

Martial Unity 451

Chapter 451: Decision

The two fake Ruis faced off against him, quickly launching themselves at him. They, together, launched a wave of attacks that would have ordinarily been annoying to deal with, but his current state of having predictive models on both of them allowed him to not only deal with the situation but do so with even a certain amount of leeway.

WHOOSH

POW!

Rui evaded the attack of one of his opponents as he simultaneously launched a low sweeping kick against the other, staggering them. Rui quickly rushed forward, performing a throwing takedown on his opponent. He used his imbalance to simply take him down at that moment with less resistance. His opponent crumbled backward quickly. However, he didn't have any leeway to turn the battle into a ground grappling match.

WHOOSH

Rui somersaulted away as his other opponent intervened attempting to throw another strike at him. He quickly unleashed several Tempestuous Ripples toward his opponent disallowing them to gather their bearings too easily. As soon as they dealt with the attacks, they realized that Rui simply used it as a means to escape from their attention for just a bit.

BLINK

BAM!

Rui managed to catch one of his opponents off-guard with a combination of Blink, Phantom, and Shadow Step, hitting them with a powerful Flowing Canon and flinging him that way.

Rui used the temporary one-on-one he had with the other fake Rui. He immediately began dishing out several waves of attacks against his hapless opponent. Although they weren't all that different in physical prowess, Rui was still able to dominate them despite this. He was simply strong.

Eventually, Rui managed to take both of them out, relying on some clever tricks, but he took them out eventually.

THUD

When the final fake Rui fell to his knees collapsing to the ground, the fight had been completed. Rui felt amazing in his current body, it was able to execute the counters of the VOID algorithm more accurately than his actual body would. Yet before he could even bask in his victory, time was up. Rui woke up, opening his eyes to be greeted by the familiar ceiling of the procedure room he was in.

"The data suggests that there was a high degree of compatibility with your own body." Doctor Herin said once Rui regained his bearings. "Seems we have hit close to the optimal bullseye."

"This is where the hard part begins." Squire Luna added. "You'll have to discover the optimal configuration by brute force trial and error until we run into the optimal configuration of the parameters of the all-rounder Martial body."

All-rounders were generally on a spectrum; an all-rounder was still considered an all-rounder even if they placed a bit more weight on one particular field than the others. As long as there wasn't an overwhelming dominance in the emphasis on one particular field in comparison to the others, they would still be considered all-rounders.

"No..." Rui shook his head. "Frankly, this configuration is perfect."

Squire Luna raised an eyebrow at those words. "A perfect distribution between all physical parameters just so happens to suit your Martial Art the best?"

Rui paused for a moment as he considered his response. "My Martial Path is adaptive evolution. I aim to adapt to all. I cannot place more weight on any one field as it would hinder my ability to adapt to some other Martial Art in question. Therefore, I think it is best if I proceed with this Martial body."

Rui glanced down at his hands at those words.

He could feel the mild incompatibility between his current body and his Martial Art in comparison to a perfectly-balanced all-rounder Martial Art. His current body was a tad too heavy to perfectly execute some of the counters to his opponent's predicted moves. He used the VOID algorithm more effectively and efficiently despite not having the familiarity with the hallucinated body than he did with his actual real body.

His Martial Art would be able to grow smoother once he had a body that catered to it perfectly. A speed and maneuvering-oriented Martial Artist would never be able to go further down their Martial Path with a heavyweight body. A power-oriented Martial Apprentice would never be able to go down their Martial Path with a lightweight body.

"If that is the case, then you can move on to the next preparatory step of the Squire breakthrough process." Squire Luna informed him.

"The measurements?" Rui asked, recalling if from the briefing he underwent with Squire Gunther.

In order for the Squire breakthrough procedure to be perfectly tailored and customized to every Squire candidate, there were two things that were necessary. The first was knowing the end goal of the evolution process, this was the Martial body configuration. The second was knowing where the starting point was, this was equally necessary.

The procedure could not get a Martial Apprentice from a particular starting point to a particular destination if the starting point was unknown. Thus, Rui's physical parameters would need to be documented thoroughly from the very top to the bottom and everything in between. Once his physical parameters were measured, then the evolution process would quickly be created, perfectly suited to take him from his current body to his Martial body in the Squire Realm.

Thankfully, it was a mundane process, there was no difficulty in successfully passing it.

"I shall inform the Martial Union of the success of the Martial body procedure, and the arrangements for the measurement process will be arranged rather swiftly, by today, even." Squire Luna told Rui.

"Actually..." Rui interjected sheepishly. "I would rather not undergo the measurement procedure immediately. I have some personal matters that I would like to before proceeding forward with the preparations for the breakthrough to the Squire Realm if that's alright."

Squire Luna simply stared at him. "That is your prerogative, of course. If you wish to delay the breakthrough to the Squire Realm, then you do have that choice."

"Thank you." Rui bowed down. He had some personal preparations to make for the breakthrough to the Squire Realm.

Chapter 452: Benefits

As impatient Rui was to undergo the breakthrough to the Squire Realm as soon as possible, he managed to retain self-control. Optimizing his breakthrough to the Squire Realm was much more important than ensuring it happened as soon as possible.

In his last training session, he had come across the Mind Switch mental technique. It was a grade-three mental training technique that would condition the mind and the brain to trigger certain mental and neurological phenomena when the user took certain physical stances or performed certain actions by creating associations between the desired neurological phenomena and the trigger actions.

This was generally a training technique that was used to allow the user to enter a calm and rational state of mind when the user performed the trigger stance that the calmness and rationality were associated with.

It was an Apprentice-level version of association therapy that existed on Earth. Association in the field of psychology of Earth referred to a mental connection between concepts, events, or mental states that usually stemmed from specific experiences. Association therapy was a form of treatment that applied this mental trait to treat and often even cure mental disorders.

In the world of Gaea, it had been elevated to an Apprentice-level technique that could be applied in combat in order to optimize the state of mind that the user of the technique. Rui had seen this technique more than half a year ago when he had scoured the Apprentice library for a technique for his previous training session.

Back then, he had an idea of how he could apply the technique to make the most of his breakthrough to the Squire Realm and optimize his Martial body as much as possible.

He intended to verify whether his application of the technique was possible or not, if it was, then he intended to master it before undergoing the measurement procedure and the breakthrough procedure to the Squire Realm.

('If it does work like I think it does... then I might be able to harness the power of autophagy.') He noted.

Autophagy was the natural, conserved degradation of the cell that removes unnecessary or dysfunctional components. It allowed for the orderly degradation and recycling of cellular components for the continued sustenance of other living cells. In the case of extreme starvation, the process of autophagy was highly accelerated and maximized in order to maintain energy and nutrition for surviving cells.

In other words, it was a metabolic phenomenon that naturally increased stamina. Something that was a constraint to the configurations of the Martial body, after all, you couldn't give too much power and speed, otherwise, energy consumption would rise resulting in very low stamina.

However, autophagy was a phenomenon that could potentially aid in mitigating the issue. However, extreme autophagy only occurred in cases of high starvation, it was not something that the body normally did, unfortunately.

('That is where the Mind Switch technique comes in.')

The Mind Switch technique allowed him to associate any neurological phenomenon with a trigger and, thus, trigger said neurological phenomenon whenever he wanted. When Rui had first seen that technique, he had thought of the possibility of using the Mind Switch technique to be able to trigger the neurological phenomenon associated with starvation, which would then go on to trigger accelerated autophagy.

Thus, he would be able to tap into the power of autophagy in order to enhance stamina in a very natural way. With greater stamina, the constraint over his speed, power, and healing would also be lessened.

After all, the greater the amount of stamina, the greater the availability of energy for various purposes such as strength, speed, and healing.

If possible, it would likely allow him to obtain a Martial body that was a cut above the norm. He still planned to choose an all-rounder Martial body, of course. But each of his raw physical parameters would be above what someone of his natural physical prowess undergoing the evolution process would have thanks to his naturally higher energy reserves.

('However, that holds true only if the Mind Switch technique works the way I think it does.') Rui mused.

After all, if the technique didn't work like Rui had hoped it would, then it would all be in vain. The worst part of it all was that due to their primitive understanding of cellular biology and biochemistry, he highly doubted that the Martial Union could provide him with an actual answer on the matter.

Not even he was sure whether it would help despite his scientific background on Earth.

('I guess I'll just have to try it anyway and hope for the best.') Rui sighed.

Although this would result in a slight delay in his breakthrough to the Squire Realm, it was worth it if he could obtain a more powerful Martial body. After all, that would be an advantage that he would retain for the rest of his life.

He reached the Apprentice library of the Martial Union, entering it for the first time.

('It's bigger than that of the Martial Academy.') Rui realized.

There were many more Martial Apprentices browsing the library than there were in the Martial Academy, which made sense given the population disparity of the groups of Martial Apprentices that the two libraries catered to.

He didn't even bother browsing through the techniques, after all, he knew exactly what he was looking for. He could simply request one of the librarians to procure the techniques for him. He didn't plan to

purchase and master any other techniques. He didn't want to delay his Squire breakthrough evolution procedure by any more than he had to.

He could focus on expanding his Martial Art after he becomes a Martial Squire, until then, everything was about breaking through to a higher Realm of power. If it weren't for the fact that the potential benefits were immense, he absolutely would not have detoured to master a mental technique just before the procedure.

('This shit better be worth it.') He groaned inwardly.

Chapter 453: Technique

"Excuse me." Rui addressed one of the support staff members of the library.

"Yes? How may I help you?" She replied.

"I'm looking for the Mind Switch technique; a mental training technique," Rui told her. "I was hoping I could request for it to be procured."

"Of course." She nodded. "Please wait here a moment."

She took off as Rui took a seat on one of the benches in the library. Rui waited patiently as he scrutinized the library.

('It has more techniques than the Apprentice library of the Martial Academy did.') He noted as he looked at the endless shelves of techniques across the entire library. The reason for this wasn't too difficult to think about. The Martial Academy had lower quality Martial Apprentices than the real world, thus it wasn't hard to see that the Apprentice library was also a little smaller in so far as the sheer number of techniques it offered.

Rui suspected that the Martial Art techniques of the higher grades were a little scarcer in the Apprentice library of the Martial Academy than they were in the Apprentice library of the Martial Union.

Just as he pondered on the matter, his thoughts were interrupted.

"Apprentice Quarrier, here is the Mind Switch technique you requested for." A support staff member told him, handing him a scroll.

"Thank you." Rui got up, nodding as he accepted the scroll.

He immediately walked over to the registrar of the library and quickly purchased the technique.

"The costs of the training facilities and guidance needed to master the techniques are charged separately," Rui murmured, recalling that fact.

In the Martial Academy, the training and growth resources were all part of the fees paid to the Martial Academy, however, the Martial Union operated with an upfront charge for the usage of such facilities at an hourly rate.

The technique was more expensive than it was in the Martial Academy, which didn't surprise him. The Martial Academy had managed the price of the techniques to ensure that the prices of techniques were just in the price range such that the students of the Martial Academy would have to work hard in order to earn the Martial credits needed to purchase the technique, but still not too expensive that each student would need to waste too much time completing missions just to earn the Martial credits needed to purchase a single technique.

However, the Martial Union didn't coddle its Martial Artists the way the martial Academy coddled its students, thus the Martial Art techniques of the Martial Union had been priced purely according to their actual value and the resources invested by the Martial Union into acquiring those techniques be it the large research and development project budgets that went into developing the techniques or the cost of purchasing the original techniques developed by the Martial Artists of the Martial Union.

Still, Rui unhesitatingly bought the technique and the required training hours for an initial introduction to the technique.

He sat down at one of the benches as he opened the scroll and began reading the detailed breakdown of the technique as well as the training methodology needed to obtain basic mastery of the technique.

He carefully read the more detailed explanation in regards to the actual functioning of the technique, looking for any information that would confirm that his goal and hope for the technique were possible, but he didn't receive any concrete confirmation of the technique.

Because of the seemingly lacking understanding of the field of neurology of the world of Gaea, the technique breakdown did not get too very far in so far as the technical explanation of the functioning of the technique. Rui was unable to derive anything that could confirm or deny that the Mind Switch technique was something that could trigger the autophagy process.

He sighed. ('At least, thanks to my high affinity to mental techniques as well as the low difficulty grade of the technique, I won't be wasting too much time trying to master this technique.')

Even if it was a failure, he wouldn't have wasted too much time trying to master the technique due to this very reason. This was part of the reason he had gone out of his way to train in the Mind Switch technique. There wasn't much to be lost beyond some time. If this were a grade-eight technique, Rui would not have been as enthusiastic and energetic about mastering the technique, for the most part.

It would have been a much harder decision if the decision would have bled away months of hard work and time. But with the sheer ease with which the technique could be mastered as well as his own affinity for it, he had weighed the potential benefits against the investment of time and energy and eventually gave in to his desire to obtain even greater power at a slightly slower pace.

He moved on to the training regime of the Martial Art technique.

"Interesting..." Rui murmured as he read through it in detail.

The training session was not beyond his expectations.

"As expected, it's brute force association therapy." Rui nodded.

The training involved a constant and simultaneous execution of the trigger position or movement with the activation of whatever neurological phenomenon was to be triggered by the triggering stance or movement.

The mind would begin developing a strong association between the two, eventually triggering one with the other, allowing the Martial Apprentice a certain degree of control over the involuntary phenomena that continuously occurred in the subconscious part of the mind and the brain.

The desired neurological phenomenon that was the target of being triggered would be artificially induced in response to the trigger, convincing and hammering into the mind that there was a causal relationship between them.

This was the same principle by which several disorders such as addiction were handled, by associating negative experiences with things they were addicted to using association therapy. Of course, what Rui was about to undergo was far worse than anything any psychiatrist on Earth could conjure up.

Chapter 454: Pain

"You want to use the Mind Switch technique to trigger everything associated with extreme starvation?" A Martial Squire frowned at Rui.

Rui had opted for the guidance of a mind-oriented Martial Squire to guide him in the mastery of the Mind Switch technique. Squire Juvier's face had scrunched in confusion when he learned of Rui's objective of trying to trigger the sensation of extreme starvation using the Mind Switch technique.

Normally, people learned this technique to retain calmness and composure in the middle of combat. There were many Martial Artists that found it difficult to retain calmness and composure in highly dangerous situations. In such situations, fear and panic could cause them to act in sub-optimal ways, increasing their probability that they would make mistakes.

The Mind Switch technique was created to give Martial Artists a way to reduce the probability of such things happening to them. It allowed them to hone their mind and impact it favorably.

Thus, Squire Juvier's surprise was quite understandable when Rui approached him, asking if it was possible to trigger the mental processes that came along with extreme starvation.

"I suppose it's theoretically possible, maybe" Squire Juvier frowned scratching his head. "I can't be sure because I'm positive that nobody has ever tried to use the technique in this manner. Why do you want to in the first place?"

He peered at Rui curiously, wondering why he would want something that odd.

"Ah..." Rui smiled awkwardly. "Just something I wanted to try. If it doesn't work out, it can be scraped, but I have to give it a shot."

"Huh." He frowned, confused. "Well, that's your choice, I guess. Have you read the technique scroll?"

"I have." Rui nodded. "I've understood and memorized all of it, I just hope to gain your guidance when undergoing the training for the technique."

"Well, you did pay for Squire guidance." He shrugged. "So that's perfectly fine. Hope you don't regret your decision though."

"Me too." Rui sighed. Even if it turned out that he was wrong, the technique could be reversed by hypnosis from a Martial Apprentice. The only risk he was taking was wasting time, but the very real and likely possibility of him being able to become a stronger Martial Squire was too much to pass. With his affinity for mental techniques, he wouldn't be wasting much time mastering it.

Furthermore, it was a grade-three technique. The single lowest-grade technique he had ever chosen to master. The lower the grade of the technique, the lesser time it took to master it, generally. Even though the Mindmirror brain had gotten rid of his superior training speed, he was still quite the sharp learner.

"Well." Squire Juvier shrugged. "We can begin whenever you want. If you've memorized the training regime, then you know that it is exceedingly simple. You'll be induced into a state of mind where you're open to suggestions to be implanted into your mind. Then, the mental state you desire will be artificially induced while you perform the trigger. Due to the state of mind, your mind will more easily form a connection between the trigger and the mental state you're in, allowing you to trigger the mental state with the trigger after extended periods of this kind of association training."

Rui nodded.

"The only problem is I don't think we have a way of artificially inducing starvation." He murmured thoughtfully.

"That's fine," Rui replied. "I can induce it by simply reducing my consumption of food."

"You won't be able to train for too long, though." Squire Juvier noted.

"I have physical rejuvenation potions." Rui reminded. "They don't directly get rid of hunger, they simply directly supply the energy and nutrients needed to the body."

"Smart." He admitted. "You can get started then, as long as you know what you want as the trigger and the mental state you want to trigger."

Rui was already starting to feel a tad bit of hunger, but it wasn't intense enough. He wanted to reach a stage of starvation, otherwise, he couldn't be sure that the Mind Switch technique would make maximized autophagy as the targeted phenomenon that he wanted to trigger.

There was another problem, however.

('What should I make as the trigger?') Rui wondered.

The trigger was something he needed to be able to effortlessly use to trigger autophagy. Ideally, it would be something that he did constantly and involuntarily so that he would need to consciously trigger his autophagy.

Ideally, something like blinking or breathing would be the trigger for autophagy, but the problem with trying to make those the trigger was that the trigger had to be something Rui was conscious of all the time for it to actively serve as the trigger.

Most of the time, breathing and blinking was done subconsciously. Therefore, if he ever got too focused in a fight where he wasn't conscious of his breathing or blinking as a trigger, then he would not be able to trigger the autophagy.

('What if I associated the autophagy with a sensation like pain?') Rui wondered.

The only problem was that it wasn't as much of a voluntary trigger unless he was willing to hurt himself every time he needed to trigger autophagy.

('Is that a problem considering every time I am hurt I could benefit from enhanced healing that would require energy and nutrients?')

One of the benefits that came from the all-rounder Martial body was that it gave him enhanced healing thanks to the evolution of his endurance and survivability. Healing required energy and nutrients, that could be swiftly provided by autophagy.

Furthermore, any instances where he would genuinely require healing would be instances where he was injured. If he was injured, then he would certainly experience significant pain.

('In that case, making pain the trigger to autophagy might actually be the ideal trigger.') Rui realized.

He took his time pondering the idea, making sure he was not mistaking anything wrong in regards to his already scant knowledge of neurobiology.

Chapter 455: Painful

"Pain?" Squire Juvier looked at Rui with disbelief. "You want to make pain the trigger to extreme starvation? Have you lost your goddamn mind?!"

"Trust me." Rui sighed. "I know what I'm doing."

Squire Juvier facepalmed himself as he shook his head. "Well, you're the one who's going to be responsible for it, so go for it. It's a crazy stupid idea that serves no purpose, but I've already warned you of that. My responsibility as a guide and aid ends there."

"Then let us begin the moment I am beset by starvation." Rui nodded. He went on to solidify details of the procedure with Squire Juvier. Matters such as the kinds of pain to be inflicted as well as the frequency of infliction of pain and the order.

Squire Juvier had never been asked to torture a Martial Apprentice in order to form a pain trigger. Therefore, he had absolutely no input to offer from his previous experience, he merely shrugged and accepted whatever Rui told him on the matter. He had long given up on trying to make sense of the strange and crazy Martial Apprentice.

It didn't take long, he was already quite hungry after the continuous hypnotized hallucinations that he had undergone in order to be able to experience and identify the idea Martial body type that would become the template for his body as a Martial Squire.

They shifted to an isolated training room for the training technique.

"It's time." Rui nodded, as his stomach growled and he was beset by famished hunger.

Squire Juvier sighed, before suddenly clapping swiftly before Rui's face, startling him.

Squire Juvier swiftly subjected Rui to a few quick whispers, before slowly edging back to speaking normally.

"You feel open, transparent, shapeable." He told Rui softly.

Hypnosis was a verifiably real field even back on Earth. It was a form of indirect manipulation of the subconscious mind. The subconscious mind was normally to external information that the mind processed by virtue of the fact that it was subconscious, external influx of information could and did influence it, but only if it bypassed the conscious mind. The conscious mind served as a guard between the external influx of information and the subconscious mind, preventing the former from influencing the latter as much as possible, by processing the information itself.

That was why, back on Earth, hypnosis didn't work if the subject didn't allow the hypnosis to be effective by allowing it to influence the mind by immersing one's self into the hypnotic treatment. It was impossible to forcefully hypnotize someone against their will back on Earth.

The same couldn't be said for the hypnosis in Martial Art of Gaea.

Martial Artists weren't limited to the same degree as ordinary people when it came to the application of hypnotists.

Martial Artists had developed techniques that allowed them to directly influence the subconscious mind by misdirecting the attention of the conscious mind before proceeding to hypnotize the subconscious mind swiftly in the moment of the misdirected attention of the conscious mind.

Or they would engage in highly stealthy and subtle manipulation that was sneaky enough to bypass the recognition of the conscious mind as an attempt to manipulate the subconscious mind.

Squire Juvier had applied a hypnosis technique that relied on the former principle. All he needed was the momentary misdirection that a gesture as simple as abrupt and loud clapping caused in order to exploit the momentary distraction to influence Rui's subconscious mind to induce his subconscious mind into a state where he would more easily form associations between the trigger and the triggered.

As powerful as Rui's mind was, he could not inherently resist and negate the mental techniques of a Martial Squire the way he did the mental techniques of a Martial Apprentice. He opened his eyes once Squire Juvier had finished. His eyes were different, they were blank than they normally were.

"We'll begin soon then." Squire Juvier told him.

Rui simply nodded wordlessly.

Squire Juvier sighed.

THWACK

His arm struck Rui's skin, making a loud sound. Rui winced, silently grimacing. Squire Juvier had used just enough power to whip Rui to cause him significant pain, but not too intense to be overwhelming. Rui wanted the pain threshold for the trigger to be not too high. If he subjected himself to too much pain during the training session then he would not be able to necessarily trigger autophagy when he was wounded.

Thus, he needed to ensure the pain was just significant enough, and nothing too overwhelming.

That was why the pain caused by a simple whip with his arm was chosen as the preferred means to cause pain. It was easy enough to inflict enough pain using this method, and the need for healing potions was also minimal in comparison.

Squire Juvier could continue whipping Rui's skin for a long time before the need for a healing potion emerged.

Rui gritted his teeth as he endured the suffering, while also focusing on his hunger. Focusing on the mental state/phenomenon that was to be triggered was necessary to ensure an associative bond formed between the trigger and the triggered phenomenon.

Otherwise, he would just needlessly suffer. There was no point in simply subjecting himself to torture if he didn't ensure it was as effective as it could be. He would simply be increasing the amount of time he would be subjecting himself to torture.

The procedure continued for hours. Rui gritted his teeth as he bore the pain. The combined mental torment that came from both starvation, as well as the physical pain he felt, was overwhelming together. The fortitude and strength he had built after the torturous training regimes of the Stinger and the Adamant Forging were faltering as starvation drained him of his strength and his willpower.

Despite the pain not being worse than that of the training regimes of the Stinger and Adamant Forging, he still felt a greater amount of torment from the Mind Switch technique training.

Rui gritted his teeth day in and day out as he continuously experienced starvation and torture. He had underestimated the sheer mental fortitude required to master the Mind Switch that he had aimed to master.

The technique was grade-three as far as the difficulty of mastery went, the problem was that it was rated as a technique with low difficulty of mastery because most applications of the technique were to be able to trigger calmness and composure in the Martial Artist aspiring to master the technique. The best part about the technique, when applied this way, was the fact that it was relatively straightforward and didn't need any severe exertion from the Martial Apprentice.

However, Rui had gone far off the normal path and used it to try to trigger the neurological phenomena associated with hunger with pain.

This was something Squire Juvier still found absurd and stupid.

"What do you hope to accomplish?" Squire Juvier asked one day, unable to contain his curiosity any longer. "Why subject yourself to this madness? Why do you want to trigger hunger in the middle of battle? That will only get you killed, take it from someone with extensive experience in the Martial World."

"That's not how it works." Rui sighed. "Hunger is a physical sensation primarily. The Mind Switch technique cannot trigger physical sensations, it can only trigger mental phenomena."

It wasn't that Squire Juvier didn't understand how the technique worked, he just didn't have as thorough an understanding of the difference between sensations and mental phenomena as Rui had, thanks to his background.

"If hunger cannot be triggered, then isn't this even more pointless? Why chase after hunger?" Squire Juvier sighed exasperatedly.

"What I desire are the neurological phenomena associated with hunger," Rui informed him.

"But why?" Squire Juvier asked, curiously.

"Because they'll help me obtain a more powerful Martial body when I become a Martial Squire," Rui replied to him.

"There's no way of that possibly being true." Squire Juvier shook his head, sighing. "The Martial Union would definitely know of such a thing and they would have made it part of the standard procedure if this was worth it. They absolutely would have told me about it, someone who mastered the Mind Switch technique when I was a Squire Candidate."

Rui simply shook his head but kept quiet. There was no need for him to debate with the Martial Squire, it didn't matter one bit whatsoever whether the Martial Squire approved or disapproved of his idea. All he needed was his guidance and help.

And Squire Juvier had obliged dutifully.

In merely a little over a month, Rui had mastered the Mind Switch technique. Even if he had made it more difficult due to his crazy modifications, it was, at its core, a straightforward technique that required zero talent. Furthermore, Rui had a strong affinity for mental techniques due to his enhanced mind.

"Time for a test." He murmured.

There was a straightforward way to verify the degree of success, if any at all, of the technique in achieving the objective with which he had mastered it. If the technique did in fact trigger maximized autophagy that naturally increased the energy and nutrients available to the body, then his stamina would rise tremendously.

All he had to do was test his stamina.

He turned to Squire Juvier with a smile that gave the former a headache. "What is it now? You've mastered the technique, go away!"

"I need you to do the whipping part to me again," Rui informed him

"But why?" Squire Juvier cajoled him.

"To verify whether the technique does in fact function like I want it to," Rui replied.

After some back and forth, Rui finally managed to convince him to heed his words.

"The things I do for Martial Apprentices in the name of guidance." He sighed.

"Alright, begin," Rui instructed him.

And so began a long session of pain infliction. Rui knew his body quite well, he knew how much stamina he normally had. Thus, he would be able to detect any improvements to his stamina sharply. He engaged in physically strenuous exercise amidst the infliction of pain, using Outer Convergence and Flame Breathing to consume vast amounts of power.

At the end of a few hours, the answer became clear.

"Amazing!" Rui's eyes flashed in excitement.

He had retained his energy levels remarkably well. He knew himself, he knew that without Helical Breathing, a technique that aided in preserving stamina, he would not be able to last this long and this well, yet his current condition was better than it would have been had he used Helical Breathing!

"This is beyond my expectations," Rui murmured. The effects of the Mind Switch were the equivalent of consuming multiple physical rejuvenation potions!

This was a luxury because every martial Apprentice knew they could not afford to have it. Consuming a potion could not be done immediately. It took a deep, slow inhalation and then some extra time for the aerosolized potion to be completely diffused into the blood in the lungs. It usually took around ten seconds for a single potion to be consumed.

This was not something that could be done in the middle of physical conflict, especially so since Martial Apprentices experienced time far slower than normal humans. What were ten seconds to normal humans was over a hundred seconds to Martial Apprentices!

Was there any enemy that was patiently willing to wait a hundred seconds for their opponent to rejuvenate themselves? The answer was clearly no. This was even more true for Martial Artists of higher Realms. It was simply too impractical.

That was why Rui was thrilled to discover the sheer effectiveness of maximized autophagy. All his old, dying, and dead cells and other organic components within his body were being broken down and turned into fuel and nutrients for new cells. It was an incredibly efficient and conservative process that truly made the best of everything the human body had.

"Now then..." Rui murmured. "Time to break through to a higher Realm."

Chapter 457: Shock

Not a day after he informed the Martial Union that he wanted to proceed with the measurement process, an appointment for the procedure was promptly arranged for the very next day. The very next day after he mastered the Mind Switch technique and verified its success.

Rui peeked into a large room with many machines and equipment. There was a team of men and women, who glanced up at him.

"I'm Apprentice Rui Quarrier." He told them holding his Martial license up. "I was informed that my measurement process would be conducted in this facility."

"Indeed, welcome. I'm the supervisor who will overlook the process. My name is Fylic."

They exchanged pleasantries as the final preparations were made, discussing the process.

"We will be taking static measurements first," Fylic informed him. "This includes things like, but not limited to, your weight, height, proportions, and lengths of your figure, your muscle and bone mass, cardiac and other metabolic parameters among other things."

Rui nodded. It made sense they would start with static measurements; those were always the easiest, simplest and quickest measurements to be made. Even when he was constructing the VOID algorithm, he would start with static measurements of his test subjects.

"Once that's done, we'll move on to active parameters. We'll measure the maximum force generated by every muscle group, reaction time and reflex time, balance, body-eye coordination, and stamina among other things." He informed Rui. "Once that's done, the data will be transmitted to the relevant department that will begin carefully customize the evolution process to ensure that the evolution process will evolve your current parameters to the parameters of the desired Martial body that you have chosen."

He turned to Rui. "Ah, I am to inform you. Once the measurement process is completed, you need to begin the evolution process as soon as possible. You also must abstain from mastering any new Apprentice-level technique after the measurement process today is completed until you break through to the Apprentice Realm."

"Why so?" Rui asked, curious. He had no intention of going out of his way to master yet another technique before he broke through to the Squire Realm, but he was curious about Fylic's statement.

"The data we collect in the measurement process is delicate, in a sense." He replied. "It needs to be accurate otherwise the evolution process that was created based on that data will not yield the desired body and could potentially lead to death in the worst-case scenario."

"I see..." Rui immediately realized. "The static and dynamic parameters can and do change over time, leading to inaccurate data that can be gravely problematic."

"Correct." Fylic nodded.

They conversed a bit more, warming to each other until it was time to begin the measurement process. Rui was subjected to test after test as they began testing his static parameters. Thankfully, the boring measurements were completed quickly, within reason. Yet there were so many measurements that

despite the quickness of each one, it stretched on longer than he had imagined. Only a few hours later did they move to the dynamic measurements.

Rui was a little more interested in this one. He felt a little childish as he longed for the stamina test. He was prohibited from using active techniques during the tests and there were even devices that he had to wear that could apparently detect the activation of techniques by a Martial Apprentice.

Thankfully, the Mind Switch technique was not an active technique. It was largely passive and did not require any specific voluntary actions that activated the autophagy, all he needed to was experience enough pain.

And sure enough, when the stamina test began, the device didn't pick up on the autophagy when he triggered it by crushing his tongue and the insides of his cheek just hard enough to trigger the autophagy.

"This..." Fylic's eyebrows knitted in confusion and amazement as he witnessed Rui maintaining peak human exertion without the application of Apprentice-level techniques. Rui should have displayed physical parameters that were perhaps at the peak of normal humans, but to his shock, Rui last well past what would be considered normal human limits!

"Did he consume a physical rejuvenation potion somehow?" He frowned.

The question was rhetorical, of course. He was being carefully monitored by the assistants, the device he was wearing on his head would have detected the activation of an Apprentice-level technique that allowed them to exert themselves beyond human limits using the technique actively.

Yet it hadn't detected anything of the sort.

"Has he mastered some rare passive stamina conditioning technique?" Fylic frowned as he read through Rui's profile, scouring through all the techniques present in his file.

There were some passive training techniques that permanently improved stamina, but Fylic had already gone through Rui's mastered techniques prior, and there was nothing, as far as he could see, that would give Rui enhanced superhuman stamina.

Rui had mastered a total of thirty Apprentice-level techniques since becoming a Martial Apprentice, however, he could not see a single passive stamina-boosting Apprentice-level technique.

He turned back to Rui with complete confusion. Hours flew by until Rui finally collapsed, unable to maintain the continuous high-effort exertion. Even autophagy had limits. However, he was quite pleased with the result. This would undoubtedly help him obtain a more powerful Martial body once he broke into the Squire Realm.

"You skyrocketed past human limits despite not using an Apprentice-level technique!" Fylic told him energetically. "How did you do that?"

"Well..." Rui scratched his head as he caught his breath.

He looked Fylic straight in the eye. "A wise and powerful man once recommended a powerful training regime that would help me become stronger."

"What training regime?" Fylic asked with curious eyes.

"One hundred push-ups, one hundred sit-ups, one hundred squats, and a ten-kilometer run," Rui told him with a dead-serious expression as his strong mind exerted pressure on Fylic. "Also, you can't use any air-conditioning esoteric technology when you're done. Only then can you forge such stamina and endurance."

Chapter 458: Arrived

Fylic gave up trying to pry into the source behind Rui's supreme stamina after multiple failed attempts. Rui simply deflected all of them skillfully.

Once the dynamic measurements resumed, it didn't take long after that, the stamina test was the most time-consuming of them all. The rest of the dynamic measurements were taken rather quickly, and the process came to an end.

"How long will the Martial Union take to create the customized and personalized Squire breakthrough evolution process?" Rui asked Fylic.

"It usually takes about two to three days," Fylic replied.

This wasn't beyond Rui's expectations. He certainly didn't expect that the breakthrough to the Squire Realm would happen then and there, or even within the day.

After all, a vast amount of information needed to be processed for the exact conditions of the personalized evolution breakthrough process to the Squire Realm to be done.

Rui simply bade the team farewell as he returned back home. He had done everything he needed to do, and now the only thing left was the breakthrough to the Squire Realm.

He returned back home peacefully and all he had to do now was wait.

"Have you prepared yourself mentally?" Julian asked him, at some point.

"For how awesome becoming a Martial Squire is going to be?" Rui asked blandly.

"For the risks associated with the breakthrough to the Squire Realm." Julian sighed replying.

"Ah..." Rui pondered the matter. "Generally, yes."

Despite the fact that the Kandrian Empire had developed an immense number of safeguards and fail-safes, it was impossible to guarantee that there was no possibility of failure. Although the rate of death was low, the rate of failure was a little higher.

The most extreme outcome was, of course, death. However, there were other ways for the breakthrough to the Squire Realm to fail. For instance, it was possible that the process would go horribly wrong in so far as the mutations developed that it would permanently cripple him in some horrible way that would almost certainly destroy his career as a Martial Artist.

One of the reasons that few Martial Apprentices went on to become Martial Squires wasn't just because of the difficulty of achieving enough individuality, or the difficulty of also achieving Martial maturity.

It was because some Martial Apprentices failed to successfully break through to the Squire Realm. Furthermore, there were Squire candidates who were unwilling to take the risk to become a Martial Squire.

After all, not all Martial Artists were as ambitious as Rui was. There were some Martial Apprentices who were unwilling to risk everything in order to become Martial Squires. To them, being a Martial Apprentice was more of a profession than it was an integral part of their identity.

It earned them money.

It brought them a status over most of the population.

They were able to remain lowkey in order to avoid the attention of powerful and dangerous people while still reaping enough benefits.

Furthermore, the missions were also a lot safer and easier. Most domestic missions within the Kandrian Empire were Apprentice-level missions. Of course, there was room for missions within the Empire for Martial Squires, and perhaps even Martial Seniors.

However, the three upper Realms had no place engaging in conflict anywhere near settlements. Their power was simply too destructive.

The higher the Realm that a Martial Artist was, the more their missions were perennially outside the borders of the kandrian Empire. Foreign missions were much more dangerous than domestic missions, on average.

There were Martial Apprentices that did not want to take on the amplified risk that came with foreign missions. Even if they made it smoothly to the Squire Realm through the breakthrough. They would largely be forced to abandon the safety blanket that came with the domestic Apprentice-level missions

within the Kandrian Empire. The psychological safety that came from knowing that the Martial Union was always just around the corner was valuable to Martial Apprentices that weren't too driven.

Not Rui, however.

"It is scary," Rui admitted. "But not enough to try and get me to stop, nowhere near enough. If that's even possible to do in the first place."

Of course, he wasn't immune to fear like some stone-hearted unfeeling rock. But his desire and ambition to elevate the Flowing Void style and the VOID algorithm to as high as possible was too strong.

At the end of the day, the process was beyond his control. He had already done his best. Autophagy would increase the healing rate of the cells during the procedure. And it most certainly would be triggered by all the pain he would inevitably suffer.

That was the scariest part of the procedure.

The pain.

He had already gotten a good understanding of what the procedure was going to look like from both the Martial Union and the data from the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana.

It wasn't possible to use anesthesia because of the sheer amount of cell death and regeneration that would be occurring in the breakthrough to the Squire realm. This meant he would have to feel every ounce of pain that procedure would cause him for however, long the procedure would take.

This was another reason why some Martial Apprentices simply opted out. The breakthrough was sheer unadulterated torture. There weren't many Martial Apprentices who were willing to endure horrific amounts of pain and all the risks that came with the procedure.

Not Rui, however.

"I can't wait until they're done." Rui grinned excitedly. "This is going to be absolutely unbelievable."

It had been three years since he had become a Martial Apprentice, and very soon, he would be elevating himself to a higher Realm of power.

('Ah, I haven't told my friends yet.') Rui realized. He immediately got up, sending messages to each of them.

Time passed in the Orphanage, too slowly for Rui's taste. The more he longed for the message to come, the slower time ticked, but it did tick, slowly and steadily. And sure enough, the day had finally arrived.

Chapter 459: Time

He made his way to the Martial Union with a pounding heart. He was going to be crossing one of the most important checkpoints of his life and his Martial Path. He was understandably a little tense, especially because he had very little agency and control over the success of the procedure beyond this point. Everything that could be done had been done.

Rui considered everything even as he passed security, showing them his Martial license. He couldn't think of a single thing he could do while still a Martial Apprentice that would aid him in the evolution process to the Squire Realm.

"Excuse me." Rui addressed one of the staff members. "I have an appointment for my breakthrough process to the Squire Realm."

He handed over his Martial license.

"Apprentice Rui Quarrier, you do indeed have an appointment scheduled today, soon." She nodded. "Facility SRB-001 in the west wing, the maps will help direct you to your location."

"Thank you." Rui nodded before making his way to the designated room.

It took him longer than he had expected, after all, the Martial Union was huge, Rui had to refer to the various maps that were planted at multiple locations across the Martial Union.

"Excuse me?" Rui voiced out, drawing attention to himself as he entered the designated facility. "I believe I was told the procedure to my breakthrough to the Squire Realm would be taking place in this facility."

The room inside was large, it gave Rui the impression of a futuristic medical facility. There were strange contraptions and machines. Among them was a small chamber that was large enough to accommodate a man in it.

There was also a medical team within. Several nurses and assistants and a few elderly doctors.

"Welcome." One of them said. "I am doctor Menun. May I see your Martial license for verification?"

Rui duly handed over his Martial license, which was promptly verified by one of the assistants.

"Welcome Apprentice Rui Quarrier." Doctor Menun said, smiling courteously. "I will be the doctor overseeing the evolution breakthrough procedure to the Squire Realm."

"Pleasure to meet all of you." Rui offered a bright smile, eager to earn some goodwill from the people who he would be placing his life in the hands of.

"The final preparations for the Squire evolution breakthrough procedure are being completed." Doctor Menun explained. "There are certain measures that need to be taken before you are ready for the procedure. We will begin them shortly, please take a seat at the table."

She gestured for Rui to sit opposite to her at her table.

"Now then, time for a few standard procedure questions." Doctor Menun informed him. "Have you consumed alcoholic beverages since your measurement process?"

"Not at all." Rui shook his head.

Forget since the measurement process, Rui had yet to put even a drop of alcohol into his mouth in his second life. But he had no real intention of doing that. He wasn't a drinker in his previous life, and he had no intention of starting the habit in his second life.

"Have you consumed any hallucinogens since the measurement process?" She asked, after scribbling on her notepad.

"No."

"Have you undergone as much natural sleep since the measurement process till now, as we advised you?"

"Yes."

Sleep was a good way to burn time so that the agonizingly long wait for the evolution process to the Squire Realm. He could cut more than a dozen hours out of his waiting time that he would have had to sit through if he had used potions to keep himself awake.

He was delighted when, among the guidelines to follow for the breakthrough to the Squire Realm, was the necessity for natural and organic sleep.

"Have you suffered any injuries since the measurement process?" She asked.

"No."

It was hard to get injured when he simply sat around in the Quarrier Orphanage, doing nothing besides from training Mana and Max to while away time.

"Have you engaged in the training or mastery of a technique since the measurement process ended?" She asked with a flat tone.

Obviously, the answer to this was no. It was absolutely impossible to master any technique in the span of a few days, even if it was the lowest of grades of difficulty.

"And lastly..." She paused, before bringing out a printed sheet of paper with writing on it. "Do you consent to partake in a procedure that is inherently quite painful, strenuous, and risky and agree that the Martial Union holds no liability in the outcome of the procedure?"

Rui glanced down at the sheet of paper that she had placed in front of him, as well as the pen.

He would need to sign it to express written consent. This was something he had expected and been informed of. He signed it without hesitation.

"We'll need to take some blood in order to ensure that your answers to some of these questions are indeed accurate." Doctor Menun explained. "Sometimes it is possible that there are issues without the Martial Apprentice's awareness."

Rui readily offered his arm to the nurse who had a syringe prepared. Soon enough blood was drawn and was taken away for testing. Fortunately, blood testing was remarkably quick in this world. It usually took a few days on Earth. Here, the process was highly expedited when it came to Martial Artists in order to ensure the timely delivery of the necessary data and information.

And sure enough, it took a little over an hour for the results to come.

"Good news." Doctor Menun told him as she studied his results. "You're suitable to undergo the breakthrough process to the Squire Realm."

She turned towards him. "All preparations are complete now. Strip all your clothes down."

She stared at him, almost as if expecting a protest. Yet Rui obliged wordlessly, handing his clothes to an assistant who collected them. Although the hormones of his youthful body were annoying in such situations, he was too old and strong mentally for any embarrassing 'mishaps' to occur.

Chapter 460: Commencement

Not a single individual changed even a shade at the sight of his naked figure, displaying perfect professionalism.

"The assistants will help you occupy and strap into the apotheosis chamber." Doctor Menun told him, gesturing towards the machine. It looked like a bed perfectly meant to encompass a whole human body head to toe. Atop was a lid that looked like it would absolutely smother him when the chamber closed. It was the machine within which he would be undergoing

He made his way toward the Apotheosis chamber, sliding on top of it as he entered the chamber. The assistants and nurses strapped him down firmly, restricting his movements severely. Soon, they moved away, and the elevated lid to the chamber came down, shutting the chamber closed.

Immediately, after, two small tubes extended from above him. Attaching itself to his nose and mouth, and sealing the connection shut. Instantly, a supply of fresh air came from the tubes, allowing him to breathe peacefully.

The chamber was pitch black, but Rui could still sense the physical layout quite well thanks to Primordial Instinct and Seismic Mapping. That was why he immediately sensed when a strange liquid entered the chamber, filling it up to the very brim.

His body rose to the center of the chamber under the buoyancy force the liquid generated. Instantly Rui ran some calculations in his mind. Given the fact that he could sense how much he rose before he stopped, he could calculate the density of the liquid using the fluid dynamics that he had studied in his bachelor's of science degree.

('About one thousand eight hundred kilograms per meter cube.') Rui estimated. ('Definitely not water. I wonder what the point of this liquid is.')

Suddenly, he heard a voice, the sound traveled through the liquid. Yet it was clear that he was being communicated through using some submerged speaker.

"Apprentice Quarrier." Doctor Menun's voice rang in his ears. "Do you feel any nausea, discomfort, or anything else of the sort?"

"Not at all," Rui replied within the mask sealed around his mouth. "I'm feeling fine."

"Good." Doctor Menun replied. "The process will begin soon enough."

Rui was left in silence as he got to experience absolute solitude, the kind that provoked introspection and contemplation.

('I've come a long way.') Rui realized.

His mind flashed back to a long time ago. The day he first laid eyes upon Martial Art. An old retired Martial Squire who had humbly limited himself to trivial manual labor had accepted a cheap commission from the Quarrier Orphanage to clear a fallen tree that urgently needed to be moved because it had been covering the back exit to the Quarrier Orphanage.

Since that very moment, he had been enraptured by the concept of Martial Art. He had begun doing everything in his power to crack the entrance exam of the Martial Academy. Subjecting himself to years of fitness and MMA training. He had trained himself on kickboxing, Brazillian Jiu-jitsu, Judo, Muay Thai and some Tae-Kwon do. These were a variation of the bread-and-butter martial arts that UFC fighters strived to master in order to gain competence and experience in all fields of hand-to-hand combat. These skills helped him somehow crack the entrance exam and be accepted as a student, despite the age gap.

He raced through the physical and Martial foundation stages thanks to his pre-existing martial arts foundation, before being thrust into exploration. Then, he became a Martial Apprentice after having discovered his Martial Art, and then a long period of growth; six stages of training thirty techniques. He had proven himself as a Martial Artist in the many missions he had undertaken, and now he was ready to take the next step.

('It's been a hell of a journey so far.') Rui mused to himself. ('I can't wait for the journey that is to come.')

"Apprentice Quarrier." Doctor Menun's voice reverberated through the liquid he was submerged in. "All preparations have been completed. Are you ready to begin?"

Rui took a deep breath.

"Yes, please begin."

"Alright, the procedure will begin three... two... one..."

Rui's eyes widened as a surge of pure agony welled up within him.

The sheer intensity, the sheer scope was beyond anything he had ever felt in his entire life.

"AAAAARRGHHHGRRHRGHRG!" He bellowed into his mask.

He didn't even know what part of his body was actually experiencing pain!

It was as though his very soul was being torn to shreds.

The pain came from everywhere. It was omnipresent.

He had lost all sense of physical self. It was as though his body had disappeared and his brain and nerves were kept alive, being subjected to the most horrific artificially manufactured sensations of pain.

Pain radiated across his entire being. As though he was being burnt alive, torn to shreds, broken to pieces, and flattened down all at once.

It was such a nonsensical amount of pain it almost felt like somewhat that could only happen in a nightmare, the kind the details of which would be forgotten once he woke up.

Soon, the pain began eroding everything.

His situational awareness had dropped to zero. The liquid whose density he had deduced cleverly had all but disappeared. His sense organs were still functioning but his brain and mind were beset with so much pain that they temporarily forgot about the senses feeding them information about the external world.

The sheer amount of pain input his brain was receiving forced it to abandon a lot of other preoccupations otherwise it would short-circuit and he would experience a seizure.

The worst was that he could do nothing about it. He couldn't even be in a position to think about it, because his ability to form conscious thoughts had been highly nerfed and impeded. Yet that was not the worst of his problems by a long shot.

He could feel that even his mind was beginning to slip. His consciousness, chipped away minute bit by bit. It was as though he was drowning, drowning in an ocean of pain.

Yet, the worst had yet to come.