

Martial Unity 1461

Chapter 1461: Suffering

Rui was determined to minimize energy waste, so he went all out on refining the image. He had already seen that his rate of progress far surpassed that of what was to be expected.

And not by a small amount either. When one combined his powerful mind with the continuously improving Mind Palace, one ended up with a rate of growth that was almost entirely unprecedented.

The speed at which he created and refined the video of Master Zeamer's was exponentially greater than anyone else could have. A month of progress was accomplished in a matter of days.

'I wouldn't have taken on four projects at once if not for the fact that I have a particularly high rate of progress with mental images,' Rui mused as he refined the image.

Within a week, he had already refined the image to a point where the returns on effort had diminished too much to be worth it.

"Fuuu..." He exhaled deeply. "This should be fine."

In his mind, an extremely sharp and refined two-dimensional GIF of a rotating hypnotic spiral drew his attention. Even he was impressed just by how attention-drawing it was. It reeled in any beholder with a high-irresistable force.

Furthermore, it was far less mentally taxing than the Greater Primordial Void was. Which was one of the primary goals when approaching the three Hypnomatrix projects.

'Now that those are out of the way, I should do some detailed training on how I approach each of the principles needed for each of the techniques.'

The maneuvering-sabotage hypnotic technique relied on speeding up one's perception of time, causing them to perceive everything to happen faster, including their own body, than they were capable of processing. Rui needed to learn how to apply image embodiment to generate non-verbal communication that would impact the subconscious to sabotage one's perception of time.

For offense, he needed to learn some amount of body sabotage, some amount of pain induction, and some body-sabotage for defense as well.

Thankfully, he had already learned the principles of each of the three techniques, so he didn't need the Hypnomaster's aid in this regard. The Hypnomaster had also given him a breakdown on how to self-train hypnosis in the best of ways.

Because of his sheer experience, expertise, and mastery of hypnosis, he showed Rui the best training methodologies and principles that he had. This helped Rui get off the right foot with his first dip into training hypnosis.

Hypnosis techniques consisted of misdirecting the consciousness and then manipulating the subconscious mind. He had already completed the first half of that, and now needed to master the second half which was entirely new to him.

He would be lying if he said he wasn't excited.

Hypnosis was almost magical in what it could do. To be able to manipulate minds with Martial Art was something that he had never expected to do in his entire life. It was new territory that he was excited to explore, especially when he possessed an affinity for it.

'The first step towards manipulating the subconsciousness after manipulating the mind is developing the right image embodiment for the non-verbal communication needed for manipulation of the mind.' Rui mused.

Thankfully, he had already had some in mind when he first embarked on the project. For the offense-sabotage technique, he was quite content relying on breathing sabotage, and he intended to make full use of his previous life's asthma for that.

He closed his eyes. "Fuuu..."

His mind delved back into his previous life. A life of hampered breathing. He had been diagnosed with a rare form of asthma that could only be treated, not cured. On top of that, he was a particularly severe

case, and he would need to be permanently bedridden and attached to all kinds of contraptions if he wanted to breathe properly.

He had decided he didn't want to lead such a life. He would rather suffer hampered breathing if it meant actually living a life.

And so began a life of gasping, wheezing, and strained breathing. He carried around three inhalers of different kinds at all times. There were many times, particularly during winter, when his asthma got so bad that even walking was difficult, he would often spend time in a wheelchair.

He was often bullied because of the frailty and fragility that came with being an asthma. Those instances generated immense frustration, perhaps he would have gone down a darker path if not for his discovery of the greatest thing humanity had ever created; martial arts.

Now that was something worth dedicating his life to.

He persevered through school, getting perfect scores before going to college for a bachelor's in science, a particularly tiring period of his life with his condition. His lungs burned and fought back against every breath he took, yet he managed to push through and get a perfect GPA.

He went on to get another degree in sports science while also getting diplomas in relevant courses and later on even a master's and a PhD in combat sports sciences.

Every step of the way, his lungs fought back, but he persevered. As he grew older and exited his physical prime, his general health dipped even more, exacerbating his already poor health.

It had gotten particularly bad during the last decade of his life. He visited the hospital so many times that he practically had a room for himself. It didn't help that the healthcare system of his nation limited options. Even while he was working on Project Water, coordinating with his team from a hospital bed many times, he still struggled to breathe.

When he arrived at death's door,, he certainly was frustrated that he hadn't fulfilled Project Water. However, he was also relieved from the bottom of his heart.

Relieved that his suffering would finally end.

Rui opened his eyes, sweating and panting. His hand flew to his chest, feeling his racing heart.

He had gotten a little too immersed in his own memories, causing his own breathing to grow strained.

'Tsk, ended up partially hypnotizing myself without trying,' Rui shook his head.

His mood grew a little pensive as he reflected back on his previous life.

Chapter 1462: Project Plans

It had been a long time since Rui had looked back to the past so deeply. The reason he avoided doing so was not because he was running away from the past.

No.

It was not that he was avoiding the past, it was that he was too focused on the future.

He had a Martial Path to tread. He had a Martial Art to grow. A higher Realm of power beckoned to him. That was why he didn't have time to wallow in the past. of course, he didn't forget it, but it had been a long time since he was immersed in it.

That was why he felt overwhelmed when he revisited his previous life. It made him boundlessly grateful for everything he had in this life.

A healthy body.

An extraordinary mind.

Priceless memories of his previous life which not only contained invaluable knowledge and experience, but also contained the magnum opus of his previous life; the VOID algorithm, and his lifelong ambition that became his Martial Path.

He went from struggling to breathe to gaining the power to deprive an entire town of air and then destroy that town with a single breath. It was a stark contrast that surpassed anything he could have ever imagined.

'Alright, back to the topic.' He heaved a sigh, getting rid of all superfluous thoughts. 'My memories are a powerful base for the manipulation of my opponent's mind.'

He only needed to gather all his memories of suffering from asthma, which was a lot, and then refine and distill the suffering caused by strained breathing, and then embody that image.

Once again, he needed to make sure that he extracted purely the suffering of his asthmatic attacks from his memories and ensured nothing else came along. The more irrelevant information came along, the greater the dilution of the image, causing the technique to be less effective.

If he wanted to cause the maximum impact, he would need to go through every single memory he had of an asthmatic experience, and then distil all of those away from the irrelevant information of his memories, and then refine and distil all of those into a single video.

'This time, the video can't be visual, I suppose it will have to be another sensory track.' Rui noted.

After all, nobody visually saw themselves breathing, so there was no point in creating a visual image. Breathing was felt more than anything else. Thus he would need to create a sensory track rather than a video.

That was new. He didn't know how to go about it since on Earth, people could produce visual data through images and videos on a screen, but there was no such thing as touch communication technology.

Or rather, there was, but it was cutting-edge and highly niche. Certainly nothing that he had ever come across before. There were no established variables like frame rate or definition that could be numerically measured, he wasn't even sure if he could develop them.

'It's not worth going down that rabbit hole, I'll have to rely on my mind alone. As long as I create it, it will forever be stored in my Mind Palace.' Rui mused.

As high as his ability to create and refine images was, scouring through his entire life and distilling painful memories into a single embodiment for the hypnosis technique was not easy, even for Rui. It would take quite some time.

Especially when he had four other projects to work on, however, he had a very solid direction to go in. Thus, he was quite satisfied with how this technique project was going to unfold.

Another technique that he was quite satisfied with was the maneuvering-sabotage technique. For this technique, he would need to spend quite some time thinking back to his experiences of mastering the Forestep technique in the Shionel Confederation.

These memories were not nearly as rich and wide as his memories of hampered breathing, but they worked fine otherwise. He had struggled a lot with trying to keep his mind up with the sheer speed of his body.

Furthermore, every time he used the Void Forestep technique, his actual reactions and processing couldn't keep up with his own movements, he relied on thoughtless reflexes and predictions to use it. Thus he had many memories of it to rely on.

Thus the maneuvering-sabotage mental technique was quite satisfactory as well.

'The only one that isn't quite satisfactory is the defense-sabotage hypnotic technique.' Rui sighed.

The only feasible idea he had was pain induction. But that was a little dull as far as he was concerned.

'If I have to use pain, then I'm going to have to go all out.' Rui narrowed his eyes. 'The greatest pain that all Martial Artists past the Apprentice Realm have felt.'

The Squire evolution breakthrough process. It was easily far and away the most painful experience he had ever had in either life. It was most certainly a dark memory in the minds of all those who had experienced it.

It was the price of the power of the Squire Realm, in addition to the risk of life.

'That could be worth it, but the pain was so extraordinary that it's hard to recall it precisely and accurately.' Rui mused.

Still, if he was going to go for pain, then he would not stand to go for anything less than the highest pain imaginable.

'That's set then.' Rui mused.

That left the self-hypnosis upgrade for the Godspeed technique so that he could get rid of the Forestep technique.

Self-hypnosis was different from the other technique, it involved willingly removing the guard of the consciousness while impacting one's own subconsciousness. The issue with self-hypnosis was reaching a level of proficiency such that one could execute then and there on the spot in the middle of a battle.

Considering the nuances and challenges of all four technique projects, he knew that it was not going to take a short amount of time. Regardless, given his affinity for mental techniques, he wanted to be thorough rather than quick.

Chapter 1463: Search

In a large office filled with hurried employees and stacks of documents was a large table in the center. A large map covered the table, a table assorted with all kinds of notes, pins, and pictures. Heaps of documents were stacked around it.

On one end of the table was the only seated man who studied the map while those around him stood each taking their turn to make reports.

He quietly listened as he studied the map in front of him with great care and attention, processing all the information. His eyes fixed on a picture pinned to a point on the map.

The picture was of a young man.

A young man with startling black hair and black eyes.

Just the sight of that picture caused his lips to curl and his eyes to sharpen. His jaws gritted while his teeth clenched.

"...According to a report from squad CF54 of the long-range surveillance division, we have yet to observe any signs of the target. Thus far we can only conclude that the target is not present in the town of Haj-"

"Enough," Deacon declared, interrupting the report. "Enough of this nonsense."

"But sir..."

"I SAID ENOUGH." Deacon bellowed loudly, shaking everyone in the room. "DO YOU THINK I'M A FOOL? IT'S BEEN MORE THAN FIVE YEARS."

He stopped, panting as he tried catching his breath and calming his racing heart down. His constitution had grown a lot worse in the past five years. His hair had begun whitening while his hairline had receded. He had lost weight, causing him to look gaunt and haggard.

His skin complexion had deteriorated, causing it to look sickly. There were eyebags underneath his eyes, causing him to look quite exhausted.

"Have we confirmed his actual presence even once since we began our operations in the Kandrian Empire?" He gritted his teeth.

"...No, sir. We have only spotted figures matching the details of Rui Quarrier to a high degree of accuracy. We also have many eye witness testimonies of those who know his appearance confirming that the suspect matched him."

"Secondhand eyewitness testimonies, correct?" Deacon growled. "In the past five years, how many times have our own people actually spotted Rui Quarrier and confirmed his appearance?"

"...Four times, but..."

"But each of those testimonies have been recently revealed to be compromised due to the suspect being under the influence of mental techniques or mentally-compromising substances, yes?"

"Yes..."

"So you're telling me that despite creating an intelligence division just for him and spending years to establish a powerful intelligence network and surveillance ring in the Kandrian Empire, not once has Rui Quarrier actually been spotted in the flesh by even a SINGLE one of our people, despite FREQUENTLY BEING SPOTTED BY EVERYBODY ELSE?"

"Sir the secondhand intelligence sources are rather credi-"

"THEY'RE COMPROMISED," Deacon bellowed. "THINK. We have an ENTIRE division of intelligence agents and analysts being outplayed by a single Martial Squire. THINK. Why is that everybody EXCEPT US spots Rui Quarrier, HUH?!"

The intelligence agents and analysts flinched, too terrified to retort.

"We're the only ones searching for him actively, yes?"

"...Yes, sir."

"We're the only ones spending millions of Shionel gold every year looking for him yes?"

"Yes, sir."

"THEN WHY IS EVERYBODY AND THEIR MOTHER SPOTTING HIM AND NOT US?" he bellowed, banging the table in front of him.

"...W-What are you suggesting, sir?" One brave analyst mustered the courage to ask.

"It's a scam. All of it." He growled, as his mouth curled. "And everybody is in on it. The Martial Union. The Kandrian Empire. That bastard Bradt. The goddamn Beggar's Sect. EVERYBODY."

None of them knew what to say to him.

"We have made shit progress in finding him in the Shionel Confederation through firsthand intelligence operations," Deacon tapped the map looking around. "Yet the secondhand intelligence is glowing with all kinds of wonderful reports of 'credible' people claiming to have spotted Rui Quarrier. IT'S NONSENSE. It doesn't make sense that so many people have spotted him when we can't even confirm his presence in this country."

He paused for a moment as his mind furiously parsed through all the intelligence that had been collected recently since the intelligence network had been gathered since his intelligence network had been fully established in the Kandrian Empire.

"We can't find him. Not an actual instance of credible firsthand confirmation and verification of both his identity and his presence in this nation, correct?"

"But sir, the secondhand rep-"

"I said FIRSTHAND," Deacon yelled. "Put aside the secondhand nonsense for now. Put aside all sources of intelligence aside from our foremost and directly credible and reliable active intelligence network. If we focused purely on intelligence gathered through our infiltration and surveillance, what is the evaluation of the probability Rui Quarrier hiding in this country?"

The intelligence analysts considered the moment before cautiously answering his question. "Very low...sir."

"Right. And why have we determined up until now that Rui Quarrier is very likely hiding within the Kandrian Empire?"

"Because of his escape from the Shionel Confederation five years ago, and the vast amount of credible secondhand intelligence supporting his presence in this nation."

"Right, but why is there such an incongruence between firsthand and secondhand intelligence?" Chairman Deacon asked fiercely. "Why is the secondhand intelligence strongly insisting he's in this country, while firsthand intelligence doesn't suggest that?"

He glanced back down at the map. "Because they want us to believe he's in this country when he's not. It's a lie. A LIE. IT'S ALL A SCAM!"

He violently swept all the documents and the map off the table with a single sweep. "DO THEY THINK I'M A FOOL?! THAT I CAN'T SEE THROUGH THIS NONSENSE?!"

"They', sir...?"

"The Martial Union which values their golden boy so much. The Kandrian Empire. The Beggar's Sect which insists the intelligence of Rui Quarrier is under a heavy seal. Guildmaster Bradt. Everybody! They're all working together to FUCK WITH ME. That's why THE WORLD INSISTS RUI QUARRIER IS IN THIS EMPIRE WHEN HE ISN'T."

He panted heavily with an enraged expression. "Abandon the Kandrian Empire. Begin searching outside. If we search hard enough, I'm sure that we'll find something. Anything. I'm sure of it."

He walked away, before pausing at the door. "Ah, one more thing. Increase the funding for the operations to capture the orphanage. They're the key."

Chapter 1464: Upgrade Project

"Tsk tsk, you're too stiff, you've got to immerse yourself into the illusion, young man," Master Zeamer tutted. "In the case of self-hypnosis, there is no external force misdirecting your attention."

Rui exhaled, heaving a sigh as he tried to submerge himself inside the image that he had created for himself. In this case, he was trying to trick his subconsciousness into causing its perception of time to slow down.

This was a phenomenon known as tachypsychia.

Unlike the images that he generated for a lot of his other techniques, he didn't have a lot of memories to rely on to create this image, thus he had to rely on pure imagination. That was the reason why he was in trouble with the fourth hypnosis technique project which was an upgrade to the Godspeed technique.

This was a direction of upgrade that was entirely different from the direction that Kane had gone down, which used electrical stimulation to speed up his reflexes significantly.

Their means of upgrading the Godspeed technique was different, but it reflected their strengths and affinities. Kane had stuck to amplifying his reflexes and reactions exclusively to a high enough degree while Rui had chosen to slow down his consciousness' perception of time using hypnosis.

"Here, let me help you out with building the image," Master Zeamer remarked as he activated a misdirection technique.

Rui glanced to his right as he felt an enormous presence that drew his attention. Of course, there was nothing there when he looked. It was a simple misdirection technique.

Yet even though he wasn't using his Martial Heart at all, and a very small portion of his Martial Mind, Rui was unable to resist the overwhelming technique.

Instantly, Master Zeamer had already manipulated his subconsciousness with swift non-verbal communication. Rui's perception of time had already begun to slow down to a crawl. The world around him moved in slow motion.

Except for Master Zeamer, who had no problem keeping up with even his slowed-down perception of time.

Rui heaved a heavy breath, having activated Godspeed. Instantly he felt his body lightening with a surge of power. He moved around with the technique, this time, however, he didn't need to rely on thoughtless reflexes to control of the technique. He could still rely on his perception of time being slowed down.

'Incredible...' Rui moved his fingers and arms around. 'I have no issue controlling Godspeed at all.'

The Godspeed technique was already a remarkably powerful technique even without this upgrade, it would be even more capable now that he had added this element to the technique.

He would be able to use the technique with a lot fewer risks if he could tap into this power on command.

'I need to remember this sensation.' Rui closed his eyes as he added did his best to record this memory as well as he could. He also made sure to record the change in his perception of time when the Master hypnotized him and manipulated his perception of time.

It wasn't too long later until it wore off, however.

"Huff..." Rui heaved a sigh as he returned to meditation, accessing the memory of the experience that Master Zeamer had generated.

Self-hypnosis worked differently from normal hypnosis due to several differences caused by the fact that the user was the target.

Firstly, there was no non-verbal communication. The conscious mind directly communicates with the subconscious mind by embodying an image. Thus the quality and speed at which one could not only generate a powerful image but also embody it was what mattered when it came to self-hypnosis.

Thankfully, Rui had extreme affinities for both, thus his aptitude for self-hypnosis was high. That was why although it was difficult, he was sure that he would be able to master the technique.

Out of all the four projects that he was working on, he was definitely having the least amount of ease with the self-hypnosis technique and the pain hypnosis technique to sabotage defensive Martial Artists.

With the defense-sabotage technique, he wanted to make sure that he didn't just inflict pain, but he inflicted pain that corresponded with whatever attacks he landed on his target.

For example, if he landed a blow on the target's arm, he wanted the target to feel a sharp pain in his bones and on the flesh that was in the area of contact. That was particularly challenging and was going to take time from his side.

He also specifically chose parts of the Squire evolution breakthrough process that would make sense to recreate for any given strike. He did not want there to be any incongruence between the strikes that he generated and the pain felt. The moment there was any incongruence, the illusion would become a lot less effective.

All in all, he had his work cut out in front of him for all the technique projects that he was working on. Ordinarily, he would never dare take up so many at the same time, but alas, he didn't have too much of a choice.

His progress with mental techniques was high. This meant that things that would take too long were a lot more manageable and quick for Rui. On top of that, he doubted that he would receive something as invaluable as the tutelage of the Hypnomaster if he tried postponing these techniques to a later date.

The Hypnomaster taught him the most efficient ways to develop images and how to embody them in the best manner to generate the necessary non-verbal communication to manipulate the opponent's subconscious mind.

On top of that, he significantly accelerated his progress by hypnotizing Rui in the manner of his technique to allow him to get a good understanding of the imagination that he needed.

All in all, it was worth it to spend some extra time in Cloudia if it meant getting the best quality techniques, and more importantly, a strong foundation to develop high-quality mental techniques in the future. The training principles and foundations that the Hypnomaster would pass on to him would be of great help in the future as well.

Chapter 1465: Skip

Time passed on Cloudia as Rui immersed himself in training. He spent most of his time meditating in the meditation chambers of the cloud town, isolating himself from any and all disturbances and distractions.

The only times he wasn't doing that were when he was sleeping or doing other daily basic necessities.

Of course, every once in a while, he would spar against the Hypnomaster alongside Ieyasu. He also sparred against Ieyasu many times just to ensure his battle instinct didn't rot.

"This is one of the issues with training mental techniques," The Hypnomaster explained. "Spend too long immersed in training them, and you'll go from a Martial Artist to a sage. The normal kind, too, not the Martial kind. Hahaha!"

On top of that, Rui and Ieyasu were routinely tasked with the duty of hunting food for all of Cloudia every once in a while. This too was because of another rule from the Martial Master. They could hunt any beast or beasts as long as it wasn't the Illusionary Dragon, the beast was apparently a rare and powerful species that the Hypnomaster was rearing. Furthermore, it filtered out the competent Martial Artists from the incompetent.

It only made their jobs harder when they ran into it, since they weren't allowed to kill it.

"Hah! It's good to face challenges. Martial Artists should learn to hunt their own food. Being coddled will do you no good," He said, as he was coddled by multiple women attendants.

Rui heaved a sigh, massaging his temples. The man was an eccentric character, even if he was a powerful Martial Master. It helped that he was earnestly helping Rui and Ieyasu out.

Rui didn't know what he was helping the latter out with specifically, but he knew that it had something to do with the man's Martial Mind. He grew stronger every time they fought.

He would be lying if he said that working to be ahead of Ieyasu wasn't one of his goals as a Martial Artist. It couldn't be helped, Ieyasu was one of the few guys of his own generation that he didn't have to hold back about.

Often, when he sparred against peers or friends, he generally needed to hold back in order to ensure that he didn't go far and cross a line. However, he had found that Ieyasu was perhaps the first person he had come across who possessed a Martial Path that was of the same caliber as his own.

It was not something Rui could overwhelm easily. It meant that Rui didn't have to worry about him or coddle him, he could simply go all out and focus on winning. This was something that he had come to treasure, even if he was too proud to admit it to Ieyasu.

It was true that both of them had grown at a much faster rate than when they were away from each other. Frequently being forced to spar with each other not only allowed them to compare their rates of growth but also drove them to train and work harder.

Rui suspected that that was the reason that the Hypnomaster made them spar with each other in the first place.

Regardless, his routine drew into a monotony of training, hunting, and sparring. Most of his time went into one of the four hypnosis projects that he had chosen to embark on.

He made remarkably fast progress, as expected, faster than any Martial Artist that the Hypnomaster had ever seen. Yet most Martial Artists only trained one technique at a time, while Rui was working on four.

On top of that, he had chosen to also work on an elementary algorithm that would allow him to decide how to apply the hypnomatrix most efficiently. After all, it wasn't the most cut-and-dry matter.

For one, not every Martial Artist cleanly fell into offensive, defensive, and maneuvering. He, of all people, knew that very well. If he did come across Martial Artists who were clearly heavily inclined toward one of the three, then that was fine, but if he didn't, then he needed to choose the best outcome.

With the way mental techniques worked, it was possible to use multiple at the same time at a fraction of their individual potency. It may have been the case that there was an optimal distribution of how much of each technique he ought to use against Martial Artists who didn't cleanly fall into offense, defense, or maneuvering categories.

In such cases, how was Rui supposed to use the three mental techniques?

That was why he also worked on a minor system of thought that would allow him to arrive at the best way to use the three techniques. It was certainly a difficult thing to add on top of the four projects that he was already working on, reducing his time even further, but alas, it could not be helped.

He was prepared to lengthen the time he spent on Cloudia if that was what it took. This was especially important since he knew that this fifth extra project would contribute to his Martial Mind, which was definitely ranking extremely high at the top of his list of priorities.

If he was going to create a system of thought that could fill his vast Martial Mind, he needed to make little steps of progress until they eventually accumulated enough to get him to fulfill the necessary threshold.

He didn't know how much he had left to go, all he knew was that the VOID algorithm filled up some uncertain amount of the totality of his budding Martial Mind. However, it was highly unlikely that he would fill the remaining gap left with another megaproject like the VOID algorithm.

'I should make progress wherever I can.'

Smaller projects like the Hypnomatrix that allowed him to decide how to apply his mental techniques might be much smaller than the rest of the VOID algorithm, making a small impact, but it was progress nonetheless.

By the time Rui completed his training, more than two years had already passed.

Chapter 1466: Test

One fine day on Cloudia, Rui opened his eyes.

"I have finally arrived."

It had taken a long time, but he had finally completed the four technique projects and the one thought project that he was working on. The sheer amount of time he had spent on each of the techniques of the Hypnomatrix, and the upgrade of the Godspeed technique in addition to the system of thought to objectively and logically arrive at the best distribution of technique application had finally paid off.

The offense-sabotage hypnotic technique had been the first to be completed. Perhaps it was because Rui had a ton of experience with asthma and breathing problems that he was able to finish it the earliest.

Regardless, it hadn't been easy. Even for Rui, going through every single memory of an asthmatic attack in his previous life of fifty-nine years, of which there may as well have been countless, was quite difficult. This was especially true when he had four other things to focus on and dedicated his time.

Regardless, a little over a year after he began, he had finally finished. The resulting technique was spectacularly functional, able to significantly hamper breathing. The Hypnomaster had no shortage of bringing Senior-level test subjects out of nowhere.

Depending on several variables such as the size and the physical power of the target, the hypnotic technique could do anything from sealing breathing techniques to hampering breathing significantly, causing his targets to gasp for air like they were having an asthmatic attack.

In many a case, this technique alone won him the fight!

However, the more powerful, stronger, and experienced the Martial Artist was, the less impactful and effective the technique was. Rui had designed the technique as a low-effort and low-potency technique in exchange for a lesser mental burden and a guaranteed hit.

This meant that he could absolutely ensure that the hypnotic technique would land. It also meant that it wouldn't burden his mind too much. Unlike the Greater Phantomind Void, Rui had absolutely no problem applying these techniques alongside the VOID algorithm.

He could use the Hypnomatrix while simultaneously constructing predictive models on his opponent.

Normally, the price of creating low-effort techniques was that the technique would yield fewer results. This was common sense, after all.

Less effort resulted in lesser results.

However, that didn't apply to Rui's hypnosis techniques. The reason for that was that his mind was so powerful that low effort from him still yielded a powerful result.

Less than twenty percent of his full effort may very well have been more than one hundred percent of another's. At least, this was the case as far as mental techniques went.

It was, in many ways, cheating. Rui came to learn the joys of sheer and raw innate talent. This was quite different from anything that he had ever experienced thus far.

After all, his Martial Path and Martial Art were certainly extraordinary, however, they weren't talent since he had worked extremely hard to get them. He had shed blood, tears, and sweat while working on Project Water and the VOID algorithm. To call them talent was a disservice to John Falken.

Even his earlier extreme tolerance of potions in his Academy days was ultimately useful only because he worked hard for them during the extra training hours he got from them.

However, the quality of his mind was something he had been blessed with when he was reborn and his mind underwent a second round of immense cognitive growth in his new brain. He hadn't worked for that, and it was something that could be considered as raw innate talent.

The three hypnotic techniques of his Hypnomatrix were incredibly powerful, yet very easy to use. They did a good job covering the only phase of the battle where Rui could be said to have a weakness, which was the beginning.

'Time to find out just how good.' Rui got up, leaving the meditation chamber as he referenced his internal clock in the Mind Palace. 'Right on time, I suppose.'

He had anticipated that he would be ready by this day a week ago. That was why he had taken the liberty to prepare a test to see just how good his techniques were. In order to verify the power of his new techniques and paradigms in combat, he needed a worthy opponent.

There was only one.

Rui sky-walked until he arrived at a cloud field adjacent to Cloudia.

The Hypnomaster and Ieyasu had already arrived.

"Hehe... He's finally arrived," The Hypnomaster grinned with palatable excitement.

"You're late," Ieyasu narrowed his eyes. "Let's get this over with quickly. I will return to my training after I defeat you."

"Ho!" The Hypnomaster grinned even wider.

"You'll be too busy asking for a rematch to return to training," Rui retorted.

"Hoho!" The Hypnomaster's grin widened even more as he stroked his beard. "This is what I like to see! The two youngest and most talented Martial Seniors going at it. This old man is pleased to have such high-quality entertainment."

The two of them ignored him, standing at a distance of ten meters from each other.

"Mrrhm!" Master Zeamer cleared his throat. "Since both of you are here to test your growth, I shall set some stipulations. You may only use what you have learned since breaking through to the Senior Realm!"

The two of them narrowed their eyes, glancing at Master Zeamer.

"You two fought each other more than four years ago, so I'm sure you are well aware of what each other was capable of back then. Furthermore, I know what the two of you have been up to in the past two years, so I can ensure that you only use what you have been working on." The Hypnomaster smirked. "Whoever loses will be declared as the one who has made the least amount of growth in the Senior Realm. Hehe..."

Neither Rui nor Ieyasu wanted to bear that humiliation. They were both far too competitive with each other to accept such a failure, both of them were absolutely prepared to go all out and procure what they needed.

Chapter 1467: Commence

Rui and Ieyasu considered the terms of the battle. Both of them had come to learn much in the past four years or so. However, that did not mean the battle was symmetric.

For one, Rui spent a lot of time mastering assassination techniques. Those techniques were much harder to apply in combat. He didn't know what Ieyasu had accomplished in the past four years, but surely it was more directly relevant to combat than the things Rui had been focusing on.

"Does upgrading techniques count?" Rui asked.

"Hmm..." Master Zeamer considered the question. "Alright, techniques upgraded in the past four years will be allowed."

That made it much more palatable. It meant that Rui could use his upgraded Godspeed technique in addition to the Hypnomatrix. Perhaps the most rational decision would be to inform them that he had focused on assassinations for a good chunk of the past four years, but he decided against it.

He was truly confident in the progress that he had made with mental techniques.

"Can I use techniques that I've copied in the past four years?" Ieyasu asked.

"Of course," The Hypnomaster declared. "You copy technique principles and mechanisms before recreating your opponent's technique by understanding the principles by reading their mind and replicating those principles by virtue of already having mastered the principles of all orthodox Martial Art fields. It would not violate the terms of this battle."

This was quite a beneficial ruling for Ieyasu, it meant that he was quite suited for the terms of this battle.

Neither side had any more questions.

"Hohoho..." Master Zeamer put some distance between himself and the two with an eager and excited smile. "Take your stances."

Both sides took neutral non-committal stances. Their eyes narrowed as their focus sharpened.

The air grew taut, wrung by the force of their minds.

A maelstrom of pressure brewed in the atmosphere.

Doom and calamity struck the hearts of the few sentient creatures in the bizarre ecosystem of the clouds.

The cloud hornets inside the cloud grew agitated, panicking in fear of the unseen threats.

"Begin," Master Zeamer's voice cut through everything, commencing the battle.

BADUMP!

The two young men activated their Martial Hearts. An immense surge of power flowed through their bodies as they leaped at each other with a blazing speed, leaving behind infernos generated by their sheer speed!

BAM BAM BAM BAM!

The two men exchanged a flurry of blows at blinding speeds.

Not even a millisecond had passed, yet the first bout had already been concluded. Yet, the same could certainly not be said about the fight, as the two surged back in for a second round.

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM!

Fists surged forward. Kicks swung forth. The two young men exchanged a flurry of blows on the surface, seemingly going all out in a brawl. Yet all of this was nothing more than just an exercise of evaluation.

What appeared as a fierce battle to the untrained eye was merely them feeling each other out in combat.

Not a single technique had been activated

That soon changed.

Ieyasu activated a breathing technique before a wave of strength washed over his entire body, increasing the speed and power of his strikes. His stance and balance shifted while his arms and legs turned, facing Rui like a compass pointing north.

He had deigned to employ a new Martial Art.

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

Rui grimaced as he did his best to mitigate the powerful blows of what appeared to be a heavy and simple offense-oriented Martial Art. Given that the Hypnomaster did not object to Ieyasu's application of this technique, it must have been something he copied after becoming a Martial Senior.

He was not content taking such damage from Ieyasu, thankfully, he didn't need to be.

Rui activated his Breathing Crucifix technique, the hypnotic technique that he had created to hamper offense-oriented Martial Artists. In his mind, a powerful hypnotic spiral identical to Hypnomaster's Martial Embodiment was generated.

It could not be ignored.

Ieyasu exerted tremendous self-control to avoid turning to the right and leaping away to the left. Yet even if he could control his body, he could not control the impact and significance of the pressure, that he felt from the right side, in his mind.

It wasn't by too much, but his consciousness had been drawn away.

And that was enough.

BAM!!

Rui landed an immensely powerful on the man's abdomen, flinging him away. The man grimaced, choking. Not just because Rui landed a powerful clean blow, but also because his breathing technique had been disrupted.

His eyes widened.

His breathing technique had been disrupted?

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM!

Ieyasu gritted his teeth, balling up as he resisted Rui's onslaught. Rui refused to give him even a moment to psychologically acclimatize to the effects of Breathing Crucifix.

Attack after attack, Rui bombarded him with a flurry of attacks. Each attack weaved through his guard, aiming to strike a vital. Each attack demanded his attention. Ieyasu could barely focus on the bizarre breathing impediment that he had been hit with.

Yet the truth was clear.

Rui had activated a technique that attacked his breathing. It had crippled breathing, making it more laborious, and also had effectively sealed off all breathing techniques.

WHOOSH!

'Poison...?' Ieyasu wondered, dodging a blow from Rui, before narrowing his eyes. 'No... under these circumstances, it can only be one thing.'

A hypnotic technique.

Ieyasu's eyes narrowed. He knew that Rui's mind was extraordinarily powerful, so much so that simply trying to read all the conscious cognition that Rui exposed inside that absurdly giant palace in his head

had strained his mind. It had been like trying to read a book by skimming through its pages in a few seconds.

What would happen if such a powerful mind mastered hypnosis?

'It may very well become an unstoppable force. A force of mind.' Ieyasu gritted his teeth as he struggled with all his might to dispel the effects of Breathing Crucifix.

While decisively inferior to Rui's, his mind was not ordinary either. He employed all the anti-hypnosis training he had gone through, he was determined to break out of this spell.

Chapter 1468: Pain

"What is the point of this training, Master Zeamer?" Ieyasu asked his Master many years ago.

The two sat opposite each other, meditating.

"To help you defend your mind from external hypnotic influences," Master Zeamer replied simply. "This training will help you break out hypnotic techniques to a certain limit.

"Certain limit?"

"Mmm. Some hypnotic techniques are too powerful," Master Zeamer had remarked.

"What can I do to break out of such powerful techniques if this training fails?"

Master Zeamer considered his question for a moment before laughing heartily.

"Nothing."

BOOM!

Ieyasu blocked a powerful blow from Rui with a severe expression as he recalled what Master Zeamer had told him many years ago. His breathing was labored, preventing him from drawing out his full power. It certainly prevented him from activating even a single breathing technique.

It made him weaker.

Slower.

Tired.

His lungs felt like they were bound by powerful adhesives, restricting all movement. His body felt like a hill weighed it down. His entire body gasped for oxygen alongside his strained lungs.

Yet had he been one to let such a hurdle impede him, he would have never made it this far.

BOOM!

CRACK

Rui's eyes widened as he felt a sharp pain on his hand as it crashed into Ieyasu's elbow. He had thrown a powerful chop aimed at his neck, yet Ieyasu merely shifted.

He shifted ever so slightly across his entire body, and before Rui knew it, his palm found itself crashing into the man's elbow.

Yet that wasn't enough to stop Rui.

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM!!

His eyes narrowed as he surged forward with extreme speed. A tsunami of attacks crashed into Ieyasu.

Yet Ieyasu parried every single one of them away. Rui was unable to use Outer Convergence, Reverberating Lance, or even a breathing technique to aid his power. On the other hand, while Ieyasu couldn't even breathe properly, let alone use breathing techniques, he still had other supplementary techniques that he could use to amplify power, ones that he had copied in the past four years.

Rui narrowed his eyes as he pushed himself to the very limit.

His bones creaked.

His muscles burned.

His flesh stung.

His body shook with sheer effort.

And yet...

STEP

His eyes widened as Ieyasu began stepping closer to him. Despite the barrage of attacks that Rui inflicted on him, he was unshaken. Not only was he unshaken, he even began walking towards Rui.

STEP

STEP

STEP

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM!!

Rui gritted his teeth as he blasted Ieyasu with even more attacks, yet man's defensive prowess could not be underestimated. His body had been forged with countless conditioning principles and training methodologies in an effort to be able to copy any and all conditioning-based techniques, far more than Rui had ever been subjected to.

His defense was impregnable.

At least, against Rui's hampered physical power, it was not going to break any time soon.

Or so he thought.

BOOM!!!

"Rgh!" Ieyasu grimaced in excruciating pain as what felt like a titanic blow crashed into his guard. His body reeled in shock as a tremendous impact reverberated across his entire body.

BOOM BOOM BOOM!!

He gritted his teeth as he used a copied defensive Martial Art to hold off Rui's titanic blows. Yet despite the best defenses he could muster, each and every attack that struck him, burned him with pain.

It was as though Rui suddenly became exponentially more powerful!

BOOOM!!

He grimaced in excruciating pain, yet his mind retained enough clarity to derive insights into his current circumstances.

'This isn't real... There is no way this is real.' He gritted his teeth. 'This is such an absurdly powerful supplementary technique that would make even grade-ten techniques look incompetent. This must also be...'

He had already realized the truth. However, he also realized that knowing the truth didn't matter. The subconscious mind did not care whether the pain was real or fake, it commanded Ieyasu to avoid it, forcing him to act sub-optimally.

A command he was unable to refuse!

BAM BAM BAM!

Rui grinned like a shark at the sight as he bombarded Ieyasu with Phantom Pain, the pain-inducing hypnotic technique that would generate the illusion that Rui was striking his victim a hundred times harder than he actually was.

The nervous system and the phenomenon known as pain were governed by rules that had been put in place after billions of years of evolution. It was precisely because these rules had been put in place and reinforced by eons of natural selection that they were almost impossible for the conscious mind to break.

It did not matter if Ieyasu knew that it was an illusion, as long as his subconscious mind was convinced that it was real by the hypnosis, he would be forced to cower as though he was taking real damage.

His subconscious mind forced his body to retreat and cower, despite his hatred of such conduct.

BOOM!

Rui blasted him with another blow grinning even wider than before. His fist surged forward, crashing into Ieyasu's guard.

BOOM!!

Rui's leg had already spurred into action before Ieyasu could even recover from the previous blow, crashing into his knee.

BOOM!!!

"Rgh!" Ieyasu grimaced as he subconsciously shirked underneath the strike. He felt as though Rui had forcefully wrenched and torn his knee joint apart grinding the flesh together, causing twisted agony the likes of which he hadn't experienced since the Squire evolution breakthrough.

He fell down to a knee when Rui saw a chance to end the match. A powerful weighted kick surged forward, lashing out to crash at his head.

It was a game-ender.

Or at least, it would have been, had it landed.

WHOOSH!

Rui's eyes widened as his attack crashed into nothing.

Ieyasu had disappeared.

SPLAT!

Rui turned around as he grimaced, leaping away as he felt a flesh wound emerging on his back.

"If I cannot defend, then I will simply evade," Ieyasu declared as he rushed after Rui at a blinding speed!

The highly realistic excruciating pain had crippled Ieyasu's defense since his subconscious mind refused to allow him to defend properly, insisting that he avoid confronting it.

Thus, Ieyasu simply obeyed. He switched gears, using a maneuvering Martial Art that he had copied in the past year to confront Rui with evasion as a solution to his offense instead of defense.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH

Ieyasu effortlessly weaved away from Rui's strikes with ease. Rui narrowed his eyes, pain could only be generated if his strikes landed on Ieyasu, which was a requirement for the pain to be realistic and believable.

He had gone on to add illusionary elements that mimicked impact that made his body feel rocked by force the same way it would if it had been struck by an actually powerful force of the same caliber as the one he was pretending he could launch.

Yet if Ieyasu simply evaded the blows, then the technique was useless.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!!

Ieyasu wormed his way past Rui's offense, rushing in to land his piercing technique.

Yet Rui had no intention of letting him.

BAM!

A short and swift blow landed on Ieyasu as he lost control of his body, crashing a long way across the cloud arena. He quickly got up in confusion, surprised at what had just happened.

Before he had known it, his body had gone out of control and Rui had somehow managed to cleanly land a strike on him. Yet he got only a moment to consider it before Rui had arrived with a speeding charge.

BAM!

Ieyasu grimaced as Rui somehow managed to land a blindingly fast attack on him, yet when he charged forward to maneuver around and land a blow, the most inexplicable outcome happened.

BOOM....BAM...POW!

His body launched itself flying before he could even react, crashing across the cloud arena before he could even control his trajectory.

'I...can't control my speed. It's too fast.' Ieyasu's eyes widened as realization dawned on him, glancing at Rui. 'You bastard.'

Rui surged forth with rapid speed with a demonic grin as he blasted Ieyasu with a flurry of blows that were nothing short of blinding to Ieyasu. The latter grimaced as he balled up, enduring Rui's blows to the best of his ability.

if not for the fact that Rui had not mastered any offensive Martial Art techniques in the past year, Ieyasu would have been overwhelmed by now. Yet the fact that Ieyasu could actually use physical Martial Art techniques while Rui couldn't was a huge advantage that not even the Hypnomatrix could overwhelm quickly.

Nonetheless, Rui was extremely pleased with the results that the Hypnomatrix had displayed. The third hypnotic technique that he had created, Temporal Disharmony, was a perfect counter to speed and maneuvering.

Ieyasu had displayed some powerful speed and maneuvering techniques that he must have copied in the past four years, yet this one technique had completely sealed all of them, making them obsolete.

Breathing Crucifix

Phantom Pain

Temporal Disharmony

The three techniques of the initial iteration of the Hypnomatrix were a spectacular success, Ieyasu had failed to overcome a single one of them while using the Martial Art that they were expressly used to counter.

It meant that they had achieved their purpose.

His victory was close to secured.

Or so he thought.

SPLAT!

Rui's eyes widened Ieyasu's right hand which had buried itself in Rui's abdomen.

"Did you think I could be defeated so easily?" Ieyasu's eyes burned with determination.

BOOM!!

Rui defended himself from the powerful blow, grimacing deeply as he was flung away. He had barely managed to suppress Ieyasu's power with Breathing Crucifix, reducing the speed and power of the blow. It was the only reason he was not knocked out.

However, his mind lingered on something more important.

A shocking discovery.

Yet Ieyasu did not give him any time to ponder it. He flashed forward towards Rui with the speed of the copied maneuvering Martial Art, before landing an attack from the offensive Martial Art onto Rui's guard.

Rui grimaced with shock as did his best to resist the power of two Martial Art. He activated Breathing Crucifix and Temporal Disharmony simultaneously at fifty-percent intensity each, before throwing a powerful blow at Ieyasu's jaw, looking to knock him out.

CRACK!

Rui's eyes widened as his fist crashed into the man's rock-solid elbows, causing a fracture across his knuckle.

This was the copied defensive Martial Art from before.

That confirmed Rui's suspicion.

"You..." He murmured, leaping away. "You're merging all three copied Martial Art into a single Martial Art!"

Ieyasu smiled, much to the shock of Rui and Master Zeamer. Neither of them had seen him do that even once in the past two years. Yet it appeared that not even he could resist the ecstatic satisfaction of progress.

"You are the first to face the first elementary prototype of my Martial Mind," Ieyasu informed him as he walked over. "My Martial Path is no longer imitative evolution... It has evolved."

He stared into Rui's eyes. "It has evolved to a higher state thanks to the power of Mind. My Martial Path... is assimilative evolution."

Rui's eyes widened with shock. "What?!"

Yet, Ieyasu had no interest in elaborating. He simply rushed forward with the incredible speed of the copied maneuvering Martial Art, while preparing attacks of the offensive Martial Art, while simultaneously maintaining the active defenses of the defensive Martial Art.

Rui's expression grew more grave as his eyes narrowed. He had countless questions, but he put them aside for now. If he did not do something about the extreme threat that Ieyasu in his current state represented, then he was bound to lose.

He had already used all three hypnotic techniques simultaneously to counter the offense, defense, and maneuvering Martial Art that Ieyasu was simultaneously using. Yet that meant that the potency of each technique was reduced to one-third its original potency.

The techniques were meant to be low-effort in the first place, being further reduced by two-thirds meant that their impact on Ieyasu was a lot more limited individually.

His breathing was hampered.

His cognition was hampered.

His body burned with pain.

Yet each of them was more manageable even if their net product was the same as before. Ieyasu, on the other hand, seemed to have grown thrice as strong!

BAM BAM BAM!

Chapter 1470: Card

BAM BAM BAM!

A flurry of strikes crashed into Rui's defense of a guard and Adamant Reforging. The only reason Rui hadn't gone down despite Ieyasu's many physical techniques was because of the three mental

techniques of the Hypnomatrix. If not for it, the gap in physical techniques would have completely taken him down in a short amount of time.

But Phantom Pain, Breathing Crucifix, and Temporal Disharmony were so powerful despite Rui's lacking efforts that they could even compensate for what was otherwise a large gap between them.

BAM!

Rui's eyes widened with shock as Ieyasu grew even stronger, integrating yet another Martial Art into his hybrid Martial Art, gaining even more techniques to stack.

BAM!

An even more powerful blow from Ieyasu punted Rui away across the cloud field, leaving him reeling. Never before had he wanted to use the VOID algorithm to build a predictive model than he did now. But alas, he couldn't, he most certainly had not developed the pattern recognition model in the past four years.

Thankfully, Ieyasu could not use his mind-reading technique either, among other things.

However, he still had one more ace up his sleeve that he had yet to deploy.

BAM!

Rui leaped back, minimizing the impact as his eyes were fixed on his opponent. He was waiting for the right moment to go all out. Timing was everything.

BAM BAM BAM!

He shielded himself from several blows, leaping away even as Ieyasu caught, keeping up with him.

WHOOSH

Rui rolled to the side, avoiding a hammer kick before launching a powerful kick to Ieyasu's torso.

POW!

The man guarded his attack, grimacing in pain. Although the intensity of the pain had lowered to a third of the original intensity, it was still excruciatingly painful. Furthermore, Rui had developed the technique such that it would generate the sensation that he was being rocked by his attack.

BAM BAM BAM!

Ieyasu gritted his teeth, pushing through the pain as he continuously bombarded Rui with blow after blow. His attacks grew more vigorous as he grew more accustomed to the impediments that Rui had forced onto him.

The deterioration of his offense and speed was highly unpleasant, but the fact of the matter was that Rui had managed to show him down and soften his strikes enough that he barely held a meager advantage, at most.

BAM BAM BAM!!

Rui grimaced under the increasing weight of his strikes. The man seemed to grow stronger as he better integrated the Martial Art that he had copied in the past four years.

BOOM!

A powerful kick launched Rui away as he just barely managed to defend to mitigate the damage.

"Hoho!" The Hypnomaster exclaimed while sitting in the sky a considerable distance away as he observed. An expression of excitement, enthusiasm, and intrigue covered his face as he watched his two pupils go all out in an intense fight.

Suddenly, the air changed.

Ieyasu's expression grew more grave. "Enough. Time to put this to an end."

He exhaled deeply before inhaling as much as he could to the best of his ability under his restrained circumstances. A great amount of power surged across his entire body. Rui could feel the sheer amount of energy brimming underneath his flesh.

He took a dashing stance, aiming for Rui, before launching himself forward.

WHOOSH!

He closed the distance rapidly, approaching Rui at incredible speeds.

BAM!

An immensely heavy blow crashed into Rui's guard as Ieyasu passed him, leaving him reeling and unbalanced. For just the briefest of moments, Rui was off-guard.

And that was all Ieyasu, needed.

BAM BAM BAM!!

He pummeled Rui with a barrage of heavy blows, bruising and cutting him significantly as he pummeled Rui away.

BOOM!

A powerful kick crashed into Rui's guard, flinging him away completely open. Ieyasu activated his charging technique one last time.

It was a game-ending attack.

WHOOSH!

He shot across the cloud battlefield. The sheer speed at which he launched himself disintegrated the cloud bedrock beneath his feet. Countless sonic booms and shockwaves were left in his wake. The sheer skies incinerated as several infernos enveloped them furiously.

BOOM!!!

The sheer momentum of the blow meant that it could easily qualify as a finisher as long as it had been well-timed.

And it certainly had.

Rui stood at his spot.

He didn't so much as move.

It was Ieyasu who collapsed, coughing a spout of blood. A deep bruise began forming on his abdomen. His breathing was more labored than it had been in the entire fight. "Damn you..."

Rui turned to face him. His body was significantly lighter than it had been before, a surge of energy flew through it. The upgraded Godspeed technique retained all of the speed of its original while using hypnosis-induced slowing down of his perception of time to allow him to keep up with his body.

He had simply sidestepped out of the way, throwing the simplest of blows at the right time and place.

BOOM!!

An immensely powerful kick crashed into Ieyasu's jaw, leaving him dizzy. Yet Rui didn't want to leave anything to chance, he continued to bombard Ieyasu with a barrage of blows to his vitals, refusing to allow him to use more techniques than he already had.

POW!

A simple blow to the jaw caused the blunt force trauma to exceed a certain threshold.

THUD

Ieyasu collapsed to the ground unconscious.

For a moment, there was complete silence on the battlefield, before Master Zeamer broke it as he descended. "Very well done. The victory is yours. This old man is grateful for the incredibly entertaining fight. You sure did fight reserved, didn't you?"

"I wanted to use my Godspeed technique to produce the best outcome. So I had to wait for a particularly decisive moment," Rui replied, narrowing his eyes. "Godspeed doesn't have longevity, especially the upgraded version. Had I used it normally, there's a chance I would have lost. Especially because he kept integrating more Martial Art and techniques to improve his style."

Rui stared at the unconscious Ieyasu, in thought. "How can a Martial Path undergo such a drastic change? I thought it was the crystallization of one's being. It doesn't seem like Ieyasu has changed in any way at all, yet his Martial Path has gone from imitative evolution to assimilative evolution. This should be impossible."