him become a Martial Sage?') Rui wondered. He couldn't help but feel that he was right on the mark.

At the Master Realm, he was sure that the difficulty of making any progress was probably much more difficult than in the lower Realms, if not for no other reasons barring the fact that resources were scarcer, and there were fewer reference paths with established paradigms that aided people to get to higher Realms.

It was possible that the whole reason Master Deivon stayed in the church was because it was powerful enough to gather resources that could help Martial Artists in all Realms grow stronger. He could then imagine that the true Martial Contest was not between the Martial Squires, but actually between all of the religious leaders that patroned them!

The one who found the best warrior to patron was the true winner, they would probably make gains that exceeded that of the Martial Squire.

Chapter 1196: Priorities

"...You're giving my training chamber to a Martial Squire?" A Martial Senior stood up with a furious expression.

His aggressive fury washed out from his demeanor and expression. An immensely deep wave of pressure radiated outwards from him, washing over the man sitting in front of him.

"Did you not hear me the first time?" Master Deivon calmly asked as he sipped a cup of tea.

"HOW DARE YOU INSULT ME?!" The man roared. "ARE YOU SAYING THAT MARTIAL SQUIRE IS OF GREATER VALUE TO YOU?!"

"That is exactly what I'm saying, Senior Dreynil," Master Deivon replied. "I'm glad you have finally caught on."

The plain apathetic disrespect that Master Deivon showed the Martial Senior bewildered him. No one had shown him this much disrespect ever since he entered the Senior Realm.

"You... Don't you dare treat me this way or else..."

"Or else what?" Master Deivon threw a calm yet steely glance his way.

It was at that moment that the Martial Senior recalled who he was talking to. He had forgotten the difference in their Realms, power, and status. Master Deivon was a man who was superior in almost every measurable regard.

"Forgive me for my impropriety, Master Deivon," He immediately bowed his head. "However, I believe that if I'm being replaced by a Martial Squire, I at the very least deserve to know why. I am entitled to that as a Martial Senior, am I not?"

Master Deivon sighed inwardly. He almost wished the man had lost his cool, he would be easier to deal with that way. Yet it appeared that that was asking for too much.

"It's a matter of immediate utility as well as future potential if you must know," Master Deivon replied. "That man is important to me and to the faith. His needs take priority over yours. It is as simple as that."

The man gritted his teeth as he bore the humiliation of being told he was less valuable than a simple Martial Squire.

This was nothing short of an insult.

"Potential... eh?" A dark thought entered his mind. ('If it's just potential then...')

Suddenly, a profoundly deep and perilous wave of pressure washed over him. A shiver ran up his spine as his hair stood on edge.

This was the fear that only those of a higher Realm could generate!

"Don't even think about it," A dangerous glint flashed in the Master's eyes.

Yet the pressure didn't cease.

It only rose.

"Urgh...!" The man grimaced as he cowered.

His body did not experience any pressure.

Yet, he felt as though a mountain had been dropped on his shoulders, pushing him down to his knees.

"If you go so much as a kilometer anywhere near him..." The Master growled. "I will not even kill you. No. I will cripple you as a Martial Artist. I will drive you to such depths of despair. You will take your own life for me. You will try to, rather."

His glare turned sharper as the Senior cowered even more. "I won't let you. Put so much as a scratch on the boy, and what had otherwise been a blessed life as a powerful Martial Artist will turn into Hell itself. Not even the Lord will be able to save you."

The Martial Senior was already on his knees due to how much the fear crippled him. He whimpered pitifully.

Suddenly, the pressure disappeared.

"Huff... Huff... Huff..." The man panted desperately as he finally gained respite.

"Have I made myself clear?" Master Deivon asked, looking down at him.

"Y-Yes Master! Forgive me!"

The man bowed deeply before scurrying away from the office.

"Hmph," Master Deivon snorted in contempt. "Azazel."

Suddenly a hooded figure appeared out of nowhere before the Master, bowing down on one knee. "Yes, Master."

"Follow him," Master Deivon instructed. "I don't trust his word for even half a second. Make sure he goes nowhere near the boy, and keep me updated on his movements and actions. Ah, and do not intervene if he tries anything. Inform me and wait, I'd like to dispatch that rat myself if he dares. It will be good stress relief."

"Understood, Master," The hooded figure disappeared as swiftly as he appeared.

"Huff..." The Master sighed as his thoughts went back to the subject of their little dispute.

A smile broke out onto his face as he recalled what had recently happened.

He had been in the middle of a Council meeting in the Central Panamic headquarters of the Virodhabhasa Foundation. He had gone well out of his way to make it back as soon as possible and suppress any news of what Rui had done.

He hadn't been able to make it in time to prevent it from spreading within the town, but he had just barely managed to ensure that it wouldn't spread any further. At the very least, he had ensured that his peers and competitors would not learn of this development.

"Hehehe..." He chuckled with a tinge of excitement. Previously, he didn't have much hope for any of the three Martial Contests that would be held during the Virodhabhasa Martial Festival. His town did not have any Martial Artists that were of the caliber necessary to make it into the top hundred, let alone win the contest. The strongest Martial Squire had been a grade-ten Martial Squire, but unfortunately, grade-ten Martial Squires were a dime a dozen at the continental stage. It was the bare minimum, and anything less would be embarrassing for a town representative.

That was when he came across Rui. A young man who sold brilliant techniques, three of which were grade ten and two of which were grade nine. This had been flagged in his notification system and immediately had drawn his interest. This was almost unheard of. Creating even a single grade-ten technique was normally a lifetime achievement. These techniques were techniques that pushed the very boundary of what it meant to be a Martial Squire, after all, Developing even a single one of them was of absurd difficulty, and usually took several years at a bare minimum.

Chapter 1197: Reflection

Yet this man had three on hand that he claimed to have created himself. This was hard to believe, yet, on the off chance that this was true, it would be of great value to him.

He recalled the first time that he set eyes on Rui. It was a novel experience.

Normally, Martial Squires were transparent to him. Their Squire-level Martial Art usually were individualistic and were synergetic with their Martial Bodies, which in turn was synergetic with their Martial Paths. It meant that their Martial Bodies possessed a lot of information about their Martial Art and Paths.

That in combination with their ticks, demeanor, personality, temperament, and movements allowed experienced Martial Masters like himself to see right through them.

Yet when he laid eyes on Rui, he was unable to see through anything. He was as opaque as a mountain.

No, not quite a mountain as much as...

('...An abyss...') He narrowed his eyes.

It was as though he was staring at a limitless void. His eyes, despite being silver, reminded the man of two swirling vortexes, vortexes of information that saw the world for what it truly was. He felt as though he was the one that was being judged.

He had only ever felt that way when he interacted with Martial Sages. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. He hadn't come across anything like this in the ninety-three years that he had been a Martial Artist. Thankfully, it appeared that Martial Seniors were not perceptive enough to notice the oddities surrounding the young Martial Squire, since he was the only one who seemed to notice them in the first place.

That was a boon since it meant that hiding the young man as a trump card was easier since no one noticed how much of one he was.

It wasn't clear whether the young man himself was aware of just how much of an aberrant he was. He casually talked about how he developed grade-ten techniques with 'quite some difficulty' in just a year, as though that wasn't an absurdly herculean task to expect out of any Martial Artist.

The technique evaluation department responsible for testing and grading techniques that were offered for sale strongly suspected that these techniques weren't developed by him, not that they reduced the value of the techniques, and that he was lying to impress them. Yet Master Deivon knew better. He could sense the sheer amount of compatibility between him and those techniques and the individuality that the young man had imbued in the techniques by virtue of creating them from scratch.

It was an incredible sight to behold.

Master Deivon needed to contain himself and play it cool as if it wasn't too big a deal. But in reality, he was willing to go to great degrees to get to Rui. Unfortunately, it appeared that Rui had long deduced the advantageous position he was in, and continued pushing for more advantages when they were hashing out the finer details of their contract.

Unrestricted training resource privileges, a remarkable amount of growth resources, a custom high-grade Senior-level anti-espionage mask that would conceal his appearance and would not be damaged in the Martial Contest, stabilizing treatment for the Martial Senior for whom he had negotiated the detoxification treatment for with the highest guarantee of covertness.

He had also attempted to ask for the assassination of an international powerhouse in the esoteric supply and esoteric technology sector of a sage-level corporatocracy nation, but that was too far as much as Master Deivon wanted him. One Martial Squire was not worth making an enemy out of a Sage-level nation. The Virodhabhasa Faith had strict guidelines of not entering political disputes frivolously, as doing so would make too many enemies that would significantly hamper its reach, and thus its Divine Mission.

Thankfully, he realized how absurd the demand was, and relented with what he had managed to get.

In the short time that they had conversed, the boy had revealed an incredibly sharp intellect and managed to come out the winner in negotiations. However, it wasn't as though Master Deivon was losing. The resources were of the church, not his. And the more time he spent with the young man, he was sure that his performance in the contest would be something special, and would earn Master Deivon enough credit to make it a win-win.

And to his greatest joy, his hopes had been validated yesterday when Rui destroyed equipment that was expressly designed and manufactured with the express intent of not being destroyed by any Martial Squire.

He had done it and even replicated it after to prove that he was the one responsible for the commotion. Master Deivon did not know how Rui had managed to accomplish this, but he truly looked forward to seeing it in action in the preliminary contest and the Martial Contest.

"If I'm not wrong... this young man is cut from the same cloth as the previous reigning Virodha Champion," Master Deivon murmured, recalling the most powerful Martial Squire that he had seen prior.

('Even if he isn't... He's still a great catch.') The man shook his head. He had the pleasure of being acquainted with the most powerful known Martial Squire, one who had been the previous reigning champion prior to the current one. One who had given up his title because it wasn't even worth guarding it.

"Hehehe..." Master Deivon grinned again. "This year's Martial Contest is going to be a blast. I predict that the Squire-level contest is going to be the most entertaining out of all three Martial Contests that are going to be held during the Martial Festival."

He was sure that many people were going to lose their minds when they saw Rui bust out his Martial Art and Path. He himself felt the excitement that he hadn't felt from a Martial Squire since the previous reigning champion of the Martial Contest.

If things went well, then there was a good chance that he be able to get access to the Celestial Soul Mirror pill. A Master-level esoteric drug made out of esoteric ingredients procured by Martial Sages, capable of aiding Martial Masters in their journey to the Sage Realm.

Chapter 1198: Considerations

"This is it...!" Rui murmured.

He was sitting in the Martial library of the Virodhabhasa Church., surrounded by scrolls and heaps of books.

His hair and clothes were a mess. Dark bags could be seen under his eyes. Yet, an expression of ecstasy flashed across his face as he read through a scroll in his hand.

[Earthen Fortress Blossom]

This training technique subjects the body to an acid that kills cells below a certain degree of cell wall thickness. The acid is applied to the flesh of the Martial Squire, immediately killing off all the inferior cells and tissue, leaving only the most durable cells intact. Thus, when a healing potion is consumed after a training session, the flesh that is healed and restored comes from the cell division of the surviving cells, which happen to be the strongest and most durable. Over time, this significantly increases the durability of the user, albeit requiring a long time, and is prone to diminishing returns.

It was a grade-seven technique that gave a decent boost to the toughness of the Martial Body. Nothing too shocking, but a solid technique.

Yet, in Rui's eyes, it was a hidden treasure.

There were conditions that he had for whatever defensive Martial Body he created. They also applied to all of the Martial Bodies in general.

First, whatever techniques he ended up creating for the first iteration of Project Metabody needed to be techniques that could be activated and deactivated at will. They could not be permanent passive techniques. Nor could they be techniques that were entirely active and dependent on constant attention and focus from the user.

They had to be techniques that were passive for as long as the user needed, and then entirely inactive once the user deactivated them.

This limited the kinds of techniques that he could create. Most techniques were incompatible with the toggle on/off feature that Rui needed for his Metabody techniques.

That's why even though he came across many fantastic grade-eight, nine, and even grade-ten defensive techniques, they were not suitable for what he wanted.

Of course, Rui was not capable of mastering many of these techniques in the first place. But even still, even if he could master them, he wouldn't attempt to use them for the Metabody techniques, because they were not compatible.

That was why this technique worked so well. The thickening of the cell wall was something that could be feasibly accelerated to begin and end quickly within a certain timeframe as long as he applied the right principles. He just needed to make sure he did some research, and consultation, and found the right way to cause rapid cell wall thickening.

Furthermore, he knew that autophagy and the Reaper Dew poison were elements that could significantly boost the power of the technique, making it a lot more worthy of being a Metabody technique.

After all, all the other Metabody techniques that he had created were easily grade-ten. Void Forestep allowed him to handle the likes of the Root that overwhelmed an army of Martial Squires. Weaving Blood allowed him to negate the damage inflicted by Martial Seniors as though they were nothing. Hungry Pain itself served as the stamina Metabody technique, especially when he paired it with the Final Breathing technique allowing him to last for an absurd amount of time. The most recent Hypertrophic Surge had given him offensive power beyond anything he had ever imagined.

Although it hadn't been his original intention, it turned out to be the case that all of the Metabody techniques were grade ten, thus he couldn't let the final Metabody technique not follow suit as well, could he?

It would crumble the balance of the initial iteration of the Metabody Project, something he simply could not tolerate. Thus he went all out in his to construct a technique that was of the same caliber as its peers.

That meant that he could not use the Earthen Fortress Blossom technique in its current state even if he ignored the compatibility issues. That was the reason he needed to employ the principle of the technique but nothing else, otherwise, it wouldn't be as potent as he needed it to be.

The reason that there were diminishing returns was because the body most likely did not have access to the necessary compounds and nutrients in the blood flow to build a thicker cell wall, as well as the fact that it probably could not be maintained for too long beyond a certain point.

The grade-seven technique that he was looking at intended for the technique to be a permanent passive technique, while Rui did not require a permanent passive technique, and instead was fine with a technique that had a time limit. All the other Metabody techniques barring Hungry Pain had a time limit that he definitely needed to be very aware of.

That was the reason he was confident that he could make a grade-ten defensive Metabody technique. As long as he sacrificed the permanence that he wanted to get rid of, he could easily elevate the potency of the technique and increase its ability to defend himself from people who sought to hurt him.

All he needed to do was find the right formula for increasing the potency of the boost in technique in exchange for making it short-lived, while also finding the most effective way to trigger the technique. He could trigger it using a physiological trigger like it was for the Weaving Blood technique or a psychological trigger like it was for the Hypertrophic Surge technique. Or he could even do a combination of both.

Regardless, he was quite confident of the resulting technique that he would develop as a result, he would most likely be able to keep up with his other techniques. Once that was done, he would have completed the most challenging parts of the first iteration of Project Metabody. He was on a tight schedule since he only had a little over half a year before the Martial Festival would begin.

Chapter 1199: Result

By now, Rui had gotten used to the process of creating Metabody techniques. These techniques were distinctly different from normal techniques. If nothing else, they were much more difficult to create than normal techniques, that was for sure. That alone meant that they were a challenge, unlike nearly anything Rui had faced before. The sheer complexity of the techniques, as well as the standards of quality that he reserved for them, was very high from the get-go, and this was unlike any other technique that he had ever mastered before where he was more open-minded about the outcome.

And yet, Rui managed to complete the defensive Metabody technique well before the Martial Festival arrived. Ordinarily, such technique projects were easily one-year long projects each, just like many of his older technique projects had each taken nearly a year sometimes, these Metabody techniques were not something that could normally be finished this quickly.

Yet, this time it was.

The reality of the matter was that due to being constrained by a rough deadline, Rui pushed himself more than he would have had this been an open-ended project. The fact of the matter was that no matter how dedicated one was, human beings were fundamentally creatures that adapted to pressure. As long as there was enough pressure to accomplish something, it would happen, including finishing two Metabody techniques well within the year ended. It wasn't that Rui or other Martial Artists were otherwise lazy or not dedicated, not at all.

All it was, was that the sheer hasty desperation that arrived when one was subjected to heavy pressure was something that simply could not be artificially generated without that pressure in the first place.

In fact, it had been a little under three years since Rui left the Shionel Confederation, and ever since then, he had noted that the rate of growth that he had experienced as a Martial Artist was visibly higher than the rate of growth he had prior to entering the Shionel Confederation.

He was subjected to a lot of pressure within the Shionel Confederation as well as after he left it, and this pressure had helped stimulate his potential unlike anything could when he was simply training freely.

Just the growth that he had made in the past year was probably much higher than anything he had ever experienced in the past. Two grade-ten techniques in less than a year were something that Master Deivon was surely bound to be excited about.

Not that Rui intended to tell him. He didn't want to disclose information that he didn't need to. Of course, Master Deivon had already gained an inkling of the previous grade-ten technique that Rui had made, Hypertrophic Surge. But he did not know of the latest one.

"Huff..." Rui exhaled, sending a small shock across a specific nerve in his navel while breathing in a certain pattern.

When faced with the choice of creating a physiological trigger or a psychological trigger for the defensive Metabody technique that he had created, he ultimately decided to go for both to make it as distinguished from his other triggers as possible. One thing that he was paranoid about was accidentally triggering a metabody that he did not want to trigger.

That was he made sure to distinguish and differentiate them as much as possible.

His flesh grew thicker and thicker and denser while growing darker and darker. He felt as though he was wearing an impenetrable armor that could protect him from any and everything.

"Please begin the final preparations," Rui instructed the assisting staff team that was assigned to aid him with utilizing the more sophisticated and complex training systems that required external aid to operate.

The staff head hesitated for a moment, bowing deeply. "Sir... Are you absolutely certain of this? May I ask you to reconsider? This is madness. These systems are meant for Martial Seniors. Even if we significantly lower their output to well below the Senior Realm, they are still far beyond Martial Squires!"

Rui sighed. "This again? I told you, did I not? You will not be held liable for anything that happens to me. I even signed a statement stating that. Don't worry, I am not that easy to kill."

The man gave a resigned sigh, nodding. "Very well then."

"What is the energy output of a baropresser?" Rui asked.

"We've set it to eighteen liters of Darion condensate."

That was an explosive that was commonly used as the equivalent of energy.

('About nine hundred tons of TNT, roughly speaking.') Rui mused, exhaling deeply. It was an intimidating number, but he was confident in his estimations of what he could handle.

He immediately began walking in a certain direction, entering a gigantic hemispherical dome chamber.

"Alright, get started," Rui called out.

"Yes, sir,"

He grounded himself, making sure to balance himself perfectly before exhaling.

VMMMMMM!

He heard a vibrating sound from the dome.

"Pressure blast incoming in ten... nine... eight..."

Rui focused himself as the man counted down, even though the defensive metabody technique that he did end up creating was passive after activation, he still felt the need to make sure he was in a sharp state of mind.

"...One."

BOOM!!!

Rui gritted his teeth as he experienced a titanic blast of pressure crashing onto him from all directions!

The sheer amount of force that he was subjected to far exceeded anything that he had ever experienced in his entire life!

Not even the Root attacks, not even Senior Xanarn's attacks, not even the barrages unleashed by the three Martial Seniors of the Kaddar Region matched the amount of force that this chamber exerted on him.

It lasted for just a few seconds, yet it felt as though it had lasted an eternity.

THUD!

Rui fell to his knees, panting.

His body was covered with bruises all over.

He glanced at his arms and legs. A few bruises, he also twisted his ankle a little, and he felt a little dizzy.

('But nothing aside from that!') Rui grinned in amazement. ('This technique is a perfect success!')

Chapter 1200: Nemean

The staff that had been monitoring him had long prepared high-grade potions and other esoteric first-aid treatments whose goal was solely to keep him alive no matter what. The staff did not know why Rui was so confident about surviving, but for some reason he was. Even if he did survive, they were certain that he would at the very least be gravely injured.

That was why their jaws dropped when they saw that the only wounds he suffered were superficial blunt-force flesh wounds. It was as though his flesh was able to reflect all of the pressure that the training facility had subjected to him.

"This..." The staff head murmured in shock.

Only now did he understand why the Martial Senior that they had been serving prior had been replaced with this Martial Squire.

"He's a monster..." The man murmured.

To think that a Martial Squire could actually justify the decision to place him in this training facility. The man had heard of the Martial Squire that caused the small incident in the Squire complex by being too strong for the facility, but to think he would be this far out of the norm.

"Sir?" One of the assistants assigned to his team broke him out of his reverie. "He isn't gravely injured, but we should still do a check-up on him."

"Ah, right,"

It wasn't long before Rui walked out of the training facility refreshed, taking a break.

"I'm finally done with constructing all the techniques needed for Project Metabody," He sighed. "Man, it's been a rough few years."

The total time spent on the project was weird to estimate because he conceived of Project Metabody far later than he did the initial technique of the project. It would have been a little under two years since he conceived of the first technique, and it would have been four years since he created the first technique that became part of the project.

('Actually, even longer if I consider that the stamina metabody was basically using two old techniques simultaneously,') He mused.

Regardless it was done.

Hungry Pain.

Void Forestep.

Weaving Blood.

Hypertrophic Surge.

('Ah, I need to come up with a name for the new technique.') He realized, sighing.

He wished he could hire someone for this part because he sucked at giving names.

"How about... Nemean Blossom?" He muttered.

He had derived inspiration from Greek mythology, specifically the tale of the Nemean Lion that Hercules fought and defeated. The Nemean Lion was said to be a beast with a hide that was absolutely invulnerable to all weapons. Even Hercules had allegedly had immense difficulty fighting the beast.

It was as good a name as any.

('Nemean Blossom it is,') Rui sighed.

Unfortunately, his work wasn't entirely done yet. He still had two smaller steps to take, which was mastering the simultaneous partial triggering of two metabodies. He definitely needed to find a way to be able to partially empower two parameters as opposed to greatly empowering one parameter because a lot of Martial Artists would be most optimally countered by a combination of two fields, as opposed to one.

That was manageable and Rui had already laid the seeds for that in the triggers that he had developed, ensuring that it was possible for his body to be trained to activate two techniques to a minor degree.

The final step was coming up with a way of knowing exactly what the best configuration of techniques to counter a given Martial Artist. He wasn't foolish enough to go with the brain-dead oversimplification where he automatically activated the Nemean Blossom every time he was facing an offensive Martial Artist, or the Hypertrophic Surge every time he faced a defensive Martial Artist.

This was a sub-optimal application of the techniques.

('Ideally, the best way to apply them would be to seamlessly magnify the anti-styles that the VOID algorithm develops.') Rui mused.

Every time he used the VOID algorithm, he developed an anti-style that was designed to counter his opponent. This style was usually not an all-rounder style equally focused on all parameters. It was usually slanted in the direction of one or two fields of combat. Like primarily maneuvering and speed, and secondarily offense. Or primarily defense, and secondarily endurance.

The best way to apply the Metabody System was to amplify those fields of the anti-style. Thus he would use Hypertrophic Surge if the produced anti-style was a pure offense-oriented style, or Nemean Blossom if the resulting anti-style was purely defensive. Or both, if the resulting anti-style was equally defensive and offensive.

At the end of the day, the Flowing Style was a Martial Art that was centered around adapting to one's opponent. He needed to use the Metabody in a manner that corresponded with that as well.

('Well, in that case, only truly powerful Martial Artists can possibly force me to use it. Nothing short of a grade-ten Martial Squire.') He sighed. Furthermore, the only reason that the pattern recognition system may not be enough on its own was that grade-ten Martial Squires were Martial Squires who had spent many years in the Squire Realm accumulating many powerful techniques over a good chunk of their lifetime. Rui's base Martial Art was actually far inferior to their highly solidified and well-developed Martial Art.

The pattern recognition system of the VOID algorithm bridged that large gap and the Metabody System allowed him to surpass that gap massively. It meant that the only Martial Squires that could defeat him were the true pinnacle of the Squire Realm.

That was depressing.

It wasn't as though he wanted to show off. It was actually closer to the desire that a child might have for a brand-new toy that he or she had been desperately begging his parents to get for years.

Still, it wasn't that bad, because if powerful Martial Squires were what it took to force him to go all out, then the Virodhabhasa Martial Festival was probably the one place that he would find what he was looking for.