

Martial Unity 1401

Chapter 1401: Mind Matters

The project was incredibly ambitious, but that only excited Rui even more. Whatever would be born from this technique project would most certainly be a different kind of beast entirely. At the very least, he doubted he would see such a technique anywhere in the Senior Realm.

The reason for that was that the sheer raw cognitive parameters needed to achieve this level of imagination and memory were probably something that no other Martial Senior could achieve. Not only was Rui's mind entirely enhanced far beyond the norm, but he also had the Mindmirror Symbiote which also gave him a boost in the form of parallel processing when Martial Art techniques were concerned.

Thus, whatever misdirection technique unfolded as a result of fully using his capabilities to the best would be cut from an entirely different cloth.

"Ah..." Rui murmured. 'I came to Master Reina to learn assassination techniques, not mental techniques.'

Well, it was clear that there was a significant overlap between mental techniques and stealth techniques, so he shouldn't have been too surprised.

"That's a stupid thing to be bothered by." She snorted. "Besides, you said you were going to go to the Hypnomaster to learn more about mental techniques right? You're not going to learn about misdirection-based stealth from that man, he doesn't like hiding his presence. You're better off learning those principles from an actual expert like me. The quality of my stealth training is unrivaled! Right? Right?!"

"...Right." Rui heaved a sigh.

"So don't be too concerned about the small stuff."

"You sounded like you know him, Master Reina."

"Ah, we're friends, though I haven't seen him for thirty years." She remarked. "I actually met him thanks to an assassination commission."

"How did that happen?" Rui frowned. "You don't seem like the type to make friends during missions."

"Well, you see..." She had a difficult expression. "He was my target at the time."

Rui's eyes widened with surprise. "Really? I'm surprised he is still around."

"I had befriended him for a few months before finally getting to the actual assassination part, catching him off-guard but..."

"But...?"

"..."

"..." Rui tilted his head at her difficult expression.

"He was too strong." She sighed, managing to squeeze out the truth.

Rui's eyes widened with shock. He had experienced firsthand just how impressive the Silent Shadow's stealth was. Even his grade-ten Riemannian Echo was powerless before her as if she had erased her very presence from space-time itself.

"...What?" Rui remarked with surprise.

"Don't get the wrong idea. He almost died and was even severely wounded!" She complained.

"You failed? You?" Rui furrowed his eyebrows as he thought about what kind of Martial Master could overcome an assassination attempt from the Silent Shadow.

"Stop fixating on that."

"How did he manage to make you fail though."

"You're ignoring me again."

"He must be quite incredible at what he does to have made you fail."

BAM!

"Ouch!"

"Hmph, that's what you get." She snorted. "...But yes, his Martial Art was magical. I didn't understand what happened or how he pushed me back to this day, hmph."

"Woah," Rui murmured. "That sounds incredible. How did you guys become friends after that?"

"Well, he has a soft spot for women. So he forgave me to use that opportunity to get in my pants. That's the kind of person you're trying to learn from. You're much better off learning from me. So don't go to him ok? Stay here."

She put her hands on Rui, unwilling to let go.

"He sounds like an eccentric person," Rui murmured. "I'm looking forward to meeting him."

"Hah!" She snorted. "That's if you succeed in getting accepted by him. You see, he isn't as kind as I am when it comes to anything not related to women. The tribulations he poses to those who wish to gain his tutelage are much harsher than my own."

"I do not intend on allowing that to stop me." Rui calmly replied.

A quiet confidence brimmed from within him. He truly believed that he would be able to overcome any test that a Martial Master put up as long as they were seriously willing to take in pupils for tutelage.

"Well, you do have a genuine affinity for his field, so who knows?" She shrugged. "But...you shouldn't underestimate the tribulations you'll face. It won't be quite like the cakewalk you had with the Shadow Isles. Do you know? The tribulations he put in place were so hellish for those who undertook them that he was formally reprimanded by the Council of Masters of the Panamic Martial Federation? You should have seen his face when I was the one that served him the official statement! Hahaha!"

She laughed heartily at the Hypnomaster's expense, yet Rui found her tale to be interesting more than funny.

"When you say tribulations, you're referring to the Great Forest of Hypnonarak, right?" Rui asked as he accessed the intelligence supplied by the Beggar's Sect. It contained the place that the Hypnomaster regarded as his abode. It was said that those who reached his abode at the center of the Great Forest of Hypnonarak would be accepted as his pupils.

"Indeed. A danger zone, as classified by the Panamic Ecological Association." She remarked. "The funny part is that that bastard created that danger zone artificially by spreading certain dangerous monster species of fauna and flora from different danger zones and Lost Cities from within the Beast Domain into the human domain creating what is regarded as a pocket extension of the Beast Domain. Countless people died in the creation of the forest, which is why he got in trouble with a lot of forces."

Rui knew of this thanks to the information that the Beggar's Sect had supplied. Still, he found it interesting that Master Reina was connected to the Hypnomaster, his next target to learn from. It was unexpected, however, he expected the world of Martial Art at the upper echelons of the Martial World to be much smaller. There were only so many Martial Masters and it was not a surprise that many had come to develop connections with each other over the many years.

Chapter 1402: Difficulty

"Why did he go out of his way to do such a thing?" Rui wondered. "It sounds like a lot more effort than is really needed. Why is it that both of you can't just choose pupils like normal teachers would?"

"Hah!" She snorted at his question. "Do you have any idea of how many people clamor to be accepted as our pupils? I don't have the time or energy to sort through all of them to find the best one."

"I'm aware, but Martial Masters possess a lot of insight, don't they? Isn't it easy for you to make instantaneous evaluations of people you lay your eyes on?"

"I can't be bothered with all of that." She shrugged. "I much prefer something more exciting like setting up a challenge, like finding me in the Shadow Isles, though that had become stale until you arrived. He has his own version of that."

"Hmmm..." Rui considered her words.

It was precisely because he planned on learning from the Hypnomaster that he wanted to gain as much information from someone who knew him more intimately than the Beggar's Sect.

Of course, the Beggar's Sect's intelligence was valuable as well, they provided a much more thorough and rigorous overview than Master Reina did. He wanted to gather as much information as he could have.

"He accepts students less frequently than I do, you know." She remarked. "I think the last time he accepted a student was perhaps nearly six or seven years ago? Something like that. So it's not going to be easy. Not even for you."

Rui had no doubt about that. From everything that he had come to learn, the challenges he would need to overcome to reach the Hypnomaster were overwhelming in and of themselves.

That was fine as far as he was concerned. It has been a while since he had truly pushed himself to the limit in regard to a specific ambition or goal.

"Enough chit-chatting, get back to training." She instructed.

Rui obliged, closing his eyes as he returned to the newly-created misdirection technique project.

'I need to give it a better name.' Rui mused, before giving it a thought. 'Project Phantomind.'

A simple fusion of two relevant words was good enough for Rui. He was not proud of his naming sense, but it couldn't be helped. He usually named a project after he squeezed his creativity to create powerful technique templates, thus, there wasn't much creativity left for the actual name.

However, he immediately began chugging away at the project, making progress every second. One of the biggest issues that he had was project management. The complexity of this project was not different from that of popular animated productions, and he needed to manage everything inside of his head.

He had fixed up the smaller details such as the framerate, definition, perspective, and data tracks, now he needed a broader overview.

'The ultimate goal is to thoroughly trick my subconsciousness into thinking that Master Uma is actually on the battlefield and is attacking both me and my opponent or target.' Rui mused. 'I should add an element of customizing the mental simulation to overlap my environment perception to the project. That will make it even more convincing.'

The more convinced he was, the more convinced his targets or opponents would be.

He immediately began creating the three-dimensional mental simulation, putting away the two-dimensional image that he was working on for the time being. Time passed as he used his imagination as a premium graphics, video, and audio software to embellish his three-dimensional simulation of Master Uma.

It helped that his fear of Master Uma was quite real. He did not need to fake it, force it, or induce it.

He just needed to remember.

While the Silent Shadow was also terrifying, even more so, she was not hostile to Rui.

In fact, the two of them had started growing more informal and casual with each other. She had earnestly passed on the principles of assassination that she had herself developed and created, passing on much of her wisdom within the field of assassination.

It also helped that she had a remarkably easygoing personality with a somewhat dry, often crass, sense of humor. Though they hadn't grown truly intimate because of Rui's hidden identity, among other things, it wouldn't work if he tried to imagine her instead of Master Uma.

He sifted through unpleasant memories, using them as foundational templates for the three-dimensional simulation. It also helped that he saw her as a blade of wind once she started to fight seriously against Master Deivon.

'Speaking of which, I still don't know what the hell that was.' Rui mused. Considering that Master Deivon had done something similar, it was definitely related to the power of the Master Realm.

He highly doubted that they actually physically transformed into a literal sword and fortress. That was far too absurd even for the Master Realm. Most likely it was something else. He didn't know what it was, of course.

'Maybe Master Reina will tell me that along with whatever she meant when she said I'd have a harder path.' Rui hoped.

That was additional motivation to complete his training. He wanted to know more about the path ahead to a higher Realm. Intuition and inference told him that the path to the Master Realm was not the same as anything he had gone through before.

Regardless, time passed as he continued his training with the three techniques that he trained with under the guidance of the Silent Shadow. He hadn't been consumed with three projects in quite some time, which lengthened the training session well beyond any others that he had ever been through.

The totality of the training period stretched well beyond a year until he finally was complete with everything that he had set out to achieve. Perhaps he could have come out earlier, but his large ambitions and his perfectionist side forced him to stay until he was entirely satisfied with the outcome.

Chapter 1403: Execution

Eighteen months breezed by as Rui secluded himself in training. This was not outside of Rui's expectations when he had first set up the three projects that he was going to work on while under the Silent Shadow's guidance.

The largest consumer of his time was, of course, the Phantomind Project. There wasn't the slightest shred of doubt in his mind that this project was going to become one of his most powerful techniques to date.

It didn't take a genius to figure that out. Not only was it attuned to Rui's strengths, not only was it an entirely unique concept attuned to the knowledge of his past life, but it was a highly individualized technique that only he could use.

To say that he expected much from the technique was an understatement. The ordinary version of the technique that he had set out to create alone took nine months, while the beefed-up version took an additional nine months.

Countless hours of imagination and self-programming and even a certain amount of self-programming went into forging the technique in his mind. His Mind Palace had needed to be extended a bit, so he relied on absorbing the Shadow Isles into his mind as a part of the Mind Palace to accommodate the massive amounts of data that needed to be stored for the technique. The volume of the data exceeded even the VOID algorithm.

It took what felt like forever to create the technique, meditating for countless hours as his mind furiously chugged away.

After a long year and a half, he had finally arrived.

With three new techniques at hand.

Lycanthropic Mask, the disguise technique that he had mastered.

Sympathetic Death Lance, the close-range version of Death's Sympathy.

And the Phantomind Void technique.

"Fuuu..." Rui exhaled deeply as he stared at a fortress in the distance.

Its walls were scarred with wounds. Wounds from conflicts of the past. Yet it stood large and tall, ominously looming over a deserted landscape.

The Draekean Fortress, home to one of the most powerful warlords of the Derschek Regions, was said to be the most impregnable stronghold anywhere in the entirety of the Derschek Region.

It was said to be one of the few locations that not even the assassins that once scourged the Shadow Isles could penetrate. Now that even they were gone, it was said that there truly was nothing that could threaten it anywhere in the Derschek Region.

Rui simply stared at the domineering stronghold with soft eyes. The eighteen months of training in darker arts after his cleansing of the Shadow Isles and another half year of training in darker arts had had an impact on the impression he gave.

He still did not give off the dark aura of a cold-blooded assassin, yet he seemed to have grown sharper. A darker glint accompanied the superficial silver in his eyes.

One moment, he was standing motionlessly.

The very next, he had disappeared, rushing towards the stronghold head-on.

The area around the fortress used to be a forest and had been cleared out to deny a foe any chance of approaching the fortress with cover, without being spotted.

Yet Rui didn't seem to care.

He rushed in, heading straight towards the fortress at top speed.

Yet the extensive Martial Artists on guard and patrol didn't seem to care either.

No, that wasn't quite right.

They didn't seem to see him in the first place. Not only did they not see him, they didn't seem to hear him either.

That wasn't the extent of it either.

The various sensory Martial Artists of the Lower Realms seemed to not notice him despite him rushing toward them at extremely high speeds.

They seemed unable to even grasp his existence.

No, instead, they even seemed to avert their gaze from him to the opposite direction, frowning.

Almost as if they saw something else that drew their attention much more forcefully.

Rui saw what they saw.

He was the one showing them, after all.

In his eyes, the silent fortress stood in the distance.

In his mind, Master Uma was assaulting it from the other direction that he was approaching it from. A giant blade of wind loomed over the fortress threatening to wipe out not just the fortress, but the entire region and reshape the topography with a single attack.

Such was the power of a Martial Master.

It was a power that they subconsciously could not ignore, almost reflexively gazing in the direction that Rui misdirected it. In comparison to Master Uma, a normal weak human approaching the castle was hardly of notice.

WHOOSH!

He breezed past the guards whose gazes were still subconsciously misdirected away from Rui by the information that his motion, micro-maneuvers, micro-actions, and non-verbal communication conveyed to their subconsciousness.

'Look away.' He whispered to their subconsciousness. 'There's much more important stuff and bigger threats to pay attention to than little ol' me.'

And they obliged, only to find nothing. Yet by the time they looked back, Rui was already gone, and they were left none the wiser. He breezed through the walls of the fortress unseen and unnoticed by those who manned and patrolled them.

He swept through corridor after corridor until he finally reached the core of the fortress, an especially well-guarded section of the fortress with much more intense security.

Clearly, he was not to be there.

That's why he knew he was in the right place.

Yet despite ten times the security, he weaved through them effortlessly until he reached the object of their protection; Warlord Fekibaya's personal chambers. the old warlord lay in bed, slumbering peacefully.

Until Rui struck him with Sympathetic Death Lance, poking the man's head with a single finger. His flesh, skull, and cerebrospinal fluid sac vibrated powerfully, crushing just a portion of his brain, leaving much of it untouched.

It wasn't long before he swiftly made his way back, unnoticed.

That day, warlord Fekibaya died, and not a single person noticed. For Rui had crushed his cerebral cortex, annihilating his consciousness forever, while still allowing his heart to beat and his lungs to breath to prevent his personal guards from noticing.

Chapter 1404: Path Forward

Rui heaved a sigh when he returned to the cliff from where he had embarked on the mission. The mission was a perfect success. Not a single guard had noticed him even as he ran right past all of them.

It was magical.

A genuinely surreal experience.

He came and went.

He was there and he wasn't.

The murder was so perfect that not only did nobody notice it, but nobody would ever know that the warlord was assassinated instead of contracting a disease that prevented him from waking up.

"Good job..." A voice from behind him startled him.

He glanced back to find Master Reina behind him.

To this day, he was unable to sense the substance of her body. It was as though she was a hologram. And it was only because she allowed him to see and hear her that he could.

While his newfound stealth with the Phantomind Void was incredible, he was still humbled by her ability to evade the mind and the senses. It was on another level entirely.

"...If not for the fact that you didn't kill him." She frowned. "Why is he still breathing? Did you go all that way to give him a good night's kiss?"

Rui smiled wryly before shaking his head. "I crushed the part of his brain that serves as the seat of the consciousness, he's as good as dead. I left him breathing and his heart beating because they're specifically looking for that while they monitor him. Now he's still dead as a sentient human being, and no one will know I killed him."

"Hmmm...there it is again," She noted keenly. "Your absurd familiarity with the human body. As far as I am aware. Not even the best researchers and scholars have learned the relationship between the brain and the mind. Why do you know the answer to the biggest questions, assuming you're not bullshitting?"

Rui glanced at her. He couldn't just tell her that neurology had come to a pretty certain consensus on the matter back on Earth.

"You'll see whether or not I'm bullshitting soon enough. Anyway, I completed the test you gave me. We're done here, right?"

"...I suppose we are." She glanced back at the fortress. "You have exceeded my expectations. Return for now, we have much to talk about."

She disappeared right before Rui, who immediately headed back for the Shadow Isles, passing through the Derschek Region as he did.

The Derschek Region experienced a period of stability once the assassination industry collapsed a year and a half ago. Rui could feel the increased sense of security in the air as he traveled through.

The many Martial Seniors, Squires, and Apprentices had either left the Derschek Region to escape the Voidreaper or had died at his hands. Either way, the Shadow Isles had become a barren wasteland that was largely devoid of any activity.

This allowed the forces of the Derschek Region time to breathe and catch their breath as the endless chain of assassinations of political leaders and their successors hadn't ceased since it began until eighteen months.

On one hand, many forces found it a shame that they lost access to a powerful weapon that could be used to get rid of their political enemies, while also being relieved that the same weapon could not be used to get rid of them.

Rui's actions led to the emergence of peace and stability in the region. Yet he didn't particularly care about that moment. He had arrived at the end of his time under the guidance of Master Uma with this.

She had given him a test to measure his capacity to kill, a particularly difficult assignment for even Martial Senior assassins. Not only had he completed it, he would have gotten an A+ had he been graded on the matter.

That signaled the end of their time together, yet Rui was relatively unperturbed. Although he did enjoy the time that he spent being guided by her, it would be time to move on very soon.

It wasn't long before he found himself in the secret chamber below Area Crina.

"You've come, sit." She instructed. "You've completed my assignment perfectly. It's almost time for you to leave. There are still some things I have to say and give."

"This is proof of your pupillage under me." She said as she presented him with a simple locket with a crest of darkness on it. "Only those I trust wholeheartedly know that about it. And it can come in handy should you ever run into them. You can choose to wear it or keep it aside, regardless."

Rui nodded, accepting the locket. "Thank you for this, I will cherish it."

She nodded. "And now, the thing that I'm sure you have been dying to know about for nearly a year and a half now."

Rui's eyes narrowed as he instantly grew more attentive.

"Tsk tsk, impatient, aren't you?" She tutted at the sight. "Relax, I'm not going anywhere."

Rui simply stared at her. He did not want to delay what was to come by replying.

"The truth of the Master Realm." She stated. "I know you've been wanting to hear about it for quite some time now. The fact of the matter is, just as Martial Seniors are entrusted with the duty of informing qualified Martial Squires of the truth about the Senior Realm, so too are Martial Masters. It's an even more important duty. The Master Realm is such that breakthrough rates to it will plummet substantially if Martial Seniors don't know about the truth."

She paused for a mind. "As you may have realized, the body has nothing else significant left to offer. As powerful and packed with potential as it is, all of that potential has been squeezed out and manifested with the Squire evolution process and the activation of the Martial Heart. While it will grow stronger, slowly and steadily, over time, that is not something that can be hastened or drawn out by additional techniques."

She stared deep into Rui's eyes with her own. "That begs the question that plagued all Martial Seniors at the time. What was the path forward?"

Chapter 1405: The Secret of the Master Realm

"Naturally, many of them were not resigned to these limits. Yet it was a clear fact that there was nothing left within the body." She explained. "No matter what they did, they were unable to squeeze out any more wells of power hidden deeper within the body beyond the Martial Heart. Such things do not exist."

Rui listened in absolute rapt attention.

"It was an unprecedented period in Martial history. After all, the path forward had always been to strengthen the body through training techniques or master new techniques that squeezed the potential of what the body had to offer," She explained. "However, when they reached what was the peak of the Senior Realm back then, none of these options were of any avail. The reason for this was simple. Martial Art techniques at that time period centuries ago were shit. Their Martial Bodies were also weaker and had less to offer. The development of techniques was far, far harder to do than it is today."

Rui could understand why. In his generation, there was an ocean of principles and techniques that served as the building blocks of new techniques. The number of principles and concepts discovered and explored were enormous, and the sheer number of combinations and permutations of those principles combined in single techniques was dizzying.

It was just much, much easier to develop at least partially original and unique techniques because of the massive depth of the foundation that they could build off.

This was especially true when the quality of training and growth resources were higher than they had ever been, eliminating many of the barriers and hurdles that would otherwise impede this process.

"Centuries ago, when none of this existed to this extent, the Martial Seniors of the time, having come to the realization that there were hard limits to power, had begun making better use of the power they already had. Thus, their combat styles grew more complex and mindful. They pushed their minds to the limit thinking about how they could better apply their power. Strategy. Tactics. Analytics. Judgement. Cognition. These became increasingly more common and deeper than they had ever been."

She paused for a moment "That's not to say that they were particularly stupid or lacking in strategy or tactics, it just was not the focus prior due to the options of simply becoming stronger, furthermore, Martial culture was much different back then. They each raced to make more thoughtful applications of their power. Instead of just outputting power, they made more effective use of power. Thoughtful applications. Strategic decisions. Tactical choices. Analytical outlooks into their opponents."

"They did grow stronger, naturally." She explained. "Of course, their actual body and techniques were largely the same or only grew stronger in a natural sense over long periods of time, but they also grew visibly stronger when their combat became more mindful and thoughtful than it ever had been before. They had come to realize the power of mind and thought. Previously, it was something that had only been applied to creating individualistic techniques attuned to their Body and Art. Now, it was something that was actively applied in actual combat much more than it had ever been."

"Unbeknownst to them, however..." She tapped the side of her head. "They had already begun traveling down the path to the Master Realm. Particularly, the best of them had taken a step further. Not only did they apply their power more mindfully and thoughtfully, they had even attuned their mindfulness and thoughtfulness to their Martial Art, Body, and Heart. They created systems of thought that could specifically elevate their styles of combat to much higher levels than they could accomplish before. Over

time, their thoughts and minds had become so elaborate that they actually exceeded the depths of their consciousness."

She paused for a moment. "A critical threshold had been reached. One fine day, the strongest and oldest of Martial Seniors fought a battle that threatened his life. It threatened to kill him and all the power that he had cultivated. The battle pushed not just his Martial Body and Heart to their limits, but also his mind. On the verge of death, that Martial Senior changed the world forever as his mind broke past its limit, activating what we now know as the Martial Mind. He became the first Martial Master."

Rui's eyes widened. "...The Martial Mind?"

"The Martial Mind is not a well of physical power like the Martial Heart. Unlike the Martial Heart, the Martial Mind does not exist."

"What?" Rui's eyes sharpened.

"It is as I said." She calmly declared. "The Martial Mind does not exist. Not naturally. Not until one actually creates it from nothing."

Rui simply stared at her with sharp eyes as his mind furiously tried piecing together the information she had revealed. "You're not being fully transparent."

She smirked at his words mischievously. "I'm sure you're smart enough to figure it out nonetheless. The mind has a lot of untapped potential you know? Although we haven't mapped it, it is suspected that we use only ten percent of our brains."

Rui stared at her with a blank expression. Many laymen back on Earth also believed that humans only used ten percent of their brains.

There were even movies that operated on that premise.

Unfortunately, it was an urban myth.

Almost entirely misinformation.

The truth was a lot more nuanced. The fact of the matter was that different parts of the brain were used for different processes during different time periods. Most of the brain was used all of the time.

The reason that it was only almost entirely misinformation, and not entirely, was because it was true that the consciousness occupied a small part of the brain, and it was also true that there was latent, untapped potential across the organ.

"However, there is no doubt that the Apprentice Realm taps into most of that potential," Rui argued. "The increase in combat-oriented cognitive parameters of the Apprentice Realm matches the very limit of the most generous evaluations of the untapped latent potential in the brain. In other words, Martial Apprentices have fully realized the potential of the brain."

"Correct, however, that was true only before the brain underwent the evolution process." She smiled. "And it was true only before the brain grew empowered by the Martial Heart. The untapped well of power within the body grew only larger after evolution. Why would you think that wouldn't be the same for the mind?"

Rui widened his eyes. "Are you saying...?"

"Yes. Rejoice, as powerful as your mind is, it still has the potential to grow far more powerful than you could possibly imagine. Now sit, while I explain the rest of it."

Chapter 1406: Difficulty

Rui had many uncertainties. If the Martial Mind was simply the part of the mind that was untapped, then why did Master Reina say that it didn't exist? Why did she say that he needed to create it?

That didn't make sense. Which meant his understanding was lacking.

Of course, he recognized that she was enjoying his frustration. He had grown accustomed to it over the past eighteen months.

"Alright, stop glaring at me like that. I'll explain." She laughed, before her demeanor grew more serious. "You have a deep understanding of the brain and mind, yet let us visit it once more. The brain and mind are not synonymous, though they are deeply intertwined. The brain is a vessel for the mind, while the mind is like water that fills the vessel. Now, what if I told you that there was an adjacent compartment of the vessel that was not filled with any water? What if I told you that this compartment of the vessel was empty?"

Realization dawned on him. "Then you could fill that compartment with water. This way, you could have more water. You could have more mind."

"That's right." She nodded. "The evolution process of the Squire breakthrough process has created that compartment, or at least made it bigger than it was. Right now it is empty and thus useless. So how does one fill it? How did the Martial Seniors centuries ago fill it?"

Rui's eyes swam around as he was lost in his thoughts. "...With the power of thought."

She grinned. "That's right. The Martial Seniors created the water to fill the compartment with the power of thought. They created thought that was so deep, complex, and sophisticated that they managed to fill the compartment to the brim. Yet, that alone was not enough to fully tap into its power. A final push was needed. A push to break the barriers between the side compartment and main vessel."

Rui's eyes widened. "The fight that pushed them past their limits, allowing them to discover their Martial Mind. This part is identical to the breakthrough to the Senior Realm!"

"Correct." She nodded. "The difference is that the Martial Heart is more convenient, it is already created, just waiting to be harnessed. The Martial Mind does not exist until one fills that empty side compartment with water. Only then does it completely exist. That is why breaking through to the Master Realm is much harder than breaking through to the Senior Realm. That is why there is a distinction between the Lower and the Upper Realms. It is harder, yet the rewards are worth the effort."

Rui's mind furiously processed what he had just heard. "Wait a minute. If the vessel is the brain, and the water is the mind, then what is the Martial Heart in this analogy?"

"..." She simply stared at him, before scratching her head. "I have never been good at analogies. However, the Martial Heart is needed because thought is a very costly action. It requires a lot of energy. Much of the energy of the human body is consumed by the brain because of how costly cognitive processes are. I suppose the vessel-water analogy isn't a good one because there is no place for the Martial Heart."

"It's fine." Rui had a better analogy. An analogy that was far more accurate and relevant.

The untapped latent potential of the brain could be treated as a computer without an operating system. In order to use the computer, one needed to install an operating system. In order to switch on the computer, one needed a power source.

'The operating system is the Martial Mind. The power source is the Martial Heart. The computer is the latent and untapped part of the brain that evolved after the Squire evolution breakthrough process.' Rui mused as his mind furiously processed all the information at hand. 'In other words, Martial Seniors need to create operating system software, the Martial Mind, and then install it into the computer, the untapped part of the cerebrum, and then need a power source, the Martial Heart, and then need to switch on the computer, the trigger.'

The Martial Seniors before the first Martial Master did not know that they were inadvertently creating the Martial Mind when they began extensively employing the power of thought to better apply their power in combat. The first Martial Master had inadvertently created his Martial Mind after decades of refining systems and frameworks of thought, strategy, tactics, analytics, and many other cognitive processes that could help in combat.

"So that's the big reveal." She huffed, leaning back. "If you want to become a Martial Master, then think, young man. Think. You need to think more. Think deeper. Only the power of thought can elevate you to a higher Realm of power."

She paused for a moment. "Well, the truth is more nuanced. Thought is not the only kind of cognition or mental process. But 'power of cognition' doesn't sound as profound as the 'power of thought', does it?"

Rui caught on to something there. "Meaning that one can create a Martial Mind out of subconscious processes?"

"Of course. It all depends on how conscious versus subconscious your Martial Art inherently is." She explained. "Some Martial Art are quite subconscious in nature, in that case, they ought to create a Martial Mind that reflects that."

Rui thought Frinjschia had a Martial Art that relied entirely on thoughtless muscle memory. It appeared that she too would be able to create a Martial Mind.

"To answer your original question that led to this discussion...the reason you're going to have the hardest time reaching the Master Realm is that the difficulty of creating the Martial Mind is directly proportional to the power of the Martial Mind. And the power of the Martial Mind is proportional to the power of the mind." She smirked mischievously. "Do you get my drift?"

Rui heaved a sigh, understanding what she was conveying. "I'm going to have a much harder time because my mind is too powerful."

"The Martial Mind gives me a powerful and vast awareness, especially when it comes to other minds. That's why I can clearly see it. Your mind is like a swimming pool if the average Martial Senior is like a bathtub. Good luck trying to fill that up!" She laughed. "...Still, if you do fill it up, then I can't begin to fathom how powerful you will become."

Chapter 1407: Quality

The greater the power, the greater the tribulations. Based on what Master Reina was telling him, the depth of his mind would mean that he had a greater amount of work to do. Based on that, he could estimate that it would truly take a long time for him to become a Martial Master.

He would have to spend decades, perhaps even a century under normal circumstances to create his Martial Mind.

'If not for the fact that that I have already done that once in the past.' Rui inwardly grinned.

He had already come to the realization that the VOID algorithm was a part of the Martial Mind. The many years that he spent creating a framework and a system of thought to create a system of thought that would allow the user to adapt to any and all combat styles.

The VOID algorithm was the fruit of Project Water, his Martial Path. He had always known that it was the core of his Martial Art.

However, only now did he understand where the VOID algorithm fit within the framework of the Martial Path of Gaia. It would be his nascent Martial Mind, one that he had been born with. One that he had spent his life forging. One that he had inherited from another world.

The efforts that he had gone through back on Earth. The perseverance. The dedication.

All of that allowed him to be probably the only person to be born with a nascent Martial Mind buried deep within his mind.

Rui suspected that he didn't need to spend nearly as much of the immense time in the Senior Realm building his Martial Mind as Master Reina suspected. He suspected that she didn't know the sheer extent to which he had made progress with the Martial Mind.

'If I subtract the decades that I spent working on the VOID algorithm from the even longer amount of time I have to spend on fleshing my Martial Mind out, then the remaining time becomes much less elaborate.' Rui realized. 'Of course, it's not that I'm unwilling to dedicate a normal human lifetime to creating the Martial Mind. I basically did it once, and I'm more than willing to do it. Especially in this world of Martial Art where it means so much more.'

Still, sooner was better. There was no doubt about that. He had become a Martial Senior at the age of twenty-four, allowing him to begin working towards the Master Realm much sooner than his peers. The only one who could compare was Iyasu, and he was still behind Rui because Rui was relatively sure that he didn't have a system of thought that could be considered a Martial Mind.

His copying worked based on recreating the nerve impulses that the brain passed through the autonomous nervous system. He recreated techniques by essentially reconstructing them from the core principles that he had already copied.

During his fight with Rui, he displayed the ability to master the core principles of many different fields, including primary ones like offense, defense, and maneuvering, but also many esoteric ones such as friction, heat, cold, and even electric.

For him recreating a Martial Art was like building a Lego structure that was identical to another. As long as he had the building blocks and the blueprint, he could recreate the exact same Lego building. He improved them by simply having better building blocks.

'Perhaps the only aspects of rigorous thought or cognition in his Martial Art are when he doesn't have the same building blocks. Though even then, it didn't seem all that deep.' Rui mused. 'Regardless, I have a remarkable advantage thanks to the labors of my previous life. I would have put in even more effort had I known that it would pay off in such a way.'

Regardless, this boon would cut the time he spent in the Master Realm significantly. It didn't mean he was going to break through any second because of how high the initial hurdle was, it still made his life much easier.

"I'm sure you have much to think about, but listen up." She interrupted his train of thought. "You can take all the time in the world to mull on these matters after you are gone from here."

Rui immediately put his many thoughts aside as he paid full attention to the Martial Master.

"The quality of the Martial Mind is something that you should keep in mind as well," Master Reina remarked. "Your system of thought needs to be not only effective in raising your effective power level but also need to be attuned to your Martial Art and Body, though that last part will occur naturally as long as it is imbued with the same individuality that characterized your Martial Art. In essence, only you can create your Martial Mind. If you create a weak Martial Mind that fills up the compartment of the vessel, you will be a weak Martial Master."

Rui narrowed his eyes. "So you're saying it is possible to fill the compartment of the vessel with... low-quality water?"

She nodded. "Some Martial Seniors in the past had been under the impression that they can try breaking through to the Master Realm with a poor Martial Mind that does nothing for their combat in hopes that they can 'update' their Martial Minds after entering the Master Realm. Well, reality isn't that convenient. The quality of the system of thought that comprises one's Martial Mind is what decides the boost the Martial Mind gives you. Can you guess what happened to them?"

"I would conjecture that they were either unable to update their Martial Minds due to some reason or found that the boost of power they gained from breaking into the Master Realm was incomparably weaker than their peers," Rui replied thoughtfully.

"Both of those happened. 'Updating' the Martial Mind after it has been realized and your conscious mind has already expanded to it is like trying to fix flaws in the blade of a sword after it has already cooled down," She explained.

Chapter 1408: Mentality

"It's extremely difficult and takes a lot of time. And while it takes time, you will remain extremely weak, so much so that you'll be considered a quasi-Master at best. Do not go down that path, it's a horrible fate that will drive you to madness." She pointedly noted at Rui.

Rui nodded. "I have no intentions of cutting corners with my Martial Mind. It will be the most powerful Martial Mind, pound for pound, that the world has ever seen."

"Hah," She snorted. "That's ambitious. I have seen some truly powerful Martial Minds. Including my own. There's a reason I am so powerful. I have created unseen systems of thought that allow me to kill. Kill far, far better than my rivals. Hardly any of my peers are my match."

"I have a lot of respect for you Master, but I have no intention of even stopping at the Sage Realm, let alone the Master Realm. By the way, can you tell me what the truth about the Sage Realm is?"

"You wish," She threw him a dubious expression.

"How does the process of creating the Martial Mind work in practice?" Rui asked. "Are there special things Martial Seniors need to do to initiate the creation of the Martial Mind?"

"No," She shook her head. "Just create, commit to memory, and use the systems of thought that you wish to create a Martial Mind out of. Nothing else is required."

"And how do I know when I have created the Martial Mind, and only need to discover it in battle?" Rui asked.

"You don't, I'm afraid," She laughed. "That's not something you possess the ability to introspect, unfortunately. You'll need to keep throwing yourself into battle in order to ensure that if you have fully created the Martial Mind, you will hopefully awaken it."

"I see... That inconvenient," Rui murmured. "The uncertainty complicates things a bit. Could I get a Martial Sage to look into my progress?"

"yes, but it's not nearly as easy." She shook her head. "The Martial Mind is a reservoir of mental power that belongs to the Upper Realms. it is a lot more inscrutable to Martial Sages than martial Seniors like yourself are to Martial Masters."

"Hm, what about Martial Transcendents?" Rui asked, curious.

"..." She paused for a moment, before shrugging. "Having met one of them only once, I would not dare to say anything is impossible for those beings."

"You've actually met a Martial Transcendent?" Rui's eyes furrowed with surprise.

"Indeed." She nodded. "...They were beyond my wildest fathoming. Worthy of the title of Transcendent. But we're not here to talk about them."

That was true, though Rui couldn't help but be curious nonetheless.

"I suppose I've largely quelled the many questions you have regarding what Martial Seniors need to do to reach the Master Realm," She remarked. "Still, ask away."

"You said earlier that the Martial Mind needs to exceed the consciousness," Rui remarked. "Can you elaborate on that?"

"...You can think of it as filling up the side compartment of the vessel by overflowing the main compartment with water. The overflowing water with nowhere else to go naturally falls into the side compartment," She explained. "The Martial mind is similar. In the first place, you need to create systems of thought that exceed what your conscious capacity is capable of processing all at once."

"So only the overflowed water is considered a part of the Martial Mind?" Rui frowned.

"Yes, but that's just because of our terminology, don't be concerned by that. The end goal is to gain more processing power to be able to wholly apply the Martial Mind. It doesn't matter what falls where as long as your mind and Mind can take all of it together. The end outcome will be the same."

"Makes sense. What if you create more water than can be filled in either the main or the side compartment?" Rui asked.

"That generally tends not to happen." She explained. "You'd be able to cut away what you don't want and keep the best parts in such a case. That would be the way to resolve that, I suppose. Though most Martial Masters discovered their Martial Mind shortly after creating it, I don't think I've heard of anybody going way beyond the limit creating a Martial mind too powerful for even the latent untapped potential of the brain."

"Hmm..." Rui fell into silence as he processed all the information at hand. She was right when she said that he had a lot to consider. "Interesting. I can see why Martial Seniors struggle to break through to the Master Realm."

Being able to create systems of thought that were so powerful that they could elevate their combat level significantly higher just through thought or cognition alone was something that was unthinkably difficult for Martial Seniors.

In general, Martial Artists had not exercised the power of thought much, if at all. The reason for this was that the Lower Realms were primarily centered around body and movement.

It was only when one reached the peak of the Lower realms that those truly no longer had anything left to offer. The body had been pushed to its limits, and techniques, that applied the power of the body through movement, had also been pushed to the limit.

'For any soaked sponge, there is a limit to how much water you can squeeze from it. Techniques can only do so much.' Rui mused. 'However, when one has mindlessly squeezed the sponge their entire life to grow stronger, they are unable to continue that growth once the sponge runs out of water.'

In other words, having spent decades, even centuries, growing stronger by exploiting the power of the body, it was considerably difficult for Martial Seniors to alter their mentality at its root and begin applying the power of thought to more than just creating individualistic and attuned techniques amidst training.

Rui couldn't help but think back to the Martial Seniors of Vilun Island. They were a highly martial set of people whose lifestyle and even combat philosophy were entirely incompatible with the mindset needed to progress one's Martial Art.

Chapter 1409: Affinities

'It's no wonder that the Martial tribes of Vilun Island don't have a single Martial Master.' Rui realized. 'They fight with emotion rather than thought. At this rate, they will never be able to break through.'

He thought about K'Mala. She was particularly bright and had even managed to partially master the Pathfinder technique. Rui had put a huge amount of effort into making sure that she grasped the highly distilled mathematics, making sure she learned the bare minimum.

Perhaps she was the only one who had a chance of breaking through to the Master Realm if she understood the power of thought.

Regardless, the cards had been laid out in front of him, and he had to say, that he was quite pleased with them. He had been dealt a good hand. Of course, that was largely a consequence of a lifetime of effort, but it paid off nonetheless.

"If I have a great affinity for the Master Realm, then that also means people can have great affinities for other Realms, right?" Rui asked. "I can imagine that some Martial Artists will gain more of a boost in power breaking through to the Squire and Senior Realm compared to breaking through to the Master Realm. In a broader sense, different Martial Art have different affinities for different Realms."

When Rui thought about people like Nel, it was clear that Nel would probably gain more power from the Squire and Senior Realms than the Master Realm. The man was so philosophically inclined towards making the best of his body that it was a wonder of whether he could break through to the Master Realm with that attitude.

"That's quite astute of you. This is a higher-level concept that Martial Artists only get in touch with in the Upper Realms, but you have managed to arrive at it nonetheless." She remarked. "Different Martial Arts have different affinities for different Realms, they are rarely equally attuned to all Realms. The Martial Path is also not equal in the Realms that it passes through. Some Martial Paths are inherently more powerful within some Realms than others. It is believed that every Martial Artist has a unique configuration of affinities for the different Realms along the Martial Path."

"Hm, that makes sense since every Martial Path has a unique trajectory," Rui mused. "In my case, I definitely have the highest affinity for the Master Realm, I'd imagine. Though my affinity for the Squire and Senior Realms is not low either."

Originally, he would have had only an affinity for the Master realm, but the creation of the Metabody System gave his Martial Art an affinity for the Squire and Senior Realms as well. It was a technique that did not inherently make use of thought and made use of Body and Heart instead.

Furthermore, it was quite powerful, close to on par with the rest of the VOID algorithm itself. That was good because it meant that he could make use of the Senior Realm much better than if he only had the pattern recognition system and the other systems of the VOID algorithm.

"One more question. I need to accumulate the power of thought to reach the Master Realm, however, I have still not reached the limit of what I can squeeze out of my body, unlike the original Martial Seniors before the first Martial Master." Rui explained. "Doesn't that mean I can also grow stronger in the Senior realm by squeezing out the most of my body along with my mind?"

"Yes, but squeezing out the potential of the body does not bring you closer to a higher Realm," She pointed out. "Though it is also true that it is easier to develop techniques that make the most out of the body than the mind, generally speaking. There is no right or wrong, objectively speaking. You have been provided with all the information, and you have been informed of the outcomes and consequences of all your available courses of action. You yourself must choose how you wish to progress from here on."

Rui nodded.

In the first place, he wasn't even sure if her statement of making the most of the body being easier than the mind was true for him. He had created several grade-ten techniques that harnessed the power of thought or cognition.

The ODA System, the Riemannian Echo, Death's Sympathy/Sympathetic Death Lance, Transverse Resonance, and his most recent creation; the Phantomind Void.

The VOID algorithm, of course, went without saying.

He had no problem harnessing thought. In fact, his greatest magnum opus was centered around harnessing thought. His affinity for Mind was definitely stronger than his affinity for Body.

Part of that was a relic from Earth. On Earth, there were much harder and concrete limits to everything. It was impossible to embody Bruce Lee's philosophy of Water through the body. The Metabody System was absolute fiction on Earth.

The only way to embody Bruce Lee's philosophy of water was through mind, through adapting strategies, tactics, and decision-making to perfectly counter his opponent with perfect moves at the perfect time and place.

That was why he had chosen to create a system of thought to embody Water. That was the only way to embody the philosophy of Water on Earth; through mind.

However, that was not strictly true in Gaia. He had already embodied the philosophy of water through the body with the first iteration of the Metabody System.

Perhaps there were ways he could do this beyond just body and mind. After all, he still had two more Realms above even those that probably tapped into a different kind of potential from the body and the conscious mind.

'I should stop clinging to thought and mind as exclusively as I have.' Rui realized. 'To be more accurate, I should cling to everything else deeply as I do with the power of the mind.'

His Martial Path was adaptive evolution, not cognitive adaptation. His Martial Path encompassed more than just his mind. It would be a disservice to Project Water if he limited it to predominantly the mind.

'Still, while I am in the Senior realm specifically, it makes sense to focus on the mind.' Rui mused. 'I can maintain balance by working on my body if it's too lopsided afterward.'

He had many ideas on how to improve his Metabody System to ensure that the adaptive evolution capabilities of his body did not lag behind those of his mind. Things like Primordial Seed opened up paths of limitless potential.

Chapter 1410: Next

Having decided to mostly focus on the mind whilst in the Senior Realm, his path within the Senior Realm was laid out.

Of course, he didn't intend to abandon the power of Body, or Martial Art techniques that brought out the power of Body. However, it was worth it to focus on reaching a higher Realm of power, especially the Realm of power that he had most of an affinity for.

Rui continued to ask various pertinent questions to Master Reina, making sure that he got everything he needed to know out of the way.

"Mental techniques do not necessarily count as the Martial Mind, correct?" Rui asked. "Since the Martial Mind is the power of thought more than it is the power of mind."

"That's accurate," She replied. "Mental techniques make use of mind rather than thought, however, mind-oriented Martial Art still have much more of an affinity for the Master Realm than any other kind of Martial Art does barring Martial Artists like yourself, I suppose."

"Hm, that does make sense," Rui nodded.

"However, the difficulty of the Master Realm remains quite high, worthy enough to separate the Lower and Upper Realms," She remarked.

"I can understand why that's true, but I find that hard to believe in a personal sense," Rui remarked. "Do Martial Artists really have that much of a trouble thinking?"

"Hah, you're overestimating the lot of them." She snorted. "You're too divergent from the norm. The current thought process you undergo at the moment may as well be larger than some Martial Minds."

He understood why that was the case on a logical basis. Having only used intelligence for imbuing their techniques with individuality during training, they were much less unaccustomed to engaging in sophisticated systematic thought.

Of course, that was an over-generalization, and there were plenty of exceptions, but it was true to a large degree for the broader majority of them. In general, using the power of thought to massively elevate their effective combat level was something that was probably unthinkable for most of them.

For Rui, however, it came to him as naturally as breathing these days. He was from a different world entirely.

Literally.

He just couldn't resonate with the experience of not being able to employ the power of thought to elevate combat.

He thought back to his fight with Ieyasu, one of the ways he hampered the man's mind-reading was by flooding him with all the information of the VOID algorithm that was being processed through the Mind Palace.

The fact that a process that was starting to verge towards becoming subconscious or reflexive had proved too much for Ieyasu's conscious mind showed that Rui's standards were probably beyond anything this world had ever seen.

He was not surprised that the VOID algorithm was at the level of a complete Martial mind of some Martial Seniors, if not most, but unfortunately, it was not sufficient for Rui's Martial Mind.

'Even if it was. I still need to expand it.' Rui mused. 'I also need to update it and fully adapt it to this world. That remains to be true even if it is enough to be Martial Mind or not.'

He had made some solid progress toward Project Water with the development of the Metabody System. However, he was still far from a point where he could cleanly adapt to everything this world had to offer.

There was Martial Art that was obscure and esoteric enough, even for him, such that none of his techniques could handle them very well. One good example of that was the freezing Martial Art that he encountered in the preliminary contest of the Virodha Martial Contest.

By relying on the second law of thermodynamics, she was able to create a freezing Martial Art to cause instant death to those who were hit by her attacks, including Rui.

He couldn't adapt to her as cleanly as he wished he could, and that needed to be changed at some point.

There also were non-human threats and elements that he was less able to handle. the adaptive evolution model of the VOID algorithm was also simply unable to tell Rui how to adapt to and counter these kinds of techniques.

Which was another problem that Rui would need to confront sooner or later. The adaptive evolution model was growing increasingly obsolete over time. Rui either needed to update it or bypass it to a certain degree.

Fact of the matter was that Rui's experience had reached a stage where he could rely more on it to know what was the best adaptive counter to the more fantastical elements of this world.

He needed to solve that issue, he didn't mind what the solution was, but the redundancy and the inefficiency were no longer tolerable from this point forward. The reason for that was because it was

extremely difficult to 'fix' the Martial Mind after becoming a Martial Master, it was better to get things right in the first go.

This meant that he had arrived at a level where the refinement of the VOID algorithm was going to start taking priority.

'I'm going to have to give it some very serious thought very soon.' Rui realized. 'It's not a matter that I can leave be for too much longer.'

"Anything else?" She asked.

"...No, I think that's about it," Rui murmured. "I appreciate you taking the time to help me. No, I appreciate everything that you've done for me. I won't forget the debt I owe you, Master."

He stood up, bowing his head deeply.

"You don't need to be so stiff," She remarked. "It has been a pleasure, all things considered. You have been the most entertaining pupil I've accepted."

"I'm glad I could stave off your boredom," Rui smiled wryly. "But unfortunately, it's about time I leave. I have things I need to do."

"Mmm, you planned on visiting Zeamer, right?" She remarked, referring to the Hypnomaster. "Well, good luck. Don't forget what I told you. The tribulations that he inflicts on those who seek him are not as easy as my challenges."