

Martial Unity 1351

Chapter 1351: Clash

Rui had activated Hypertrophic Surge as he banked everything on his long-range offense. It had the highest probability of ending the fight, largely because the man was unable to evade the heavy attacks and could only withstand them.

And it appeared that his estimations weren't too far away from the truth.

RUMBLE!

The very land around them shook violently as the two Martial Seniors punished it with the power of their conflict. Senior Minneson gritted his teeth as he did his best to weather everything that Rui threw at him, yet it was clear that Rui's power had exceeded his expectations.

He had not expected the younger Martial Senior to be able to output such ferocious power continuously. Given the fact that his Martial Heart was dimmer than any other he had ever seen, it meant that this power was a product of his Martial Art rather than his Martial Heart.

Senior Minneson couldn't imagine how strong Rui would go on to be if continued to grow stronger and delved deeper into the Senior Realm.

Instinctively, he came to a conclusion.

'He needs to die before he grows even stronger.' Senior Minneson narrowed his eyes.

Especially since there would be a grudge between them if his opponent survived. It was possible that if they faced each other in the future, his opponent will have reached a level of power that would allow them to beat him.

"Hyah!" The man yelled as he resisted Rui's onslaught, closing the distance between them at an ever-increasing pace.

His powerful Martial Heart and Martial Body forged forward as they endured the many impacts that Rui inflicted on them.

Rui, on the other hand, was having trouble facing a shift in mentality. He was not accustomed to the Metabody System not only not getting the job done, but also being overwhelmed by anybody who wasn't also the strongest in the Realm.

However, he had experienced this twice in the past, entering a new Realm meant that he was quite weak from the start all over again. This time, of course, he didn't start at the absolute bottom, however, it was clear that he was still well below the norm if someone like Senior Minneson was able to compete against his Metabody System.

The surrounding town that they were in had already been leveled to the ground, and completely wiped out. The infrastructure wasn't the best in the first place and with two Martial Seniors fighting off a raging battle, it was no surprise that the entirety of the town had already been reduced to rubble.

That included the man's base of operations, but it didn't appear like he cared about that anymore, if ever.

"RAARGH!" The man snarled as he increasingly gathered momentum and heat, rushing forward towards Rui.

Every step he took shook the land they were on.

Every swing of his arm generated a wave of flames.

His body steadily made its way to Rui as he weathered down the power of his Hypertrophic Surge-empowered attacks. Rui narrowed his eyes, increasing his limits as he launched his most powerful Transverse Resonance attacks.

And yet.

BOOM!!!

Attacks that used to be devastating were only effective at most. Senior Minneson gritted his teeth as he bore the brunt of everything that Rui had thrown against him.

It was at this juncture that Rui had a consideration. If he wanted, he could ensure that the shootout fest would last till the end of the battle, but the issue was that he didn't know if he could actually take down the gargantuan giant down in this manner.

It appeared that as powerful as Hypertrophic Surge was, it was not necessarily strong enough to win him the battle. At most, Rui was sure that he could deal severe damage to him over time.

However, the man also had a healing factor, which meant that the worst of the damage would most likely get mitigated and he would retain a good chunk of his combat prowess despite the wounds.

If Hypertrophic Surge ran out before the man did, then Rui would be in no position to take him down. The Metabody System drained him too much. He certainly did have his Martial Heart, but it was simply not enough to overcome the man's powerful Martial Heart.

Rui had not forgotten that his ordinary attacks did little to no damage against the man's extraordinarily powerful physique.

Rui narrowed his eyes as he made his choice. He stopped backing away from the man, instead standing his ground as the man closed the distance between them at an increasing rate.

He rushed forward, with a wild grin on his face. "What's the matter? Don't want to continue this little contest for much longer? I can do this all day!"

His burning fists blasted through all of Rui's attacks as he seemingly exerted himself to the absolute limit.

Rui suddenly ceased attacking as he adopted a crouching position before launching himself forward at an extreme pace towards the man. Before the man could even question the decision, a change had already occurred.

"Fuuuuuu...!" Rui exhaled deeply as he activated Godspeed, deactivating Hypertrophic Surge.

The man's eyes widened as Rui lashed forward in a blur, the momentum that he had gathered from charging forward with Hypertrophic Surge was still there, so he had momentarily combined the power of both techniques. Yet Rui gritted his teeth as the flames burned his flesh unperturbed and with greater ease.

BOOM!!!

A swift and incredibly heavy Flowing Canon crashed into the man's vitals before he could even react. The man staggered, bending forward reflexively disoriented. Yet even as Rui's flesh charred, his foot flew to the man's jaw at an extreme velocity.

BAM!!

A powerful impact struck the disoriented man's unguarded jaw, permeating through it with the help of Reverberating Lance. A wave of shock rippled across the man's face. Flashes of dizziness rung in his vision. He staggered unsteadily, trying to maintain his ground and regain his clarity. He reflexively generated even more heat with friction, trying to keep Rui away.

Chapter 1352: Opportunities

Yet Rui bore all of it as he blasted the man's head with even more attacks, doing his best to inflict as many strikes as he could.

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM!

Even as he bombarded the already dizzy man's head with strikes, his flesh had already burned off entirely.

Yet he didn't stop.

BOOM!

A powerful drop kick landed on the man's head, sending yet another impact permeating through his head.

The man's eyes rolled up as his body went slack.

The accumulated blunt-force trauma crossed a critical threshold, causing the man's brain to shut down.

THUD

The man's unconscious body fell to the ground. Yet compared to his much better body, Rui's charred body was unrecognizable. He collapsed to his knees, quickly deactivating Godspeed and his Martial Heart as he pulled out rejuvenation and healing potions that had managed to survive within his Senior-level garb, before inhaling them deeply.

An incredibly soothing sensation spread through his body as his body began recovering at a pace that was visible to the eye. Yet the potion did work much slower than it did when he was a Martial Squire.

Healing the body of a Martial Senior's body was perhaps harder than that of a Martial Squire.

It wasn't until a minute later that he was finally fully recovered. Yet an incredible wave of exhaustion hit him harder than it did when he was a Martial Squire. Martial Squires were capable of exerting great power, but they required even rejuvenation and sustenance to return to their prime.

Ordinary amounts of ordinary food were usually not enough.

It appeared that was even more true for Martial Seniors who not only exhausted the body's ordinary power but also a good amount of his Martial Heart. In order to restore both these reservoirs of power, the amount of food that he would need to eat would be extremely high.

He immediately felt a deep amount of hunger welling up within him.

Thankfully, this was a problem that already had solutions, from dense food pills, and supplements that could be added to regular food. Rui routinely traveled with the former, quickly consuming them as he gave himself some momentary respite.

His eyes drifted to his unconscious opponent. In hindsight, as painful as it was, he made the right decision. Had he chosen to go along with the stalemate clash, he most likely would not have had the fuel to finish the job in this manner.

Before any further ado, he quickly walked over to the unconscious man, raising his leg high before activating his Martial Heart.

BOOM!!

CRACK!

Without the Martial Heart amplifying defensive techniques, the attack effortlessly crushed his skull.

He heaved a sigh. "That was too close for comfort."

He hadn't really had such a close battle since his battle with Ieyasu. However, because Ieyasu had also been the peak of the Squire Realm with him before they broke through, he didn't feel the fact that he entered the lower echelons of the Senior Realm.

But the fact that this random Martial Senior almost roasted him to death was an indication that he had yet to fully readjust his mentality as a young inexperienced Martial Senior who was no longer at the peak of his Realm.

Of course, he generally felt more secure since he was vastly stronger than before, but he knew that he would be subjecting himself to even greater forces in the Senior Realm as opposed to the Squire Realm from here on out.

He shook his head, leaving the man's corpse behind. He knew that the Beggar's Sect probably already knew of his victory and his success in taking down the Martial Senior.

It was a good feeling knowing that, at least for a while, the human trafficking sector in the Saiful region would go down. It wasn't long before he had returned to his quarters, before resting in his bed and heaving a deep sigh as his mind flew through the many thoughts that had been budding.

He had gotten a better understanding of how strong he was, given that Senior Minneson had been a Martial Senior for twenty-five years after breaking through to the Senior Realm at the age of sixty-one.

In other words, despite being much older, and having two and a half decades of experience in the Senior Realm, Rui had managed to overcome him with everything he had. The fact that he had been pushed to his limits was a good thing because only when he was could he determine where his limit was.

The fact that he was able to overcome someone who had spent so many years in the Senior Realm despite just having broken through a few weeks ago showed that he most certainly had started remarkably high in the Senior Realm.

However, the fact that the Senior Realm was fifteen grades wide showed that even if he started several grades above the bottom, that was still quite far away from the peak of the Senior Realm and from being a high-grade Martial Senior.

Given that Martial Seniors seemed to stall for a long time in the Senior Realm before they broke through to the Master Realm, Rui could estimate that making progress in the Senior Realm was most certainly harder than making progress in the Master Realm.

His eyes narrowed. "I should wrap up my acclimatization period and quickly begin moving on to reaching greater heights. It's not as though the Saiful Region has too much to offer to Martial Seniors in the first place."

Like the Kaddar Region, the Saiful Region only had a few dozen Martial Seniors at most. It wasn't rich with the opportunity to fight other Martial Seniors. In his estimation, he would most likely have to leave the place and head to greater avenues of opportunity to grow stronger.

His mind flashed back to the list of places across the continent where one could grow stronger Martial Seniors that he got from the Beggar's Sect. He would definitely have to pick a place from the list soon, and continue completing operations and missions for the Beggar's Sect as he traveled the continent, growing stronger.

Chapter 1353: Disqualify

The Derimont Bazaar experienced almost an immediate drop in the human trafficking sector of the market. The Minneson human trafficking ring fell almost immediately after Senior Minneson passed away.

The entire organization had been held together by his own personal strength, various conflicting people and modus operandi all held together by the power of a Martial Senior, they immediately crumbled from within, unable to sustain any cohesion that allowed them to perform a large number of operations.

Those in the upper echelons of the Saiful Region who were in the know could not help but heave a sigh of relief. Although they all had various conflicting interests, they could all agree that the Minneson human trafficking ring was a nightmare for the entirety of the Saiful region.

That was the reason that many rejoiced when it collapsed, and many grew even more curious about the force that caused the collapse of the human trafficking ring. Perhaps it was because of the grace of the Beggar's Sect, but the fact that Senior John had been the one to take him drew the interests of many powers.

No one knew who commissioned him, but someone had, and he was strong enough to take down the leader of the trafficking ring. Many wondered if this was a sign that Rui was going to involve himself in the matters of the Saiful Region and become a staple of the Martial powers of the region.

Yet, in reality, the opposite was true. Rui was already preparing to leave the Saiful Region while he completed a few more mundane operations.

There simply wasn't much it had to offer for Martial Seniors.

In the first place, there weren't many Martial Seniors that warranted a mission to target them in the first place. The number of missions and operations within the Saiful Region that could truly challenge him was too limited.

That was the reason he immediately consulted Sian about the options that he had for his next operation.

"The perfect execution of your mission is appreciated," Sian remarked. "The missions and operations that you can undertake after leaving the Saiful region depend on where you want to go."

"I'm heading towards the east," Rui replied with a hint of determination.

The time for running away was done. It was time for him to begin his journey back home.

"Specifically, I wouldn't mind missions and operations that can be completed while also training in the various avenues of opportunities for growth for Martial Seniors," Rui replied. "That would be ideal for me."

Sian considered his words for a moment. "It's not going to be easy to arrange potential missions and operations for you with a vague schedule and vague destinations. Rather than having me prepare missions for you, it will be ideal for you to approach the base of operations of our foreign affairs department that is closest to the location that you wish to remain at for a while and complete their operations with you."

Rui considered her words, nodding.

They had merit. It was probably best to just interact with the branches of the Beggar's Sect across various regions and nations than to continue corresponding with Sian across such a distance.

"I'd need locations of the various branches, though," Rui said.

Sian nodded. "We'll give you the broader general locations of the various branches across your journey to the east."

Rui raised an eyebrow. He didn't expect her to agree so easily. The locations of various bases of operations of their foreign affairs department were strategic intelligence that could be used to potentially harm them.

"Naturally, we won't be informing you of their precise locations," Sian remarked. "However, we will equip you with the means to be contacted by our various branches should you seek to find them."

"How will that work?" Rui asked, curious.

"We will equip you with a simple and inconspicuous badge." She replied. "If you wish to make contact with our foreign affairs branch at any given region. Then you merely need to wear the badge in that region, and it will be interpreted as a desire to make contact."

That was not only discreet and clever but also showed just how cohesive the Beggar's Sect was despite being so large and widespread. The more Rui interacted with this mysterious group, the more he was determined to never make an enemy out of them.

Even if their intrinsic militaristic power was not that high, the sheer amount of influence they wielded was off the charts.

"That works for me as well." Rui nodded.

The two of them hashed out some more details before their meeting ended. Rui was supplied with the badge before he left the book market of the Derimont Bazaar.

'It is pretty unremarkable.' Rui mused.

It was made out of ordinary steel, there wasn't even a shred of esoteric substances in it. In a way, it was representative of the Beggar's Sect that was able to hide in broad daylight under an unremarkable disguise.

He pocketed it, heading back to his personal quarters in the Zerendul Republic before quickly gathering his few belongings before leaving.

He hadn't even decided where he was going to go. All he knew was that he needed to leave the Saiful Region before his momentum stagnated in this dull region.

He had a decent array of options at hand. It all depended on which of the three paths of growth and improvement he wanted to go down first when it came to his Martial Path.

It wasn't easy, but at the very least, he knew which one it wouldn't be to start off.

'Primordial seed is definitely the hardest among them all.' Rui mused. 'Even getting started in this field is too hard.'

Because he was trying to tread completely new paths, the difficulty of success was much greater. With mental techniques and assassination techniques, although he would be most certainly developing techniques from scratch, or at the very least modifying existing techniques significantly, he would still be working on a pre-existing foundation.

He didn't need to invent mental or assassination techniques.

Chapter 1354: Shadow Isles

It wasn't long before Rui exited the Ferendul Republic and began traveling east. He had already ruled out primordial seed. However, now he needed to choose between mental or assassination techniques.

He recalled the two Masters that were documented in the intelligence that Sian had documented for him.

He was particularly interested in them above the other potential avenues of growth.

The issue was that not only were there not many alluring avenues to train mental and assassination techniques like there were for primary fields of combat, but in addition, Rui was unfit to train in them.

It was no different from an amateur who didn't know how to properly throw an attack trying to train in the Umiana Trench. One needed to have a foundation before one could even think about going to a place like the Umiana Trench.

That was why he was interested in building up a foundation before he considered going to these training avenues. The best way to do that was to develop some mental and assassination techniques and add them to his Martial Art.

Being trained by some of the greatest authorities in those fields that he could possibly have access to was definitely better than trying to purchase some random mental techniques without the corresponding training resources for that technique, trying to piece their core principles together to create a new technique.

Of course, it wasn't going to be easy at all.

The intelligence documents detailed that it was exceedingly difficult to be accepted as pupils by either Martial Masters, and that was to be expected. Considering how few they chose as pupils versus how many tried to get accepted as pupils, the success rate was a milli-percent at most.

Still, Rui had reason to be confident in himself.

The only question was which field ought he try first. He was conflicted. He had a greater affinity for the field of mental techniques, but he had a more urgent need for assassination techniques.

He was going to assassinate Chairman Deacon, after all, not challenge his security measures to a duel. Still, he knew just how compatible with mental technique he was.

'Well, I do plan to do both. So I guess I'll start with the Silent Shadow since her reported location is closer to me than the Hypnomaster.' Rui mused.

The Silent Shadow, Master Reina Cara, was a highly renowned Martial Master who had spent nearly two centuries as an assassin. It was said that the number of people she had assassinated was enough to populate an entire country. It was not an exaggeration to say that across her life, she had impacted the course of human civilization through her many assassinations of many powerful and influential figures.

She was currently residing in the Ghana Archipelago, also known as the Shadow Isles, a group of islands in the Sirana Gulf of the Vanema Ocean. Yet despite the public knowledge that the notorious and feared Martial Master resided in the Shadow Isles, nobody knew where she was.

Many people and Martial Artists who were part of the covert and assassination world came to the Shadow Isles in hopes of being accepted as a pupil by the legendary assassin, yet an overwhelming majority of people failed.

People could not even find her, let alone try to persuade her to impart even a fraction of her mighty prowess to them.

When Rui heard that, a single thought entered his mind.

"It's a test."

Assassins eliminated their targets. Those who could not even find their target were assassins unworthy of her tutelage. Given that she was a Martial Master assassin, hiding would be effortlessly easy for her. She could adjust the difficulty of finding her to whatever degree she wanted to set the standards as low or high as she wanted.

And he was absolutely certain that her standards were extremely high.

The reason that he knew this was because not even the Beggar's Sect had been able to locate her in the Shadow Isles.

"Our modus operandi has proven to be largely ineffective in locating her. Thus, her general location is all we can offer, I'm afraid." Sian had shaken her head.

That was extremely high indirect praise from the Beggar's Sect, which had thus far seemed almost nigh-omniscient when it came to matters across the continent. The fact that Master Reina Cara had managed to successfully evade the omnipresent Beggar's Sect showed just how absurdly high her skills as a Martial Master were.

Of course, in a sense, she was sort of cheating. The Beggar's Sect harnessed the power of human civilization itself to gather intelligence. Thus, simply cutting one's self off from human civilization was the best way to avoid the Beggar's Sect.

Still, he knew that this was only partially effective. The Floating Sect was almost entirely disconnected from the human civilization below. He knew that Senior Sarak had prohibited unauthorized contact from the human members of the staff to the continent, and the Floating Sect had still effortlessly pierced through those measures and learned about him before he even left the sect.

Thus the fact that the Silent Shadow had managed to completely befuddle the Beggar's Sect spoke highly of her prowess. She had most likely taken these measures specifically to evade the Beggar's Sect and the broader intelligence community in general. It was also an indirect of her skill to all those who came to the Shadow Isles looking for her.

She was the real deal.

If anybody could give Rui the foundation he needed to be able to kill Chairman Deacon despite the heavy security measures that the latter had undoubtedly taken to protect his life, it was her.

Once he gained what he needed from Master Reina Cara, he could be on his way to the Hypnomaster, who was much further east than her.

"I also need to complete a really big mission or multiple small missions in the Shadow Isles," Rui murmured. He had not forgotten about his commission payment for the Beggar's Sect's services.

It was going to be challenging to keep up both those tasks at the same time, but it was a challenge that he was willing to take.

Chapter 1355: Targeted

According to the briefing that the Beggar's Sect had provided him with, the Shadow Isles were in the Sirana Gulf, surrounded by the east coast of the Derschek Region.

Since he was approaching the Shadow Isles from the east, he would need to pass through the Derschek Region to get to the Isles.

According to the intelligence from the Beggar's Sect, the Derschek Region was one of the most volatile war-ridden regions in its geopolitical surroundings. The reason for it was actually quite simple.

Access to incredibly cheap covert and assassination services.

The Shadow Isles that were surrounded by the Derschek Region on three sides were filled with quality and elite covert operatives and assassins looking to gain the tutelage of the Silent Shadow. During their stay on the Shadow Isles in search of the Silent Shadow, these covert operatives and assassins made a living by doing what they did best.

Their market was predominantly that of the Derschek Region, the only region that was by far the closest to the Shadow Isles.

Consequently, the Derschek Region had an overwhelming supply of freelancer covert operatives and assassins from the Shadow Isles.

When supply exceeded demand, prices deflated. This meant that it was far easier to hire genuinely elite Martial Artist assassins in the Derschek than arguably anywhere else on the continent.

On top of that, the Derschek Region was an inherently highly divided region with many nations and settlements. This bred a lot of conflict, which was only exacerbated by the ease with which assassins could be hired.

The consequence? An unending ocean conflict fueled by endless commissioned assassinations that never allowed for any kind of peace or stability to ever be fostered.

A maelstrom of chaos, war, and blood.

It was the ideal place for assassins. So much so that it had eventually become half the reason operators and assassins even came to the Shadow Isles, on top of searching for the Silent Shadow.

Was there a better place to hone his ability to kill a target? He could hardly think of any.

It took him a week of nigh-continuous travel to reach the Derschek Region, overlooking the entire coast from a large mountain from afar. To the ordinary eye, it appeared to be nothing more than an ordinary coastline that extended for many hundreds of kilometers, bordering the Vanema Ocean.

Yet, Rui felt like he could sense the maelstrom that brewed in the Derschek Region just looking at it.

Regardless, he persisted, keeping a low profile with his Mind Mask as he de-elevated his way to the Derschek Region. It wasn't long before he arrived at the first human settlement in the Derschek Region.

[Arabaor Town]

A town that welcomed newcomers to the Derschek Region allegedly.

Yet even before he could enter the open town, he was greeted with corpses that were uncaringly tossed and littered around the outskirts of the town. The air was saturated with the pungent odor of rotting flesh. Yet the locals were clearly unbothered by it, given that the corpses were not even buried.

It was a greeting that Rui had never experienced when entering a new place, but it didn't stop him.

He walked in, glancing around as he took in the noisy and chaotic place. Despite the clearly high death rate, the place was as densely packed as ever. Most of the establishments were small bars, pubs, or mess halls where many people gathered.

His senses swam through the crowd as he sensed an unusually high population density of Martial Artists, mostly restricted to Martial Squires.

POW!

"Urgh!" A young boy grimaced, falling to the ground.

"Little brat -hic- thinks he's all grown up." A drunk obese man staggered over the fallen child with balled fists.

Behind him stood two Martial Apprentices.

"You stole from me!" The boy protested.

The man grunted, racing his fist once more.

Rui's eyes narrowed as time slowed down to a crawl. With one step, he had arrived beside the man.

TAP

A simple poke to the man's chest with Reverberating Lance permeated an impact that sunk in deep before striking the heart. Unlike a Martial Body, his weak flesh was unable to offer an impedance.

Given how drunk and obese he was, a cardiac failure would be written off as a result of poor health. Rui did need to hold back immensely to make sure that he didn't flatten the man's heart by applying just a little iota of more effort than he should have.

STEP

The next moment, he was already a hundred meters on the other side.

"Hngh!" The man clutched his chest with a pained expression, staggering a bit before falling down. The Martial Apprentices reacted with shock, rushing over to his side.

Yet what Rui paid attention to was not the man himself, but the reaction of the crowd.

Nobody even noticed.

The few that did immediately went about their day, as if they just spotted a leaf falling or any other mundane event that did not warrant their attention.

A complete and total apathy and indifference to death.

It reminded him of the Derimont Bazaar. However, the Derimont Bazaar was an artificial creation of the Beggar's Sect of the darkest parts of humanity. The Ajaor Town was merely the beginning of the Derschek Region, it was the welcoming mat of the entire region.

What was the rest of the region like?

He shook his head.

He wasn't interested in the rest of the region, he was here for the Shadow Isles, and more specifically, the Silent Shadow. Everything else didn't matter. He maintained a tight Mind Mask while traversing the macabre town, minding his own business.

Yet suddenly.

WHOOSH!

Rui calmly dodged a blade lunging towards him from behind. A passerby had randomly attacked Rui with a Squire-level attack when they crossed each other.

CLASP! THWACK!

Rui swiftly caught the man's arm, disarming him before throwing him to the ground and putting his foot on the back of his head.

"Urgh!" The man grimaced.

"Talking will make this less painful." Rui coldly informed him. "If you're honest, I just might let you li-!"

His eyes widened in surprise as the man's eyes had already rolled backward, his mouth had already begun foaming as he choked. Rui just watched with shock as the man ingested poison, dying right there on the spot.

It took his mind just a moment to swiftly infer and deduce everything about him that Rui needed to.

'He was not a thug looking to steal from a dead corpse.' Rui's eyes narrowed sharply. 'He's an assassin. An extremely professional one based on how quickly and unhesitatingly killed himself.'

There was only one conclusion to be inferred.

'Someone has already put out a hit on me?'

Chapter 1356: Destination

It was a shocking conclusion, but he didn't see any other truth. This was clearly a professional assassin targeting him instead of a thug, that was for sure. Which certainly meant that there was a commission or hit out on him as professional assassins only worked for money.

'How long has it even been since I got here?' Rui frowned. 'Why would there be a hit out on me so quick?'

He wasn't sure. However, he had a few guesses.

'Maybe someone saw me kill that man.' Rui mused.

After all, the man did have some wealth, maybe Rui pissed off someone who wanted to teach him a lesson. Rui hadn't used his Martial Heart since it was a waste to use it against a normal human.

This meant that a Martial Squire would be able to perceive what happened. Perhaps that information wound up in the arms of some third party that decided they wanted to get rid of him.

Or, it could be a third party trying to test him as well. Sending in a single Martial Squire assassin after that demonstration was not exactly the most fitting, but it could simply have been someone trying to confirm his capabilities.

Rui was concealing his true status with Mind Mask, he didn't want to draw eyes in a region that was known for being infested with covert attacks. Although he did have a lot of faith in his senses and mind, he also had a lot of faith in assassins.

Ultimately, it was best not to get into trouble against them if possible. Yet he had already failed at doing that.

He sighed, shaking his head. 'The Derschek Region lives up to its reputation. All I can hope is that whoever targeted me did it for mundane reasons and isn't persistent enough. I don't have time for this.'

He had to go out there and immediately begin searching for the Silent Shadow in the Shadow Isles. Regardless, getting out of here was probably a good idea. Given how quickly he was found and commissioned, whoever put out a hit on him probably had a base of power in the town of Albaor.

This person or organization must have not only received a surveillance report on Rui being a Martial Artist but also quickly hired a hitman to take Rui out. Which required some foundation of a base of power to get things done that quickly.

However, it begged the question as to why people would establish a foundation of power in the town of Albaor, an outer town with no real power that is merely meant to welcome outsiders traveling to the Derschek region for the first time.

The only real answer was that being outsiders didn't necessarily exclude them from potentially being targets.

In fact, perhaps it was because they were outsiders that they were definitely not excluded. After all, an outside element could disrupt the balance of power within the Derschek Region. It was best to nip such an element in the bud.

However, if that was the case, it allowed him to deduce and infer even more information about the ones who targeted him. If they decided he needed to go after witnessing that simple display of power, then they were most likely from a weaker group or nation where that level of power could make a critical difference.

After all, the Martial Squire assassin, while remarkably professional, was weak. Even if Rui had still been a Martial Squire, he would have effortlessly folded him without feeling the slightest hint of danger.

Perhaps stronger assassins would be sent after him, but Rui doubted it instinctively.

Besides, even if stronger assassins were sent after him...

'I'm strong.'

He was a Martial Senior. Not the strongest, not by a long shot, but anybody who wanted to take him down needed to be willing to indulge in expensive expenditure if they wanted to get rid of him.

Given that the Beggar's Sect had divulged that the Silent Shadow was the only Martial Master in the Derschek Region and the Shadow Isles, it meant that the strongest forces were Martial Seniors.

That already meant that he was a powerhouse as far as the forces of the Derschek Region were concerned. Of course, that didn't give him impunity to do as he pleased, but as long as he kept to himself, no one would bother him.

In that case, perhaps broadcasting the fact that he was a Martial Senior was not the worst idea. In these circumstances, deterrents were better than trump cards. But the plan could backfire if he didn't deter them, since they would send forces specifically to take down a Martial Senior.

'Well, let's just keep a low profile for now while I reach the Shadow Isles.' Rui narrowed his eyes.

He also needed to meet up with the branch of the Beggar's Sect in this region. There was a good chance that they could supply him with relevant information. He quickly plucked out the badge from within his robes, pinning it to his attire.

Less than a minute later, he was stopped by a street fortune teller.

"Ah... young man. I see that you are destined to go to a certain place." The old man told him. "Allow me to help you fulfill this destiny."

The man gave Rui a slip of paper.

Only two words were written on it.

[Libraries of Gehu]

"This Beggar prays that you find what you are looking for." He bade Rui farewell as he went about his way.

A moment later, the piece of paper turned to ashes, flying away. Rui raised an eyebrow as he watched the man go away.

'Sian wasn't kidding when she said that they would find me when I put this badge on...' Rui mused as he went about his way. It had happened sooner than he had imagined.

His mind turned to the location that the old man had passed to him.

The Library of Gehu. He hadn't heard of it, but it was without a doubt the base of operations of the Derschek branch of the Beggar's Sect.

Chapter 1357: Gehu

"I'd like to see a map," Rui told a storekeeper. "Where can I find the Libraries of Gehu?"

The storekeeper rolled out a map, pointing at a spot on it. "About several hours of travel through carriage."

Rui nodded as he quickly scanned the map carefully and thoroughly, before leaving the store empty-handed. It wasn't long before Rui found himself near the Library of Gehu in the town of Veran within the Cerxeun Duchy.

In his time traveling through the Derschek Region, he hadn't been the victim of yet another assassination attempt. It led him to believe that it was most likely closer to a general measure as opposed to someone targeting him.

Or if someone did target him, they were either too weak to deal with the level of power that he had displayed, or their desire to take him out wasn't worth the price. In either case, it led him to believe that he was probably not special in any regard.

However, what truly drew his attention was the volatile atmosphere of the Derschek Region as he traveled through it. It wasn't that this region was impoverished, no. It was just that he got the sense that life was fleeting in this region.

The citizens lived as if they could die any moment anywhere. There was an immense air of wariness from the common folk, and he couldn't blame them.

He saw many corpses on the way to the Library of Gehu. He even witnessed a live murder and plenty of smaller acts of aggression. It was a place that did not convey even a shred of stability.

He sensed countless Martial Apprentices, most of them were hiding their Apprentice-level auras, not drawing attention to themselves. Rui figured most of them were freelancer assassins for hire given how they shadily brooded in alleyways. It reminded him of the Derimont Bazaar.

They were essentially cheap hitmen for hire. He bet that in the Derschek Region, unlike in the Kandrian Empire where common folk were too poor to hire Martial Artists for anything other than the simplest of tasks, even middle-class folks could easily hire assassins to kill any other ordinary people they wanted.

This led to the birth of a society where nobody was safe. The ordinary conflicts between normal people used to be generally harmless, since ordinary people were too weak to have an impact, were now quite problematic since they could just hire an assassin to take out someone that they didn't care about.

This was a direct consequence of the Silent Shadow turning the Gaha Archipelago into her Shadow Isles, and drawing assassins from across the continent.

The Cerxeun Duchy where the Library of Gehu was located was actually a lot more stable than the rest of the small states and settlements that Rui had traveled through to get there, which did explain why the Beggar's Sect chose to settle there.

"Wow," Rui murmured when he arrived at the Libraries of Gehu.

It was different from what he had pictured. The cluster of libraries was rather wide and expansive with impressively large infrastructure and architecture supporting it. It was extremely different from the shabby image of the book market of the Derimont Bazaar.

It appeared that the Beggar's Sect did not use the same cover to hide behind all the time. Evidently, they were also capable of masquerading as a cluster of elite libraries. The impressive establishment was in stark contrast to what he had witnessed thus far.

According to the information that he had gathered, the Libraries of Gehu was actually a joint endeavor of the Gehu Consortium, a consortium of powerful corporates that each set up a library together within a single cluster.

Given that he knew this place was the base of operations of the Beggar's Sect, it meant that the Beggar's Sect also basically controlled the Gehu Consortium, or at least one constituent. which didn't surprise Rui. If it needed to interact with the world, then it could not do so openly, and always had to rely on shell fronts.

When he ran his Reimannian Echo through the establishment, the sheer volume, density, and complexity of the layouts and the assortment of literature meant that it served as the perfect place to hide a library of intelligence within.

Just the absurd amount of information within the library meant that it was just too easy to bury intelligence documentation well within the ocean of information. He had to admit, they nailed their hiding spot just like last time.

He glanced around, studying the people who entered and exited the library. Surprisingly, it didn't just comprise of posh upper-class people. He could see that people of all backgrounds freely entering and exiting the libraries.

It wasn't until he entered and inquired about the fee that he understood why.

"Free of charge?" Rui frowned.

"Yes sir," The receptionist smiled at him. "The Libraries of Gehu are free of charge for all those who wish to access our vast repositories of knowledge. This whole establishment is an endeavor of public charity from the Gehu Consortium to allow anybody of all backgrounds tooo gaaaaaaaaiiiiiiii..."

Time slowed down to crawl in Rui's eyes, as he studied the entirety of the vast establishment.

The elements of the establishment required a constant supply of energy from esoteric sources.

The number of hired staff that were clearly skilled and qualified.

The sheer number of books and documents.

All of this was free?

Such a thing was almost impossible to believe. In reality, Rui was certain that the Beggar's Sect was using some of the immense revenue they made from selling intelligence to keep this place afloat.

The reason it was free of charge was so that the number of people across the entire establishment as well as those walking in and out would increase dramatically, making it almost impossible to spot the Beggar's Sect and its business amidst the genuine library affairs.

It was a good way to hide in plain sight as the Beggar's Sect modus operandi went.

Chapter 1358: Dismantle

The more Rui looked at the libraries of Gehu, the more he came to like it. Unlike the Derimont Bazaar, the libraries of Gehu had a positive impact on society. Here, one could come to freely learn as much knowledge as they wanted to, potentially to change their life for the better. It was an avenue of opportunity for the average person.

Rui simply walked in, sauntering around nonchalantly.

He was wearing the badge that Sian gave him, so he was sure that soon enough, he would be approached by someone.

For the moment, he was curious about the inventory and catalog of the entire library. There was so much information here that he was actually intrigued and curious about it.

This place held his interest even outside of being the base of operations of the Beggar's Sect. He could use it to quickly gain tons of relevant and important information that would help him if he stored it in

the Mind Palace. He could even gain more intelligence on substances like the primordial seed. It was definitely something that was worth considering.

However, the books weren't the only things that drew his attention. All of the libraries and their various sections had a public sitting area that extended far and wide, accommodating many people, as well as private accommodations for the wealthier who wished to have more privacy and comfort.

Rui could sense anti-sensory technology in these private compartments, making them increasingly difficult to sense. Some had managed to even hamper his Riemannian Echo, which was quite impressive.

Looking back at his visit to the Derimont Bazaar, he knew that the purpose of these private compartments was simply to hide the use of anti-sensory measures of the Beggar's Sect, so that people didn't grow suspicious, or use it to locate members of the Beggar's Sect since nobody would be able to distinguish them.

"You seem rather interested in this particular section, sir," A staff member drew his attention. "If you wish, I can bring you to a qualified expert who can recommend an assortment of relevant literature that will surely be of interest to you."

Rui nodded. "Please do."

She smiled courteously. "Please come this way."

They walked down the many halls and corridors of the expansive establishment before she guided him to a mundane office with shelves stacked with all kinds of documents. Inside sat a short man in formal attire, and round-rimmed glasses engrossed in writing.

"Professor Carl, we have a guest who wishes to consult you."

The man didn't respond as he continued to obsess over the document he was working on.

"Professor Carl."

"Hm?" The man furrowed his eyebrows, looking up at Rui. "What can I do for you?"

"I came here to make a payment," Rui replied. "I was hoping to gain your help with it."

It wasn't long before the door closed behind them and powerful anti-sensory measures were taken.

"Sian did inform me that you might come, Senior Falken." The professor spoke first as his entire demeanor changed. "It seems that the Derschek branch of the Beggar's Sect has been graced with your services."

"Yes, I do intend to complete a portion of the commission payment in this place," Rui noted. "I also wanted to consult an on-site expert of this branch in particular."

"You're searching for the Silent Shadow." The professor replied expectantly. "Many are, but almost none succeed in finding her."

"Sian did inform of that." Rui nodded.

"Then you are aware that we are unable to supply you with her location and identity." Professor Carl remarked impassively. "The intelligence community at large has failed in finding her. We estimate that only a powerful Martial Master with especially powerful senses would be able to sniff her out. While our modus operandi gives us many significant advantages that conventional intelligence-gathering approaches do not have, it is not particularly effective when it comes to cases like the Silent Shadow."

"I understand, rest assured that I do not expect the Beggar's Sect to lead me to her," Rui remarked. "However, I was still hoping to learn about the information that you have managed to collect and the insights that your sect has made while investigating her."

Even though the Beggar's Sect had already made it clear that they could not lead Rui straight to her, he was sure that the results of their efforts would be useful to begin with.

"I also would like to get a general overview of the broad state of geopolitical affairs of the Derschek Region, as well as the Shadow Isles," Rui said.

He could definitely come to learn of these matters with his own efforts, of course. But it was just far easier to get it from the Beggar's Sect.

"That is trivial information," The professor remarked. "We can disclose that to you free of charge, consider it a token of our goodwill. However, the results of our investigation on the Silent Shadow will cost you."

"That's not an issue. I will pay for it while completing operations in this region." Rui replied casually.

"That's your prerogative." The professor nodded before nodding to the silent staff member who immediately left the room. "It will take a bit of time to gather and organize. Is there anything else that you would like to purchase?"

"That will be it for now." Rui shook his head.

"Then let us talk about your commission payment operations." The professor eagerly remarked. "Unlike the Derimont Bazaar where there are numerous operations catering to numerous agendas. Our branch only has one."

Rui raised an eyebrow, surprised.

The professor's demeanor grew more severe. "We will enlist your services to dismantle the hitman market of the Derschek Region."

Rui's eyes widened with surprise.

He didn't know that the Derschek branch of the Beggar's Sect had only a single, yet incredibly ambitious agenda. Based on the brief amount of time that Rui had spent in the Derschek Region, the assassination industry was deeply rooted in the very fabric of its civilization.

Chapter 1359: Dead Horse

"Of course, we do not expect you to undertake this operation on your own." Professor Carl clarified.

"However, as a Martial Senior, you can make significant contributions. You possess the ability to eliminate the most powerful assassins in this region."

"You want me to eliminate Martial Senior assassins?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"Of course." Professor Carl nodded. "We wouldn't mind if you eliminated assassins of all Realms."

Rui considered the mission.

It was not outside his capabilities. Despite his lacking experience, he was a pretty decent assassin thanks to his extraordinary long-range capabilities as a Martial Senior with the Pathfinder technique.

However, what he was more curious about was why the Beggar's Sect had such an ambition in the first place.

"It's a matter of the reliability of our operations." Professor Carl replied, noting his curiosity. "Not even war disrupts the smoothness of our operations as much as mass assassinations, each unrelated to the other. That is something that does tend to sabotage our operation a lot, unfortunately."

Rui raised an eyebrow. That made sense. War was more orderly and followed patterns and could be seen coming from a mile away, especially with their intelligence capabilities.

However, a large number of unrelated assassinations was something that was far more inscrutable and unpredictable. That was the reason that they were so disruptive to intelligence operations, it was what made this region so chaotic and volatile in the first place. The fact that it was almost impossible to see all of them coming was something that probably irked the Beggar's Sect to no end.

"We wish to restore some stability to the region so that intelligence-gathering becomes it is easier for our modus operandi that way." Professor Carl.

Rui nodded. "I believe I can commence these operations at my leisure, correct?"

"As long as you're not using that leeway to try and deceive us, of course." Professor Carl nodded. "I wouldn't recommend that."

Rui had no intentions of doing that. The Beggar's Sect was scarily powerful, he would be foolish to try and renege on his agreement.

"Can I get the intelligence I purchased ahead of time?" Rui asked.

Professor Carl considered his words, before nodding. "We're willing to extend this favor to you. However, be warned, even with a report on our investigations on the Silent Shadow, your probability of success is extremely low."

That was obvious enough. He heard that the Silent Shadow only sparingly accepted the best of the best. Still, he had enough confidence to consider it at least worth trying.

He already had many considerations as to how to go about trying to be accepted as her pupil.

For one, he didn't need to actually find her.

He just needed her to choose him as a pupil. That did not necessarily require Rui to find her, that just required Rui to be worth accepting as a pupil, and it required her to be aware of him.

The latter was not a problem. She was a renowned Martial Master assassin, he wouldn't be surprised if she was aware of everything that happened on the island. If that was the case, then finding her was probably not relevant to his desire for her to be accepted as a pupil unless she specifically made it her condition.

The reason most people sought to find her was because they probably thought that finding her was necessary to convince her to accept them.

But Rui wasn't convinced of the merit of such a case. The fact that nobody had found her when she didn't want to be found told Rui that such a thing was probably futile in the first place. She had not been found, but she had accepted pupils.

That clashed against his initial theory that stated that finding her was the test in and of itself.

In the first place, assassins were not detectives. Their skill sets did not revolve around investigation, so why would she set such a condition for finding her pupils in the first place? There was absolutely no correlation or overlap.

'Assassins are not hunters.' Rui narrowed his eyes. 'The assassins that came to this island hunting for her have probably already failed the test.'

Assassins had only one job. They eliminated their target. Thus, most likely, the criteria for being accepted as a pupil by the Silent Shadow were probably closer to the core fundamentals of what an assassin was.

Rui heaved a deep sigh as he considered what that would be, and how that would relate to his objective.

But his first guess was that he had to eliminate one or many targets to find her.

Definitely not anyone, otherwise, everybody would be worthy.

He narrowed his eyes. 'Is there a specific person she wants to be eliminated?'

It wasn't impossible. Perhaps half the test was figuring out who the target was, and then assassinating the target. If that was the case, then maybe he would be accepted as a pupil.

"Who are her pupils?

"From before she retired. There are many, like the Harvester, the Boloxeun Beauty, and the Nigtheater. All renowned assassins within their Realms." Professor Carl replied.

Rui frowned at all those monikers.

"Are any of her pupils after she retired known?" Rui rephrased.

"Ah, no, not at all, unfortunately." The professor replied, throwing a knowing glance at Rui. "Of course, it seems you understand why this is the case."

If people looked into the candidates who succeeded, it wouldn't be too difficult to find patterns that can be used to figure out what one needed to do to be accepted by her. The fact that none of the identities of her accepted pupils were disclosed proved that she most likely took measures to prevent it from happening.

Which only reinforced his theory. If it was just a matter of figuring her location and identity out, then there would be no reason not to disclose the identity of her disciples.

He had the sense that he was on the right track, there was no point in beating a dead horse.

Chapter 1360: Reports

If that was the case, then he just needed to refine his ideas a little bit more and tie them back to the observations he made.

"Ah, the intelligence you requested has arrived." Professor Carl remarked as the staff member entered the office, with a pile of documents.

Rui's attention was drawn towards them. Even if they did not contain information on those that were successfully accepted, he could look at those that definitely failed, and avoid making their mistakes.

Those that failed seemed to continue going down that path. From their point of view, their lack of failure was due to the difficulty of the test, not because they were going down the wrong path.

Their lust for obtaining a legacy of one of the most renowned Martial Master assassins in the world was extremely high, it had clouded their judgment, making them choose to go about it in ways that were perhaps unbecoming of an assassin in the eyes of the Silent Shadow.

Or at least, that was what Rui had come to suspect after giving it some deep thought.

"I should mention that you cannot take these documents away with you." Professor Carl remarked, drawing his attention. "They contain too many sensitive details of our investigative process. You may refer to them here at any time, or you may rely on that handy memory trick of yours."

Rui did not recall ever having disclosed that he had a handy memory trick, but he wasn't even surprised that the Beggar's Sect had come to learn of this. They had proven their ability to learn information many times at that point.

"That's not a problem," Rui remarked, before taking the large pile of documents over to a different desk as he began scouring them.

The Beggar's Sect had systematically begun searching for her through various means and avenues, each assigned its own division. There was an entire division dedicated to gathering and analyzing second-hand intelligence of all kinds, from other intelligence brokers to even rumors and testimonies of various individuals on the Silent Shadow.

There was another division dedicated to profiling every individual in the Shadow Isles and evaluating the probability of them being the Silent Shadow in disguise. Rui's eyes widened in shock as he read through the details and the degree to which the Beggar's Sect looked into every single person who was in the Shadow Isles.

They had systematically looked into millions of individuals within the Shadow Isles and conducted analyses on every single one of them. The sheer manpower needed to even dare to go to such lengths was something that was probably unique to the Beggar's Sect.

Thankfully, they hadn't included a report of every single individual inside the Shadow Isles. As big as his Mind Palace was, not even he was sure if he could contain that much information in it.

They also dedicated an entire division to an extremely precise and accurate layout of the Shadow Isles as a whole. Based on the investigative reports that he was going through, the Beggar's Sect allegedly had mapped every square meter of all the Shadow Isles.

Another absurd feat, yet one that also did not yield any clues about the location of the Silent Shadow.

It showed the degree to which the Silent Shadow had obscured herself, making it impossible to find her using brute force unless one possessed especially potent resources.

Perhaps there was an exceptionally powerful Master-level esoteric resource, or another Martial Master or Martial Artist of a higher Realm that decided to exert themselves to locate her in one go, then it was not something that could be brute forced.

If the Beggar's Sect truly wanted, they could probably find her by expending such powerful means. But the issue was that it probably wasn't worth it. In the first place, the Beggar's Sect predominantly relied on the power of ordinary people. Esoteric or Martial resources were reserved for matters that were both important and were impervious to their main modus operandi.

The case of the Silent Shadow fulfilled the latter condition, but it did not fulfill the former condition. There was no burning need for the Beggar's Sect to find her. The reason that they were collecting intelligence in the first place was because this was their business.

They collected intelligence and sold it for a profit. Given how much work went into it, the intelligence on the Silent Shadow would have been worth a fortune, and given the sheer number of powerful assassins in the Shadow Isles that desperately wanted it, they could have made an even greater fortune selling it.

But alas, the failed venture did not justify using strategic resources. It didn't matter anyway, since Rui himself would never gain access to such resources as he currently was.

Besides, even if he did use them to find her, he highly doubted that she would accept him as a pupil. There was nothing alluring about a Martial Artist who relied on esoteric technological artifacts instead of his own personal capabilities.

He put those thoughts aside as he skimmed through the detailed compiled progress reports over an established timeline. Essentially, the Beggar's Sect tried many approaches to finding her and came to the conclusion that she may as well have not existed on the island.

It also gave him an overview of the state of progress of other aspiring candidates. Interestingly enough, the various Martial Artists that came to the Shadow Isles had tried many approaches themselves. Many had decided to show off powerful techniques by accepting commissions. Most decided to go on an active search for the Martial Master, under the impression that not being able to find her was the reason that most people failed to be accepted.

Most Martial Artists sought to find her through their own efforts, while some banded together in order to pool their efforts. All the while completing commissions from the Derschek Region to sustain their investigations.

Rui noticed that the intelligence mentioned kept mentioning a name in all their reports.

Area Crina.