

Martial Unity 441

Chapter 441: Interrogation

In the middle of that ordeal, she threw him a simple question.

"Have you fulfilled the two conditions of Squire candidacy?" She asked him straightforwardly.

"I have," Rui truthfully answered. She peered at his reactions with her sharp eyes, discerning every detail. Rui felt transparent, for the first time.

"Tell me about your Martial Art and your Martial Path."

Rui paused for a moment as he contemplated his answer.

What could he even say on the spot to such a request?

"My Martial Path is adaptive evolution. My Martial Art allows me to adapt my combat style and all of my movements to suit my opponent's, Martial Art." He replied, pausing before continuing. "In its most ideal state, I would be able to adapt to any form of opposition of any kind in combat. However, unfortunately, I'm far away from achieving that goal. I have yet to develop solutions against many fields of Martial Art, several domains and different kinds of opponents as well."

"An ambitious goal, no doubt." She commented. "How do you hope to go about it?"

Rui paused. This alone was more than he would tell most people, but this was clearly part of the test. "By expanding the diversity of my capabilities. Every Martial Art has a unique solution, the greater the diversity of my capability, the greater the number of Martial Art I can adapt to."

He didn't mention adapting the VOID algorithm to the world of Gaia, although it was relevant. It was difficult to explain the VOID algorithm to people of this world, let alone explain its flaws. He couldn't very well tell her that the VOID algorithm was a relic from a different world that was limited to the previous and needed to be adapted adequately to suit this world.

"I see..." She appeared deep in thought. "That will take a long time to achieve."

"Most likely," Rui admitted. "Yet, I intend to see it through to the very end."

"That's quite admirable of you." She replied. "Do you remember the moment you felt the maturation of your Martial Art?"

"Vividly." Rui nodded. "It was like time slowed down, and an immense wave of clarity washed over me. I felt ready to step into a higher Realm of power."

"When did the moment happen?" She asked.

"Very recently, a few days ago," Rui replied. "It happened in the middle of combat. I had been beset by targeted attacks from ten Martial Artists across three nations on the battlefield. The situation was dire and I had been pushed to my very limit. For a moment there I had been forced to use all of my Martial Art, every maneuvering technique, every supplementary technique, every offensive, and defensive technique. It was at that moment that I had an epiphany."

"Are you ready for a higher Realm of power?" She asked him.

Rui paused for a moment. "As ready as I'll ever be."

She stared at him.

Suddenly, the pressure she exerted on him was gone.

"Okay, that concludes the test." She nodded. "In my evaluation as a mind-sensory Martial Squire, you are indeed qualified to undergo the breakthrough to the Squire Realm."

"Mind sensory Martial Squire?" Rui echoed with raised eyes.

"It's a very niche field, an overlap of the sensory Martial Art techniques and mental techniques." She explained. "It allows me to peer into the mind of my target to a certain degree. Most applications of my Martial Art are purely combat-oriented. But it is quite useful in circumstances like these, where the state of a Martial Apprentices mind is required to be verified by a credible and reliable source."

"So you verified that I am a Squire candidate through those techniques?" Rui asked, incredulous.

She nodded. "Indeed. I verified that you have the mental fortitude to at the very least not be guaranteed to die to the procedure due to being too weak. Furthermore, I have verified the stability of your Martial Path as well as the sincerity of your recounts."

Rui's eyes rose up in interest. He had never seen a mind-sensory Martial Squire before. It was a fascinating concept to him.

He wondered if he could master some mind-sensory techniques. Although he had no affinity for sensory techniques, he certainly did have some affinity for mental techniques. Surely that meant he would have a certain degree of affinity to an overlap of mental techniques and sensory techniques, right?

Squire Deria had mentioned most of the applications of her Martial Art were meant for combat. He wondered what that would actually look like in practice. He wasn't entirely sure, but he had a few guesses regarding what she meant.

For example, he would be quite surprised if there weren't techniques that allowed the user to sense the intentions of their opponent, one way or another. Although such a technique would undoubtedly be extremely high-grade. He would expect there to be a technique that allowed the user to sense the weaknesses of their opponent via a mind-sensing technique. There probably were techniques that allowed the user to sense the kind of Martial Art their opponent had.

Of course, this was all merely conjecture, but these were the kinds of techniques he pictured when he thought about mental sensory techniques.

('I'll definitely have to look into this intersecting specialty when I become a Martial Squire.') Rui mused.

He instinctively felt that there probably was something that would aid his Martial Art significantly. After all, the mental sensory technique was a niche field that allowed the user to gain information about their opponent in a very unique and special way. Considering the fact that his Martial Art heavily relied upon gathering information about his opponent, it was quite likely there was something that could at the very least supplement his information-gathering ability on his opponent. He would be quite surprised if there wasn't a technique that could aid in the creation of the predictive model or the execution of the predictive model to predict the movements of his opponent.

Chapter 442: Briefing

"So, is the examination complete?" Rui asked.

"The analyst team will be cross-referencing my results with the data gathered by all the sensors." She replied. "They aren't just for show. However, those are only extra precautions that the Martial Union is taking to make sure beyond any shadow of a doubt that you are a Squire candidate."

"What follows from here?" Rui asked.

"Once they have verified your status as a Squire candidate, the actual briefing on the process will begin." She explained. "Once that's done, you will need to go through a few procedures that are necessary for the breakthrough to the Squire Realm."

"How long will the verification of my status as a Squire candidate take?" Rui wondered, curious.

"Should be done within a day." She replied. "I need to file a report regarding my examination of you, the analytics department will verify my evaluation along with the data the sensors gathered on you. Together, the truth will become irrefutably clear. The Martial Union will contact you when the results have been evaluated."

"Alright." Rui nodded.

He bade her farewell and returned to the Quarrier Orphanage, waiting patiently with high expectations. Sure enough, as Squire Deira told him, the Martial Union messaged him several hours within the day.

[Apprentice Rui Quarrier,

We write to inform you that the evaluation of your Squire candidacy examination has been completed. You have successfully passed and are now officially acknowledged as a Squire candidate. Your application for the breakthrough procedure to the Squire Realm has been processed and accepted. You may debrief yourself at the Hajin branch office of the Martial Union by an official at a time of your convenience.

Regards,

The Martial Union]

Rui didn't even hesitate.

He immediately returned to the Martial Union.

"Excuse me." He addressed one of the receptionists. "I received a message from the Martial Union stating that I was evaluated as a Squire candidate, and thus I could apply for being debriefed on the breakthrough process to the Squire Realm. I would like to proceed with that."

"That is correct." She said. "You can undergo a briefing session if you have been accepted as a Squire candidate and have applied for the breakthrough process to the Squire Realm. May I have your Martial license?"

She plucked the card from Rui as she ran the details through her terminal.

"You have indeed been evaluated to be a Squire candidate. Please wait while I make the arrangements for the briefing session."

Rui nodded.

Surprisingly, it didn't take them long at all.

"Apprentice Quarrier? The preparations for the briefing session have been made. Please head to presentation room thirty-eight. You will be met with a support staff member who will explain the process to you."

Thankfully, it didn't take much time until he got there, despite the size of the branch office of the Martial Union.

What he didn't expect was a Martial Squire waiting for him instead of the promised support staff member when he entered the room.

His presence was loud and eye-drawing. He did his best to restrict and halt his aura, yet Rui's keen senses and powerful mind instantly discerned his identity.

"Apprentice Quarrier." He said. "You have arrived. Let us begin immediately. I am Squire Gunther, and I have taken the liberty of handling your briefing myself when I received the notification that you were to be briefed on the breakthrough procedure to the Squire Realm."

Soon, Rui found himself seated at the front row of a desk as the Martial Squire finished loading up the projector.

Rui wasn't a fool. The fact that a Martial Squire had shown up for a simple briefing session was not random. It was a sign that demonstrated the value that the Martial Union put in Rui. Otherwise, it was inconceivable that a Martial Squire would go out of their way to provide a service that would otherwise be handled by ordinary support staff.

Still, he almost wished that he had gotten ordinary treatment, it was a little burdening and shackling having a Martial Squire to do this.

"The breakthrough to the Squire Realm, as you have realized by now, is not a natural spontaneous phenomenon that occurs to a Martial Apprentice. Unlike the discovery of the Martial Path, the breakthrough to the Squire Realm is entirely man-made." He explained.

Rui nodded, acting surprised and intrigued. He had expected to hear a lot of the same old stuff, yet he added something that made him knit his eyes in confusion.

"The breakthrough to each Realm requires the discovery of an important part of every Martial Path. The breakthrough to the Apprentice Realm requires the discovery of the Martial Path." She told him. "However, the breakthrough to the Squire Realm requires the discovery of the Martial body."

Rui's eyes lit up in interest at those words. ('The discovery of the Martial body... So that's how they've chosen to frame it?')

"The discovery of the Martial body...?" He probed.

"The Martial body is the body that Martial Squires acquire from the breakthrough process. It is effectively a brand-new body with superhuman physical prowess. One that is catered to suit your Martial Art and your Martial Path."

He began explaining the mechanisms and principles of the breakthrough to the Squire Realm.

Rui oohed and aahed as he did his best to appear surprised and shocked. He also threw in a fair bit of confusion, after all, he was supposed to be a Martial Artist in a world with an already poor scientific background.

"The details, frankly, don't matter." He waved his hand. "No Martial Artist truly understands the core of the science behind the breakthrough."

"Truly fascinating." Rui nodded. He probably understood the principles behind the breakthrough better than anyone else in the world did.

"All you truly need to know is that the procedure evolves your body, but there will still be a possibility of death, and a guaranteed tremendous amount of suffering." He explained. "The effectivity of pain-relieving medication and drugs is non-existent. You will need to bear the pain."

Chapter 443: Configuration

"How high of a risk is death?" Rui asked.

He had previously been under the impression that becoming a Squire candidate got rid of all the risks of the procedure.

"Not insignificant, that's for sure." He sighed.

"I thought the point of the first condition of Squire candidacy was to ensure that the subject survived the procedure." Rui probed.

"The first condition of Squire candidacy is the bare minimum to ensure you won't automatically die due to brain death due to the procedure." He explained. "There is no way to guarantee the absolute success of the procedure, not without extraordinarily high-grade potions and things of that nature. Certainly things beyond your reach as a Martial Apprentice."

"I see..." Rui pondered deep in thought.

"Each Martial body is usually perfectly tailored to suit the Martial Apprentice and their Martial Art and Martial Path of the Martial Apprentice in question." He told Rui. "We do this by allowing the user to experience a taste of what the Squire Realm is like through certain hallucinogens and hypnosis techniques."

"What?" Rui's eyes widened in surprise. "I need to be drugged and hypnotized in order for me to discover my Martial body?"

Squire Gunther nodded. "The goal is to figure out exactly what kind of Martial Art body is best suited to your Martial Art and your Martial Path. There is an endless kind of bodies that can be forged by adjusting the process and changing several parts of it. It is possible to obtain a heavy body with high muscular and bone mass relative to net body mass. It is possible to obtain a light nimble body that places weight on speed, agility, and mobility at the expense of power and durability. It is possible for the procedure to be adjusted such that the Martial body obtained is a perfect all-rounder."

The biggest problem in such a case was figuring out the most optimal configuration and balance for each particular Squire candidate in question. If the wrong configuration was applied, then the Martial Path of the Martial Artist in question would forever be ruined by a Martial body that conflicts with their Martial Path.

That was why the Martial Union had invested an immense amount of research and development funding into this matter so that Martial Artists had a more reliable and less risky route of breaking into the Squire Realm.

The most effective solution in the modern era was the process of mental induction by a combination of hallucinogens and hypnosis.

It wasn't easy to hypnotize a Martial Apprentice, least of all Rui. The hallucinogens reduced the resistance and made it easier to exercise imagination, all it did was require a powerful suggestion to allow the user to imagine exactly what it was like to possess a different body.

It was this out-of-world experience that worried the authorities of most nations had resulted in the plan to simply ban all of the relevant hallucinogens.

However, it was quite useful in allowing the Martial Apprentices to experience the hallucinogen with realistic Martial bodies before the actual breakthrough procedure. This was effectively highly altered experiences of reality that were often bad, but often could be useful when used correctly.

"Are the effects of the drugs and hypnosis harmless and temporary?" Rui asked sternly.

His mind was extraordinarily important to him, more so than any other part of his body, he would watch his own body get annihilated before he allowed something to happen to his mind.

"The procedure is harmless with no permanent influence on the body." He reassured.

Rui stared at him with stern eyes. "I have the Mindmirror Symbiote in my head, does that change anything at all?"

"Not at all." Squire Gunther replied "The procedure is verifiably for all kinds of Martial Art and Martial Path. It is a perfectly harmless procedure that does not negatively impact symbiotes in the body."

Rui looked unconvinced. "So what exactly are my tasks to do in this maelstrom of drugs and hypnosis?"

"Your goal is to experience the hallucinogenated state as well as the highly accurate and precise images and sensations of a completely different body" he explained. "Once you have locked down a general type of Martial body that you are looking for, your job is to narrow down the precise and exact kind of Martial body that clicks with you and your Martial Art. Once you have done that, your initial goal will be quite complete."

"So... I'm just going to have to take some amount of drugs and be hypnotized in order to discover my Martial Art?" Rui asked.

"Well, not just some, but a fair amount is." He replied. "The worst part is not having as much agency as you'd like, it can be pushy on them. The drugs and hypnosis are absolutely necessary, furthermore, the value they provide exceeds any potential demerit that comes with them."

"So, how do I figure out whether a particular configuration is my particular Martial body or not?" Rui asked, testing him.

"Mostly by gaining experience with that particular configuration of physical parameters." He replied. "You'll know when you've run into the perfect body that suits you to the T."

"What happens if I don't find the ideal physical parametric configuration?" Rui asked.

"There exists a unique configuration of unique parameters for every Martial Apprentice." He reassured him. "All it takes is some amount of time and energy and dedication. However, when you hit the unique configurations of physical, you'll know for sure, and personally, it is an incredibly eye-opening experience."

"Once I've discovered my Martial body," Rui added. "How much time will it take before I'm ready for the actual procedure?"

"That depends on how complicated the kind of Martial body in question is, A strange and more exotic kind of Martial body to suit rare techniques is quite unusual, and is usually much harder to be able to replicate in reality. Depending on how strange or esoteric that is, it is something that can take some time for the Martial Union to fully figure out.

Chapter 444: Fortunate

"Hallucinogens and hypnosis, huh?" Rui murmured.

It seemed extreme at first, however, it made sense. It was very difficult to figure out the most optimal Martial body as far as the configuration of physical parameters went without something like this. How else could Rui personally experience a particular kind of Martial body?

The only other viable possibility was some kind of temporary-enhancement potion that enhanced his body in one particular kind of way that would allow him to experience a particular kind of body for him to decide whether or not he was compatible with that kind of body or not.

However, this was an incredibly expensive and wasteful solution. Temporary-enhancement potions were military assets that allowed ordinary trained humans to keep up with Martial Artists. They were not resources that could be splurged on training.

Hallucinogens and hypnosis techniques were much more pragmatic solutions to the problem.

They allowed Rui to experience various configurations of physical parameters inside a hypnotized hallucination. If he wanted, he could try out a power-defense configuration where his body was extremely big and muscular possessing great power and defense at the cost of speed. Or a speed-mobility configuration where his body was light and nimble, sacrificing power and durability for speed, agility, and mobility.

All inside his head.

"Alright." Rui nodded. "I understand."

"The discovery of the Martial body requires experiencing all kinds of Martial bodies, but the Martial Union has perfected the way of narrowing down on the ideal body for you. We begin by subjecting you to the configurations suited for every primary field. You will experience a Martial body suited for power, defense, speed, striking, grappling, and so on and so forth. Of the many basic templates, you can zero in on the types of body that suited you the most when you experienced them in the hallucination. From there will begin a process of adjustment. The bodies that you expressed compatibility with will be continuously adjusted with repeated refining until we hit the most optimal configuration suited for you." He explained.

"And that would bring us to the final procedure?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

Squire Gunther nodded in response. "The Martial Union will document the particular body that you experienced optimal compatibility with and will then devise a procedure in order to create an identical Martial body when you undergo the breakthrough to the Squire Realm."

"The procedure needs to be devised from scratch?" Rui asked.

Squire Gunther nodded in response. "Because the Martial body of each Martial Squire is unique, a unique procedure is required to achieve each of them. The procedure needs to be customized perfectly for you so that when you become a Martial Squire after the evolution procedure, your Martial body will be perfectly suited to you."

As Rui had expected, the Martial Union's breakthrough procedure to the Squire Realm was much more elaborate than the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana.

The Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana hadn't yet even conceived of the concept of customized evolution processes.

These processes were alterable and customizable because the evolution procedure worked by subjecting the Martial Apprentice to various procedures that caused cell death, round after round. The surviving cells would pass on the genes that allowed them to survive the procedure in the first place and the next generation of cells would be superior. That was how the evolution process functioned.

However, the degree to which the filtration processes caused cell death could be manipulated. A particular process that caused evolution to the toughness of the body could be reduced in exchange for

increasing a particular process that increased speed, resulting in a faster, but more fragile body. A particular process that evolved agility could be reduced for a particular process that evolved power, resulting in a slower but stronger body.

By increasing and reducing the timeframe of these procedures, different kinds of Martial bodies could be produced.

The Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana had only just very recently stumbled upon the secret to the Squire Realm. They had not yet devised a system that allowed each Martial Apprentice to obtain the perfect body when they broke through to the Squire Realm.

('Man, I'm so glad I'm born in the Kandrian Empire.') Rui sighed in relief.

Had he been born in the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana, he would have had to deal with inferior Squire breakthrough processes, however, that wasn't the worst part. The worst part was he would have had to deal with being given a body that doesn't align with his Martial Art and Martial Path.

Squire Caella Freelia, the successful Squire subject that the research facility had created, was supposed to be a defensive Martial Artist, yet her body was not aligned with that because the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana had not yet conceived of the idea of customized and personalized Martial bodies.

Her Martial Path was inadvertently ruined because of the inadequacy of the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana. In comparison, The Kandrian Martial Union had a strong foundation in that regard. Going so far as to develop procedures centered around hallucinogens and hypnosis techniques in order to make the very absolute best of the breakthrough to the Squire Realm. He was absolutely certain that the filtration processes that caused the evolution to occur over time were also likely to be far more effective and efficient, given the fact that the Martial Union had doubtlessly invested an immense amount of research into the matter.

After all, the quality of the breakthrough procedure to the Squire Realm decided the quality of not just Martial Squires but also the quality of Martial Artists of the higher Realms. It had already been made clear that the breakthrough to the Squire Realm was not something that could be undone or reversed, any flaws and shortcomings would bear down on the Martial Artist for the rest of their life. In a way, he had done a favor to Squire Caella, he would rather die than live with a ruined Martial Path.

Rui glanced at Squire Gunther.

"When can we begin the process?"

Chapter 445: Explanation

"Immediately, if you so wish." He replied. "Finding the right Martial body is something that requires time and exploration."

"How much time?" Rui asked, curious.

"Oh, it can vary wildly." He replied simply. "I think the minimum it has ever taken was a few days, and the maximum it took was a few months."

"A few months?" Rui frowned.

"Yes, we were dealing with a very fussy and indecisive Martial Apprentice." Squire Gunther nodded. "Lot of it depends on how much clarity you have with how you want your Martial Art to look at the end of your Martial Path. Usually, Squire candidates have very high clarity on exactly what is needed."

"I see." Rui absorbed the information he provided. "Can we begin the process right now then? I do not wish to waste any time before heading to the matter."

"Alright." He nodded. "The preparations have already been made. I won't be conducting the procedure, of course. It's a mostly medical procedure."

"A team is already prepared?" Rui's eyebrow rose. "That was remarkably quick. Wouldn't these things need to be booked days in advance?"

"It was." Squire Gunther sheepishly admitted. "The Martial Union expedited the process so that there would be as few delays as possible, back when you informed commissioner Feristen of your status as a Squire candidate."

Rui's eyebrow rose even higher. To think the Martial Union had gone this far the second he had off-handedly made that comment to commissioner Feristen after the Serevian Dungeon mission ended.

It was yet another reflection of how valuable he was to the Martial Union.

Of course, in hindsight, it was to be expected.

Rui's contributions to the Serevian Dungeon mission were beyond ridiculous. Furthermore, he had made major contributions to a mission that was of great importance to the Martial Union, making his feat all the more impactful on the relationship between himself and the Martial Union.

Commissioner Feristen had already informed him that he could basically ask for a favor from the Martial Union and they would help him out, within reason, of course. Rui still hadn't figured out what he would use the favor for. But frankly, there was no real hurry.

It was a valuable one-time opportunity, he ought to use it for something important, significant, and something only the Martial Union could do.

That instantly disqualified all of his ideas. He had initially considered requesting the Martial Union for waiving his loan, however, he quickly dismissed it as a stupid idea. His income was tremendous as a Martial Apprentice, and although his loan was by no means little, it was static because there was no interest.

Meaning, he would absolutely repay his loan. There was no doubt about that. In that case, there was no point in wasting the favor on something that he was very confident of being able to accomplish by himself.

Was it worth using it on obtaining techniques?

Rui shook his head. Techniques could be purchased, unless it was some confidential technique, there was no point in wasting something that could straightforwardly be purchased.

('Besides, if I'm not wrong, from this point on, techniques are going to be increasingly less purchased and increasingly more developed instead.') Rui mused.

Although there were Squire-level techniques, things weren't nearly the same as it currently was with Apprentice-level techniques.

For one, every Martial Squire had a unique body. Meaning it was impossible for Squire-level techniques to be able to be universally applicable to each Martial Squire.

Furthermore, it was quite likely that no Squire-level technique as they were sold was completely compatible with every Martial Squire.

He recalled when Squire Dylan had told him there existed Squire-level versions of Apprentice-level techniques. He had taken it at face value back then, but of course, there was likely much more nuance to it than he had expected back then. Nuance Squire Dylan had chosen not to reveal because the breakthrough to the Squire Realm was still a secret from him back then.

The deeper down one's Martial Path one went down, the greater the individuality the Martial Art would possess, and the greater the individuality needed to make any progress down one's Martial Path. That was the reason that Rui

However, if it was true that purchasing and mastering Squire-level techniques was far more difficult and less viable, then it was even more unlikely that he would waste the favor on a technique.

He certainly didn't need it for the breakthrough to the Squire Realm either, since he could freely purchase it.

He couldn't really think of any favor he wanted that was important and also something that could only be completed with the help of the Martial Union. Thus far, he had led a relatively simple and normal life as far as Martial Artists went.

('Whatever.') He shook his head. ('I'll leave the matter for another day.')

It was best left for a rainy day when he would genuinely need the Martial Union's help over a matter with high stakes. He did not want to lose something important because he had already squandered his one-time favor on something unimportant.

"The preparations for the explorative process are complete." Squire Gunther nodded, interrupting Rui's reverie. "You will be notified and guided to the procedure room when it is time, which should be soon."

He turned to face Rui. "That brings us to the end of the briefing session. Goodbye, Apprentice Quarrier. I bid you a successful breakthrough to the Squire Realm."

"Thank you, Squire Gunther." Rui bowed as he expressed gratitude and respect to a Martial Artist of a higher Realm. A Realm that he hoped to be a part of soon.

Rui simply waited in the presentation room once Squire Gunther had left, waiting for the promised explorative process that would allow him to figure out the most optimal Martial body suited to him.

Before long, as promised, he received a message on his accouter as he was instructed to go to a particular operating room in question.

Chapter 446: Commencement

"Apprentice Quarrier." A doctor greeted him when he reached the designated room for the procedure to occur. "We've been expecting you. I am Doctor Herin. I will be overlooking the administration of the hallucinogens that you will be undergoing during the procedure."

"Pleasure to meet you, doctor. Will you be overlooking the procedure as a whole?" Rui asked.

"That would be me." A voice addressed him from behind, entering the room.

Rui didn't even need to turn to recognize the presence of the Martial Squire.

"I am Squire Luna." The old woman told him. "I will be overlooking the actual explorative procedure."

Accompanied her was a Martial Apprentice. Rui wasn't sure what his presence here was for, but he didn't question it.

"Pleasure to meet you." Rui greeted. "When can we begin the procedure?"

"Immediately." She replied, gesturing at a medical bed. "Lie down there."

"A few tests will be conducted to make sure you are fit for the procedure." Doctor Herin explained. "We will be subjecting you to hallucinogens, after all. It won't take much time at all, however."

"I understand," Rui nodded, as an interesting thought came to mind. "Do Martial Apprentices require an increased dosage of hallucinogens for them to be effective?"

He hadn't considered the possibility before, however, it was quite plausible. The brains of a Martial Apprentice were quite resilient in many ways, it was quite reasonable that this resilience extended to resistance influence of drugs such as hallucinogens.

"They do, actually." He replied. "We're giving you an increased dosage to achieve the desired level of influence, compared to normal humans."

This made sense, raising the dosage would definitely be needed if Martial Apprentices were indeed more resilient towards it.

"How do you know the exact dosage needed for me, in particular?" Rui asked.

Even if Martial Apprentices were more resilient, surely different Martial Apprentices had different degrees of resilience, which would then lead to different dosages needed for each of them.

"We have prepared the correct amount of dosage from the reports of your verification examination." The doctor explained patiently. "The data from the reports of your verification examination give us all the necessary information to accurately and precisely estimate the necessary amount of hallucinogens."

Rui's eyes lit up in interest as he pondered the implications of those words. This meant that from the data that verified that he had fulfilled both conditions of Squire candidacy, his resilience towards these drugs could be accurately estimated.

Squire Deira's report was likely to be too vague to provide them with something that specific. This led Rui to suspect that the metabolic data on him that had been acquired during the procedure was likely what allowed them to estimate the correct dosages.

He found it quite unlikely that the maturity of his Martial Art, which did not have a bearing on the state and nature of his mind, would be correlated with resilience. Thus, that meant that they must have used the data they had on him from the verification of the completion of the first condition of Squire candidacy.

The doctor proceeded to draw some blood, something that hadn't been done in the verification exam.

"It will take just a little time before the tests will be completed, you may, of course, leave and return, however, It is advised you wait," he explained friendlily.

Fortunately, the doctor was true to his word. The results of the test came back remarkably swiftly.

"There are no problems with the result, we are free to begin." The doctor confirmed as several nurses, as well as the Martial Squire and Apprentice gathered around.

Rui's limbs, neck, and head were locked in place.

"Are there any issues by having a Mindmirror Symbiote in this procedure?" Rui asked.

The Mindmirror Symbiote did not amplify his general base intelligence or capacities in any natural way. It could only aid the user in any way if the Mindmirror Symbiote is mentally embedded with the neurological processes of the particular task that the user wants augmented.

However, that only included neurological phenomena. Resistance to hallucinogens was not something that fell under neurological phenomena.

"The Mindmirror brain will come in contact with the hallucinogen, naturally, through your bloodstream. However, it's not conscious and cannot be a victim of hallucinogens, it simply is utterly incapable of falling for the hallucinogens and hypnosis." He explained. "After all, it does not possess a consciousness of its own."

"I see..." Rui digested the information. "Does the presence of the Mindmirror Symbiote interfere with the process?"

"Not at all, thankfully." The doctor sighed. "Alright, we will begin this process soon."

At those words, the Martial Apprentice arrived in front of him.

A breathing apparatus was immediately adjusted to his face, as the nurses strapped it to his head from behind.

"Once the hallucinogens are administered, the hypnosis will be immediately administered as well. Hypnosis is the means by which we control what you see in your hallucinations, allowing us to allow you to exist in several different bodies." The doctor explained.

Once that happened, Rui would get to experience different kinds of Martial bodies that he could potentially have. At his current stage, he was merely supposed to test and experiment with different bodies.

"Ah, you probably have been told prior, but remember." The doctor explained. "The flow of time inside your hallucinations under the influence of hallucinogens and hypnosis will be significantly slower than it normally is in real life. Meaning, you'll have plenty of time inside your own world to seek the Martial body that will become the body you'll have as a Martial Squire and for the higher Realms as well above."

"Above all." The Martial Squire interjected. "Be sure to be true to your true to your Martial Path, as long as you do this, Apprentice Rui Quarrier, you cannot go astray."

"Thank you for your encouragement." Rui nodded. "I'm ready. Please begin the process."

Suddenly, the sound of gas releasing hit them as Rui inhaled the hallucinogens.

The world went dark.

Chapter 447: Clash

"The hallucinogens have been administered." Doctor Herin nodded. "Subject is under the influence of the drugs."

"Begin." Squire Luna turned to the Martial Apprentice who had accompanied her.

"Yes, Squire Luna." He nodded as he walked over to beside Rui, kneeling down. He brought his mouth close to Rui's ear as he began whispering inaudibly.

It was an auditory hypnotic technique that manipulated the target's mind to alter their perception to a certain degree. Normally, it was something that was very partial in nature, however, due to the fact that Rui was already in a drug-induced hallucination, the technique worked entirely, allowing the Martial Apprentice to manipulate Rui's perception of not just the world, but himself.

('Woah.')

The pitch-black world turned white as Rui fell to hard ground.

As Rui tried to get up, he noticed something extremely strange.

('I'm heavy...')

He glanced at his arms. His eyes widened as he realized he was extremely muscular. His muscles bulged exaggeratedly, as though they were trying to break out of his body.

('Huh...')

He tried getting up, almost falling over due to a lack of familiarity with his body. Yet, he realized it didn't feel as alien as he had expected.

('Partly because this is inside my imagination, but also because it is still based on my memory of my body.') He mused.

It was the perfect way to test his compatibility with various kinds of bodies.

('As planned, the first Martial body configuration is a heavy-weight power and durability oriented Martial body that sacrifices speed.') He noted as he tried moving his arm around.

('I'm so ridiculously slow.') He groaned mentally, as he swung a few strikes, trying to gauge how the body actually performed.

His agility and speed were painful. He felt like a lumbering sloth compared to his actual body.

('Man, how the fuck do heavier Martial Artists deal with being this slow?') He groaned inwardly. ('This is criminal!')

Suddenly, a figure appeared before him.

It was a spitting image of his actual self.

This was something that Rui had been informed about ahead of time, so he wasn't too surprised. However, he undeniably felt a sense of déjà-vu.

('Didn't I go through something similar during the Mindmirror implantation procedure?') He recalled fighting himself back then, during that procedure as well.

Suddenly, his figure rushed towards himself with remarkable speed and agility. Yet Rui had expected that as well. He had already been informed about the details in the briefing session. The point of the procedure was to test how compatible a given Martial body was with his Martial Art compared to his current body.

Of course, Rui did not actually have any expectations that he would perform well with a heavy power-oriented and durability-oriented body. Yet, this was part of the standard procedure so he couldn't help but bear it.

He was already sure that his Martial body would be some configuration that would fall into the all-rounder category, however, he was required to test out Martial bodies of various kinds regardless, just to be sure.

BAM!

Rui barely managed to move his slow heavy body as he conjured up a guard, blocking the straight punch that his clone had thrown at him.

His clone had attacked with one of its most powerful attacks; the Flowing Canon. The attack was further boosted with Outer Convergence and Flame Breathing as far as power went, furthermore, the blow had been empowered by the momentum built up with Parallel Walk, Balanced Direction, and Wind Breathing. Furthermore, the impact had been permeated with the help of Reverberating Lance.

It was a devastating attack that when landed was extremely difficult to defend against.

Ordinarily, had Rui faced such an attack himself, he would have chosen to evade it rather than withstand it head-on. However, in his heavy and slow body, it was impossible for him to evade anything. He gritted his teeth as he used Inner Divergence, Acute Edge, and Elastic Shift to mitigate the damage of the attack. The Adamant Reforging seemed to have been retained even in the new Martial body that he currently had.

He skidded back a bit, surprised. The damage had been far less than he had expected. The raw durability was far greater than that of his actual body, allowing him to withstand an immense amount of punishment.

His clone began aggressively pummeling him with attacks. Rui immediately had to adjust his strategy, he aimed for a tight defense that required minimal movement in order to counter fake Rui's attacks.

However, that crippled his offense and gave fake Rui an immense amount of leeway, the latter's combat style grew more and more offensive as there was less the latter had to fear. Rui was at a disadvantage since his maneuvering techniques were basically useless, he had to try and stick with his offensive and defensive techniques whereas fake Rui was using everything in his arsenal.

('Almost everything.') Rui suddenly noted as he made an astute observation. ('He's not using the VOID algorithm... Not the predictive or the adaptive-evolution model.')

This told him a lot about the nature of the hallucination and the hypnosis. The fake Rui was clearly using his techniques, which meant that the hallucination being generated did tap into his mind for information on his Martial Art to a certain extent. However, the fact that his clone was not using the VOID algorithm, meant that the hallucination could not replicate the mental processes he engaged in when he fought.

The VOID algorithm was one such thing. Its requirement to actively gather and process information likely made it impossible for it to be replicated in a hallucination. This was quite distinct from the Mindmirror implantation process where the clone he faced mentally was able to replicate the VOID algorithm in combat against him.

('I'm at a disadvantage in so far as the compatibility of my body with my Martial Art is, but the fact that I can use the VOID algorithm and my hallucinated clone can't is more than enough of an advantage.') Rui grinned.

Chapter 448: Outcome

POW POW POW!

Fake Rui launched a barrage of swift jabs at Rui. The latter merely blocked them with a guard. With his current unnecessarily high defensive prowess, he needed much less effort in order to defend against other attacks effectively. This made defense more convenient, however, Rui still hated every moment of it.

He hated his lack of flexibility, both physically and tactically. He had no leeway to evade, he needed to defend every strike even though they weren't always the optimal move had he still had his all-rounder body.

He began relying increasingly more on his passive defense and natural defense rather than active defense. In his actual body, his raw durability wasn't high enough to rely more on it than more active defensive techniques like Inner Divergence. But in this body, its innate toughness meant that he had to worry less about getting hurt.

He had already begun gathering and processing fake Rui's data as the construction of the predictive model was already underway. It helped that he was quite familiar with his own move set, which hastened the construction of the predictive model.

POW!

BAM!

Rui gritted his teeth as he withstood an attack from fake Rui in exchange for launching his own. They both mutually bypassed the other's defense, yet the outcomes were different. Rui's strike was heavier because his hallucinated body was much more suited towards offense than fake Rui, while his body was more suited towards withstanding fake Rui's attack.

Although fake Rui was much faster, more mobile, and more agile than real Rui, it didn't seem to make too much of a difference. This was because Rui's timing and placement were more effective and efficient than fake Rui's. This was the difference that the VOID algorithm caused. Even a large speed and mobility gap caused by a difference in frames were still smaller than the advantage that the VOID algorithm granted Rui.

('Low kick, 92%.') His mind flashed as he planted his legs firmly and stabilized his balance. Ordinarily, he would have met low attacks with attacks that evaded them while also hitting his opponent, like flying knee kicks.

However, he wasn't as nimble as his actual self that would have been able to smoothly execute that attack. Instead, he relied on his power and defense in order to anchor himself strongly to the spot.

POW!

Fake Rui's kick stopped in its tracks, unable to so much as budge against Rui's body.

WHOOSH

Rui tried landing a strike on fake Rui, however, the latter was too swift for his slow self.

Rui found the experience more illuminating than he had expected it to be. The VOID algorithm was designed for an all-rounder body. A lot of the solutions provided by the adaptive evolution model were solutions that could only rely on the well-rounded nature of an all-rounder. This was the biggest incompatibility between his Martial Art and his body at this point in time.

Rui had to improvise. Because of his intimate understanding of the adaptive evolution model, he was able to understand which counters could be performed by his current Martial body and which ones couldn't. Every time the optimal counter to fake Rui's predicted move involved a lot of movement, speed, and agility, he simply replaced it with something that achieved as close to the effect as the original counter.

Normally, this was not something the VOID algorithm could handle, but with Rui's extreme understanding of the algorithm as the actual creator of the VOID algorithm, he knew exactly what wasn't the best counter-move for his current Martial body.

However, actually applying this knowledge in combat showed him the limits of the compatibility of any Martial body that wasn't an all-rounder. The VOID algorithm assumed competence in all basic fields of combat on Earth, at least.

BAM!

Rui managed to land a devastating uppercut on fake Rui despite the speed gap between them. Exploiting a mistake as well as perfect counters from the VOID algorithm allowed him to ensure that he was able to land a blow with great power on fake Rui.

THUD

Fake Rui collapsed to his knees, before falling down entirely, losing consciousness due to blunt-force brain trauma.

('Tsk.') Rui was displeased despite his victory. ('I would not have lost against me if I had been the fighting against myself with my actual body.')

The point of the procedure was to test the compatibility of different body types with that of the Martial Art of the user in comparison to the actual body of the user. However, if the fake version of himself was not even using the VOID algorithm, which was the core of his Martial Art, then the effectiveness of the procedure was at least halved.

He sighed, shaking his head. He had already long known that he would not be going for a heavyweight kind of body frame, so it didn't really matter.

All of a sudden, the world dissolved and he opened his eyes.

"How do you feel?" Doctor Herin asked as he flashed light on his eyes.

"Alright." Rui stretched a bit as he got up. "It was a strange experience, however, I confidently say that the heavyweight body type is certainly not suited for me."

"That is expected." Squire Luna nodded. "However, there are Martial Apprentices who have said something similar but ultimately found themselves to be wrong when they actually experienced the Martial body in the hallucinated hypnosis. The reason these are mandatory is that it is not uncommon for Martial Apprentices to have wrong conceptualizations on the compatibility of certain body types and their Martial Art."

"I understand." Rui sighed. He couldn't wait to reach the all-rounder part, he was pretty sure he would stick with an all-rounder body type, the question was the details of the physical parameters of his body. He wasn't sure if he would place absolutely equal weight on all physical parameters or perhaps lean a little more in the favor of certain kinds of Martial Art. He couldn't wait to find out.

Chapter 449: Second Round

"Your resistance towards mental techniques is quite remarkable, even for a Squire candidate." Squire Luna informed him. "Apprentice Frix here alone wasn't able to maintain the hypnosis because you were developing too much of a resistance, I had to step in personally."

"Ah..." Rui recalled that he was able to resist offensive mental techniques. He recalled the first round of the Martial Contest where he had fought against a mental technique Martial Artist. He had been able to dominantly resist the influence of mental techniques back then.

The reason he'd forgotten about it here was that he thought he needed to actively resist the mental technique for it to affect the procedure. However, it turned out that he was wrong, his passive mental defenses alone were enough to hinder the Martial Apprentice, to the point that a Martial Squire had to intervene for the hypnosis to still be effective on him.

"My bad," Rui added apologetically.

"It's not your fault." She waved her hand dismissively.

"Your condition is remarkably well." Doctor Herin added. "We can begin the next session immediately if you so wish."

Rui nodded in response. "Please do."

Preparations were made and Rui closed his eyes as the hallucinogens entered his system, affecting him.

When he opened his eyes, he had returned to the white world that seemed to expand infinitely.

('Woah.') He got up with a jump. He glanced at his thin arms, unsurprised. This time, he was hallucinating a lightweight body. The abrupt shift from heavyweight to lightweight had caused him to use too much force.

He hopped on his feet lightly, amazed at how nimble he was.

Suddenly, fake Rui appeared at a distance before him.

Rui grinned, dashing towards him. He moved with a speed and agility he could scarcely fathom, crossing the distance between them in just a moment.

POW POW POW!

He had launched a flurry of strikes at fake Rui with blinding speed and impeccable fluidity. Yet, fake Rui didn't even bother blocking them. Rui frowned as he realized his attacks were too weak.

Even when he used Outer Convergence, Flame Breathing, and Reverberating Lance, they were unable to overwhelm fake Rui's Inner Divergence, Elastic Shift, Acute Edge, and Adamant Reforging. They weren't even able to come close. Fake Rui's defensive prowess was extremely high, not only because he had four potent techniques defending him at any time, but because three of the techniques were techniques whose effectivity depended on the timing and accuracy of the user.

Rui was able to apply these techniques with far greater timing and placement than almost any Martial Apprentice he knew, and fake Rui had inherited his prowess.

Rui had no hope of ever taking him down with ordinary blows.

Ordinary blows, that was. He still had solutions against fake Rui if he used his trump cards.

WHOOSH

Rui evaded a hook with remarkable ease. The predictive model he had made in his previous mental fight was still effective, after all, fake Rui was not changing like he himself was.

PEW!

The Stinger flew swifter than it ever had before, whistling as it cut through the air, burying itself in fake Rui's neck.

He grimaced as he retreated, covering his wound. Rui immediately pursued him, not willing to give him any respite. He launched a Flowing Canon amplified with many techniques at fake Rui. Although ordinary blows could not even faze fake Rui, the same could not be said for Flowing Canon, Rui's most powerful blow.

BAM!

Fake Rui blocked the attack, being forced to let go of his wound. The bleeding immediately resumed, just as Rui had aimed for. He launched an avalanche of attacks that were nigh unblockable.

He was a ghost.

His maneuvering techniques which were stifled in the previous fight in the heavyweight body, took center stage as they shined brightly. Parallel Walk, Balanced Direction, Wind Breathing, and Phantom Step. These techniques combined with the VOID algorithm allowed Rui to express a degree of speed, agility, and maneuvering that far surpassed anything he would ever be capable of as a Martial Apprentice in his actual body.

However, his staggering lack of power was painful to watch. He launched many an attack, yet they all mostly bounced off fake Rui's powerful defensive prowess. Only the attacks that landed on extremely vulnerable and vital locations had any effect at all. However, they were unable to make any meaningful impact by themselves.

('Can I only inflict any significant damage through the Stinger?') Rui cursed. Although his speed and maneuvering allowed him to move around like the wind, he only felt more shackled. His offensive potential was so pathetic that it disgusted him.

Furthermore, he could forget about trying to withstand even a single attack from fake Rui. In his current state, every single blow that struck his body would blast him inside out. Each blow would be devastating, he needed to run away from all of them even if there were better responses had he been durable enough to execute them.

PEW!

Rui managed to launch a devastatingly swift Stinger for a second time, once again towards fake Rui's neck. This time he had managed to pierce an artery.

Blood spurted from fake Rui's neck as he tried covering it. Fake Rui had already activated Final Breathing to mitigate the damage done and reduce the impact it had on his combat prowess. However, too much damage had been done.

Rui simply continued to abuse his speed and maneuvering to continuously pepper fake Rui with well-timed Stingers, until eventually, too much damage had accumulated for Fake Rui to maintain his original combat prowess.

BAM!

Rui mustered all of his might as he landed a Flowing Cannon on his opponent's jaw. In his condition, the attack shook his opponent's head, triggering enough brain trauma to knock him out.

THUD

He collapsed to the ground unconscious.

Yet Rui wasn't too pleased with his victory.

('This body type may suit someone like Kane, but it certainly doesn't suit someone like me.') Rui sighed.

Chapter 450: Balance

Although Rui wished he could have skipped all the hallucinations based around body types he didn't care about because he knew they weren't going to be the ones that would be most compatible with his Martial Art, he did gain some unique experience that he would probably never gain again.

The procedure was extended for days as he was made to experience a variety of body types. He was supposed to experience the body suited to each of the fields he had mastered a technique for. This included power, speed, defense, grappling, and supplementation, among other fields. Thankfully, he didn't have to experience Martial bodies centered around fields he had never even touched.

He never lost against the hallucinated version of himself. This was a surprising outcome to Squire Luna, it was the norm that the hallucinated mirror version of the subject won against the subject due to a lack of familiarity and comfort with one's new body in the hallucination.

Rui, of course, had already figured out the reason. Because the hallucination lacked the core of his Martial Art. Without it, it could express only a portion of his true power. Meanwhile, even if he had a new body, he could still use the VOID algorithm to a high degree. The disadvantage he had from having a drastically different body type was not enough to dampen the advantage the VOID algorithm provided him. Furthermore, he could use the same predictive model each time, which meant he didn't need to adapt or evolve to his hallucinated clone all over again each time.

The predictive model only grew increasingly accurate and precise the more they fought.

The biggest problem was that he always lacked the body that was able to execute all of the adapted counters provided by the adaptive evolution model. He usually made do with his own improvised counters that while perhaps not the best in his current body, was still good enough.

Soon time passed and eventually, they had finally reached the all-rounder-oriented Martial body.

"This is the final body type on our checklist." Squire Luna informed him. "This Martial body is oriented around placing an equal amount of weight on power, speed, defense, and endurance. With a muscle mass to body mass ratio that perfectly caters to all primary fields equally as well as a mildly augmented healing capability."

"That's possible?" Rui wondered in glee. "An increased healing factor?"

"Indeed. Martial Squires with Martial Art focused around endurance often have a heavy focus on regeneration, at the cost of power and speed." Squire Luna explained.

"At the cost of them?" Rui asked, intrigued. "Why would the increased healing capability come at the cost of power and speed?"

"The reason for that is the fact that an increased healing factor creates an increased consumption of energy and nutrients. This reduces the available energy and nutrients needed for power and speed." Doctor Herin chimed in, explaining it to Rui.

"Ah," Rui nodded. "That does make sense. After all, there are constraints to how much stamina can be augmented by the evolution process."

"Correct." Doctor Herin nodded. "We improve stamina to the necessary amount without compromising the other physical parameters more important to the Martial Art in question. Endurance-oriented Martial Artists usually improve stamina and healing capability along with toughness to the maximum extent. However, this is not really possible in an all-rounder-oriented Martial body."

Rui nodded, as several considerations flew through his mind. He had come across a potential solution to bypass or at least mitigate the stamina solution. But he needed to verify it before he could attempt them. For now, he decided to stick to figuring out his optimal Martial body.

The medical team was subjected to hallucinogens once more as he entered a trance-like state. Squire Luna quickly began executing the hypnosis technique, causing him to return to the white world.

('Wow.')

He glanced down at his own body. His current body had been the closest to his original body. Yet it still felt mildly different from anything he had ever experienced before. Considering this body was a body that was a perfect all-rounder, it meant his previous body was not perfectly an all-rounder.

This was to be expected, to some degree. Although he had consciously trained to ensure that his body catered equally to all fields of combat, it was impossible to make it perfectly so. If he had had the technology of his previous world, reaching something close to perfectly all-rounding was perhaps not impossible, but in this world with the lack of the technology he was familiar with, with only the resources he had at the Academy, it was impossible to gain perfect balance.

Fake Rui immediately dashed towards Rui after he appeared.

BAM!

He gasped as Rui perfectly evaded a swinging blow from fake Rui as landed his own blow in the latter's gut. Rui immediately followed up with a barrage of perfectly-timed swings.

POW POW POW!

Each bypassed the guard of his opponent, relying on impeccable timing and placement.

BAM!!

Rui followed up with a Flowing Canon, successfully landing the attack and flinging him away in the distance with a devastating blow.

His performance against his hallucinated clone was domineering, more so than any of their previous fights. Rui had been previously burdened with an unfamiliar and incompatible body in each of his fights that had partially dampened his advantage of being the sole VOID algorithm user. Now, however, there was no incompatibility between his body and his Martial Art.

The gap between himself and his hallucinated self was large. He didn't even need to exert himself. Fake Rui couldn't even be considered a modern grade ten Martial Apprentice due to an inability to use the VOID algorithm. He stood no chance against Rui alone.

Alone, that was.

Suddenly, a second hallucinated clone of Rui appeared in Rui's perception.

('Two of them against one?') Rui was amused at the improvisation on the part of Squire Luna in the procedure.

('Very well then.') Rui nodded. ('It will allow me to test this body even more.')