

## Martial Unity 1391

### Chapter 1391: Affinities

"Correct, indirect manners of assassinations can be remarkably effective at circumventing security and protective measures, but they are much more difficult to plan, and have a much greater margin of error." Master Reina echoed his words. "Under what circumstances is one more preferable than the other?"

Rui had already arrived at the answer. "Indirect assassinations are probably preferable when the defensive measures of the target exceed the combat capabilities of the assassin. A Martial Artist has no need to go through the tedious and complex preparations and measures to assassinate a normal human who isn't even protected. However... if the target is protected by powerful Martial Artist bodyguards, then a direct assassination is likely to fail."

Master Reina nodded. "You mentioned you had powerful enemies. Assuming that the man you wanted to kill is among them, then you might want to consider an indirect assassination."

Rui hadn't given the actual manner of killing Chairman Deacon too much thought. After all, he had already decided to wait until the Beggar's Sect had gathered the information that it needed before making a plan.

But now that Master Reina had helped him get a slightly better understanding of the paradigms of assassination, her suggestion was definitely quite palatable. Chairman Deacon was undoubtedly a difficult target to target and kill.

Although Rui had quite some time to grow stronger, he may not reach a level of strength where he could directly assassinate Chairman Deacon past the man's security and defensive measures.

The Shionel Confederation may not be a powerhouse like the Kandrian Empire, but it was still a Sage-level nation. That meant it almost certainly was capable of raising and attracting incredibly powerful Martial Seniors. Certainly more powerful than the likes of those in the Shadow Isles which was a Senior-level region, barring the Silent Shadow.

Could Rui cross the vast gulf of the Senior Realm before his time was up?

If he could, then it was possible for him to consider a direct assassination where he attacked Chairman Deacon and his security detail and convoy to kill the man himself. But if he couldn't... then the only way to go about it was to rely on indirect assassinations.

There was another thing that made him consider it too.

"The probability of success of an indirect assassination is largely contingent on the quality of preparation," Rui noted. "Which means I'm probably more suited to indirect assassinations than direct."

"That's a smooth way of calling yourself intelligent indirectly. You really do have a talent for it.." She noted thoughtfully. "I shall keep that in mind the next time I want to brag without actually bragging."

Rui heaved an amused sigh. "I thought you were supposed to be the teacher."

"A good teacher learns from her student."

"I see. Can we get back to the main topic now?"

"Can we? Yes, but will we? That depe-"

"Perhaps I should have looked into more indirect forms of killing," Rui murmured interrupting her.

"Indirect forms of killing don't directly make use of Martial Art techniques. And as prone as I am on relying on rigorous analysis and planning, I rely on Martial Art even more."

"Indirect assassinations can make use of Martial Art techniques just as much as direct assassinations do." Master Reina continued. "It is very difficult to poison someone well-protected without powerful poisons or good stealth-oriented techniques, as a Martial Artist."

"Hmmm..." Rui noted. "That convinces me more that my mind makes me more suited for indirect assassinations, if not for my Martial Path, that was."

Rui's Martial Path was centered around adaptive evolution in a direct confrontation setting. That meant although his extreme analysis, deductive, and preparatory ability would normally make him more suited for indirect assassinations, he had applied those three mental parameters toward direct combat in the form of the VOID algorithm.

His ability to analyze, recognize, and predict was something that fully employed his cognitive parameters to the highest degree in combat in the form of the VOID algorithm. He has also applied it to his assassinations as well.

"My direct assassinations have as much preparation as indirect assassinations do," Rui murmured.

Master Reina nodded. "The level of preparations of your assassinations was quite unusual for a direct assassination. Usually, the only preparations that direct assassins need are ascertaining security measures, finding a good time and place, and securing an escape route. That isn't nothing, but it doesn't compare to the level of preparation you went through for each assassination, although you did make it look easy."

She turned back to the whiteboard. "Regardless, let us get back to the lesson. You can ponder your own course of action and potential endeavors after I have finished."

Rui put aside his thoughts for the moment before paying attention to her. He had come to appreciate the simple clarity that came with the distilled wisdom she offered. It hadn't even been fifteen minutes into the lecture on assassination theory and he had already found it to be quite informative and relevant to his own considerations.

He highly doubted that the information she provided was standardized information. Most likely, these were perspectives that had been born from her own experience as an assassin.

That meant that they were priceless. Who knew how many decades or centuries of experience had been distilled into these explanations and insights. Although she did lighten the atmosphere with her silly teacher cosplay, she was completely serious about passing on as much as she could to her pupils.

"Assassination is a field that has existed as long as humanity has." She momentarily interjected.

"Furthermore, it is not a standardized field for Martial Artists since Martial Artists pursue solitary paths. What that means is that there is no existing theory for how assassination ought to be approached.

Martial Artists simply hone their Martial Art and do their best with their assassinations with what they have. The reason I have developed a broad and deep outlook on the paradigms of assassination is because of my all-rounder nature and my many years of experience in the field. Be sure to absorb as much as you can."

#### Chapter 1392: Lacking

The lecture continued as she began delving into greater detail bit by bit, as time passed. Rui kept up with every word she uttered, actively using the Mind Palace to store and organize information in a manner that made it the easiest to access at any given time.

The value of the lecture kept unfolding as she went in-depth into the paradigms of assassinations, conveying the very essence of her experiences to Rui in a compact information package.

"I'm surprised you have been able to keep up so well," She remarked by the end of the seminar. "Most people are lost by this time even with notes. This usually takes some time to digest."

Rui shrugged. "I've always been good with handling a lot of information."

"Then again, I suppose I shouldn't be surprised, considering how powerful your mind is." She remarked. "Regardless, we've finished the boring theory. Now it's time for me to actually begin training you."

"What exactly does that entail?" Rui asked with a glint of enthusiasm.

"I told you, didn't I? I'm going to provide you with a good foundation that will allow you to kill the person you want to." She said. "There are some foundational techniques that I can impart to you, better than any other you'll find out there. Once you have mastered them, you won't be as limited and will have many options at hand if you want to kill someone. That said..."

She glanced at him. "You are a Martial Senior, which means that there is a limit to what I can pass on to you directly. In the Senior Realm, techniques need to cater to both the Martial Body and the Martial Heart, both of which vary from Martial Artist to Martial Artist."

Rui understood her predicament. Techniques squeezed the untapped potential and power from within a person. In order to do that, they needed to be attuned to the person. Techniques for someone with a lightweight body were going to be very different from those with a heavyweight body.

"That is why what I intend to pass on to you are principles rather than the techniques themselves." She explained. "You can apply those principles yourself and form your own technique surrounding them, and it will naturally be attuned to you. You can even play around and diverge from it if you think it will suit you more."

Rui actually preferred that.

Not that he was strictly against the Silent Shadow of all people teaching, he was against being denied the opportunity to imbue his own Martial Art techniques with individuality and attuning them to himself.

He had also grown far too accustomed to developing his own techniques, it was far too difficult for him to diverge from that and simply engage in mindless training.

"Now then, based on our lecture. Tell me what you lack when it comes to being well-rounded for assassinations?" She asked.

Rui thought for a moment. "Range versatility. Although my long-range technique is powerful, it has its limitations because of the fact that it needs to be undetectable. Thus against those with passive defenses, it is powerless."

The fact of the matter was that if someone had extra layers of protection, especially at the Squire level, the difficulty of assassinating his target with Death's Sympathy rose significantly since the technique relied on there being only three layers of protection around the skull.

Because of the range, the undetectability significantly constrained its power and thus its ability to kill well-protected individuals who actually invested resources into their immediate and passive protection.

It also couldn't work in a close-range setting since the activation of the Mighty Roar Flash Blast technique was something that drew a lot of attention, making it difficult for the technique to actually catch the target off-guard and cleanly if they were protected by Martial Artists.

"Good point." She noted. "You are almost constrained and impotent in a close-quarters encounter with a well-protected target. That's not a good thing. I can impart a number of principles to allow you to bypass defenses with close-quarter techniques."

Rui didn't disagree, but he had other ideas in mind. "I actually have a technique template of my own for a close-quarter assassination technique. I would rather realize it than rely on something provided by someone else."

She nodded. "That's fine as well. If you think you can develop an effective killing weapon for close quarters, then it will be better to rely on yourself entirely. However, remember that assassination techniques are not the same as combat techniques. Assassination techniques maximize killing potential in exchange for combat practicality, many assassination techniques require forehand knowledge, or preparation, or an element of surprise in order to have a higher probability of successfully killing."

Rui nodded. "I do intend to create an assassination technique, not a combat technique."

Simply developing a lethal attack in close quarters was not enough to call it an assassination technique didn't work. Any technique that viably could be used in combat normally was a combat technique.

"Good." She nodded. "Now, putting aside range versatility, what else do you lack?"

Rui considered for a moment. "Stealth. Not being identified as a threat by your target is fundamental to exploiting the element of surprise that every assassin has."

She nodded. "Not being identified as a threat allows you far more flexibility in both direct and indirect assassinations. Every assassin must learn stealth, being it avoiding detection or identification, in order to effectively assassinate. You have already learned a technique that allows you to disguise your perceived threat level to a target, haven't you?"

Rui nodded. "I create an image of weakness out of imagination and embody that image in my consciousness and unconsciousness. It allows me to completely mask my power."

"Hm, that technique is actually not a stealth technique." Master Reina noted. "It's a technique meant to misguide the accuracy of your opponent's evaluation, causing them to underestimate you in combat. However, because your consciousness is so powerful, you are able to completely hide your power. It is completely different from the principles of normal power-concealing techniques."

### Chapter 1393: Disguise

"Well, it doesn't matter what technique principle I use as long as can successfully conceal my power, right?" Rui asked.

"That is true. As long as the objective is accomplished, the means are irrelevant." She nodded. "Still, with such a powerful mind, you are suited to learning mental techniques."

"I do intend to learn mental techniques as well," Rui remarked. "However, learning exclusively assassination techniques is quite important to me."

"Assassination and mental techniques have quite the overlap, you know," She twirled her hair. "It will be exciting to see what kind of assassin you become."

She smirked at Rui with a glint of interest. "When you do set out to assassinate the person you want to, be sure to invite me. I don't mind witnessing an incredible spectacle."

"I'll be sure to book front-row tickets."

"My, what a kind pupil. I shall do my best to be worthy of such affection."

Rui glanced at her. "Maybe you could kill him for me, then."

"Hahaha!" She laughed, bending. "And deprive myself of an exciting tale of revenge? I think not!"

Rui heaved a sigh. It was worth a shot. He couldn't ask Master Deivon since the Shionel Confederation was in an allyship with the Virodha Theocracy. As valuable as the Virodha Champion was, he highly doubted they would be willing to break a partnership with a sage-level nation over a Martial Squire.

"But, coming back to the main point..." She said. "Simply concealing your true power isn't always enough. Especially when your target knows who you are. Or in circumstances where you can't approach your target regardless of your perceived power level."

Rui nodded. Chairman Deacon knew of him and had probably done a lot of research on the past data that he had on Rui. Even if Rui had grown, he was not going to get past the man just by concealing his power level.

The man had probably memorized every single facial feature that Rui had after hunting for him for almost four years now.

"I could use both stealth and disguise." Rui mused. "I don't mind learning both."

It was not going to be that easy to infiltrate the Shionel Confederation using stealth. It was a sage-level nation and thus their defenses were much better than those Senior-level nations that Rui could easily bypass.

In that case, it was better to infiltrate via disguise.

"Alright, so we have a close-range assassination technique, a disguising technique, and a stealth technique." She nodded. "You've already decided to take care of the assassination techniques. So why don't we begin with the disguise and stealth techniques?"

Rui nodded. "I am looking forward to that."

"Follow me." She got up, walking across the training chamber. "The art of disguise and stealth are as old as human warfare. However, only after the age of Martial Art were they elevated to a much higher level. Prior to the age of Martial Art, they were a lot more primitive and harmless."



Without the power of Martial Art, techniques, in general, were much more limited. That applied to disguise and stealth as well.

"However, when the power of Martial Art empowers them..." Her palm rose to her face, swiping across her face. "They can become something else entirely."

Rui's eyes widened as her appearance completely changed. Her skin color, facial features, and even bone structure shifted. It was an almost magical transformation that Rui didn't even entirely understand.

"Impressive, isn't it?" She smirked. Even her voice changed, before returning back. "This is a result of years worth of training and experimenting. I can mimic any and every appearance."

"I'm supposed to master that technique?" Rui asked with a dubious expression.

"No, like I said, I'm simply going to impart some principles," She replied. "You can make use of them however you like. You don't need to master such an extreme technique for your purposes."

This was true, Rui did not need such a high-level disguise ability. She had reached an extraordinary level of impersonation. What he needed was anything that allowed him to make him harder if not impossible to identify.

"Such a thing can allow me to travel without a mask too," Rui noted.

The Master-level mask that he continuously wore drew him more attention than he liked. Anybody who hid their appearance was someone who had a reason to hide their appearance.

That was also part of the reason that Rui was interested in the disguise in addition to not having to worry about being detected by Chairman Deacon.

"However, I do also want a stealth technique," Rui noted. "There's a good chance I'm going to need it to kill my target."

"We can work with that. The only question is finding out what principle of stealth suits you the most." She wondered as she stared at him.

"What kinds of principles are there?"

"Oh several. One of the more common principles of stealth is misdirection. Given your affinity for mental techniques, that's probably the best route to go through. Though there are other principles that involve camouflage, not generating anything that can be perceived by sensory techniques." She said as she took a single step, seemingly completely disappearing from reality as her figure escaped Rui's senses entirely.

Rui narrowed his eyes as he tried sensing her with all his techniques. He even activated the Martial Heart, actively empowering them, yet he still wasn't able to detect her existence.

"Incredible," Rui murmured. "I didn't even know such a level of stealth was possible. You can completely erase your existence from people's senses and minds!"

"Heh." She reappeared, smirking with a hint of smugness. "Very few assassins possess that level of stealth. It takes many many years of training to achieve something like this."

"I have a friend with a similar technique." Rui was reminded of Kane by her display. "Except his stealth technique required him to keep moving."

"That technique relies on maneuvering to compensate for misdirection." She replied. "Misdirecting one's attention in one direction while moving away from that direction to separate one's self from the target's awareness creates the illusion of the user disappearing. However..."

She narrowed her eyes, before disappearing from Rui's awareness once more. "If one's misdirection is powerful enough. They do not need to rely on such a crutch."

"I believe that you have the aptitude for wielding the power of misdirection effectively." She said.  
"Although you have also displayed an extremely unusual talent for tapping into the principles of reality with your technique."

She threw him a look of interest.

Rui knew that she was referring to Death's Sympathy. Considering it was a technique that relied on the knowledge he gained from his bachelor's and master's, it was a technique that would almost certainly never be born naturally given the sorely lacking theoretical framework into reality.

Even for a Martial Master like the Silent Shadow, a technique based on sympathetic resonance and constructive superposition was probably something well beyond what she could understand and replicate. He would probably need to hold her hand for more than a year the way he did when Senior Ceeran tried to learn Pathfinder.

"Regardless, let us go with misdirection." Rui's eyes lit up with interest.

This was not the first time that he would be learning a technique based on the principles of misdirection. He had mastered a lesser version of Kane's Void Step back when he was an Apprentice; the Shadow Step technique.

It was a good example of what happened when techniques were not attuned to the user. The Shadow Step technique was a technique that also relied on maneuvering to amplify basic misdirection.

Because the technique's principle focused more on the maneuvering part rather than the misdirection part, Rui wasn't able to reach Kane's level. Kane had an affinity for maneuvering techniques while Rui did not.

Rui had an affinity for techniques that rigorously made use of the mind. Thus had he developed his own technique that relied more on the mind than a technique that relied more on maneuvering, it would have been more attuned to his strengths, allowing him to reach a much higher level of stealth than he had reached back then.

Unfortunately, he hadn't been informed of the importance and need for individuality back then. But he was aware of its importance now, and he didn't intend to make the same mistake. Rui fully believed that he could reach Kane's level when it came to stealth purely based on his affinity for misdirection.

"Misdirection is a principle that relies on the shortcomings of the fundamental nature of human consciousness." Master Reina began. "The human consciousness receives an influx of information from a variety of senses. The fact of the matter is that it is impossible for the human mind to process all of the influx of information that comes in. It decides to choose and pick what information to focus on and what to throw away..."

She paused, looking at Rui. "In other words, consciousness is simply the brain processing the information it has decided to keep and process."

Rui nodded. In reality, the truth was more nuanced. Although Rui was far from an expert on neurology, the field of science had made far more progress in mapping out the brain and its relationship with consciousness. Consciousness was not discrete, nor was the processing of information so simplistic.

Regardless, the overall point was on track, so Rui didn't bother trying to interject with unnecessary details.

"Our brains have evolved a prioritizing system that decides what information to focus on and what not to." She continued. "Misdirection exploits the vulnerabilities in that subconscious system. By engaging in physical, verbal, and non-verbal cues, we can trick the prioritizing system into prioritizing something else and shifting its attention away from us, allowing us to escape the cognition of the user to varying degrees."

Rui nodded. "The same subconscious information sorting system that evolved to protect us from threats by prioritizing elements that seemed threatening and thus attention-drawing is now a weakness that can be exploited."

The brain focused on significance because only significant events could impact the human negatively, thus insignificant events naturally fell back to the background and were ignored.

"That is why part of misdirection involves minimizing your perceived significance." She said. "Concealing your power completely is vital, and the good part is that you have already achieved that with your Mind Mask technique. However, there is still the other half."

"The actual misdirection itself. Reducing your presence is only a prerequisite for misdirection techniques." Rui guessed.

She nodded. "The question is how do we misdirect other people's minds and attention? How would we know exactly what physical movements, cues, and micro-actions to execute to precisely misdirect the human mind when we do not understand the complexity of the human mind entirely?"

Rui had already arrived at the answer. "The goal isn't to understand the human mind, but merely to know how to trick it. One we can do that is by tricking our own minds."

"And why would that work?" She raised an eyebrow.

"There are common evolutionary elements across our entire species. That includes the danger and priority evaluation systems of the mind at its core. These are fossils that won't change, and even if they do, they will change over enormous periods of time that dwarf the Age of Martial Art." Rui continued. "In other words, by tricking ourselves, we will react in a way that tricks others as well. This way, we don't need to understand the complexities of the human mind."

Rui wondered if he could create a predictive model for the subconscious human mind, and the commonalities of the human mind across the entire species. If he did that, then he would be able to peer into the mind of evolution. He would gain an understanding of humans that was unprecedented.

Who knew what kind of power he would obtain if he succeeded in such an ambition? It would be akin to a new field of Martial Art, one that only he could tap into.

'It's a super difficult project though.' Rui mused.

It couldn't be helped, yet he wasn't able to shake off such a thought whenever he thought about it. It could evolve his Martial Art to heights that may very well have never been touched.

## Chapter 1395: Strengths and Weaknesses

"To truly misdirect others, you must master the art of misdirecting yourself." She explained. "You will need to push yourself to the limits of your capabilities even with your Martial Heart and Martial Body. There is a reason why this is a Martial Art technique and not a technique that non-Martial Artists can pull off ordinarily, do you know why?"

"...I suppose because the misdirection would need to be executed within a millisecond, at a bare minimum, in order for it to be effective against Martial Artists." Rui thoughtfully replied. "Martial Artists have an extremely brief reaction time and our reflexes operate at even shorter timeframes. The longer that a particular misdirection maneuver takes to be executed, the harder it is to misdirect a Martial Artist since their reaction time and reflexes is short enough for no human to possibly finish a maneuver within those timeframes. That's why only Martial Artists can misdirect the awareness of Martial Artists."

"Correct," She nodded. "That's why you will need your Martial Heart if you want to misdirect the awareness and consciousness of Martial Seniors also using their Martial Heart. Otherwise, you will be far too slow in their perspective to pull off a misdirection micro-maneuver."

She paused for a moment, before continuing. "The combat effectiveness of a stealth-oriented misdirection technique depends on how mentally consuming it is. One needs to be extremely aware during combat, and misdirection can make one much more prone to delayed reactions due to the constant mental activity."

Rui nodded, that tracked with how Kane dealt with Void Step, it was only worth using if it actively granted an advantage, but like how it was the case against the Martial Artist he challenged to enter the Floating Sect, it was not always worth using in combat all the time.

It would be much more true for Rui if he mastered a full-fledged misdirection technique that relied fully on misdirection alone and not maneuvering. It would be a very mentally consuming fight to constantly abuse such a powerful misdirection technique all of the time.

This was especially true because Rui already engaged in a lot of mentally consuming activities and matters across the fight. He used the Mind Palace technique to store and process data that he collected from observing his opponent's fight, before creating a predictive model that constantly required inputs throughout the fight.

Then he also had things like the Pathfinder technique and its ODA System that also required mental energy. Having a mentally consuming misdirection technique on top of that would probably be quite stressful, even if worth the price.

This wasn't as much of a problem with Kane who relied on maneuvering more than misdirection to disappear in people's senses.

'Still, it is worth it to have such an option at hand nonetheless.' Rui glanced back at Master Reina. "What does the training entail for such techniques?"

"A lot of mental training," She explained. "Misdirecting your opponent's awareness entails knowing how to move to convey to the subconscious processing system that there are more important things to pay attention to. You need to learn to know how to act as if such a thing is true, your micro-maneuvers and micro-actions need to be spot on, and only then can you trick their minds momentarily."

Rui nodded. "That sounds fine to me. What about the disguise technique?"

"That is actually more complicated." She replied. "It's also a Squire-level technique since it does not require the Martial Heart."

"That's fine, I care more about the utility than the Realm."

"That is a good mindset to have," She nodded. "Far too many Martial Seniors scorn Squire-level techniques because they don't use the Martial Heart, however, what they don't understand is that having more Senior-level techniques makes them more dependant on the Martial Heart."

Rui nodded. "In the first place, the Martial Heart amplifies the parts of a body involved in a given technique at any given point, so Senior-level techniques are not functionally different from Squire-level ones. One needs to merely ensure that a technique is able to properly use the Martial Heart at most."

"I'm glad you aren't arrogant about being a Martial Senior." She remarked with appreciation. "The disguising technique that I showed you is not something you can master relatively soon. It is a genuinely time-consuming technique and is actually an amalgamation of many smaller disguise techniques that I

have developed over my life. I can teach you a few principles to manipulate your appearance so you can get rid of that mask."

Rui nodded. "Alright, let's get started."

"Hold your horses," She paused. "There is still something you need to do before we can get started."

Rui raised an eyebrow.

"You need to convince the Beggar's Sect that you have failed in finding me," She explained. "I can't have those plebeians learning that you are my pupil and that you did find me using your little public stunt move."

"Ah...hm," Rui did recall that the Silent Shadow obscured her students so people couldn't spot patterns in regards to how to be accepted by her as her pupil. "How would you have me do that?"

"Just leaving this area is fine." She explained. "I have prepared measures just for this. Listen carefully..."

She began to explain a complex series of actions that would eventually end with Rui returning back to the Shadow Isles.

"This as an absurd amount of length to go to just to throw off the Beggar's Sect." Rui complained when she was done.

"Hah. If you don't do at least this much, those annoying peasants will see right through you." She snorted. "I've worked for and against them many times in the past, and I've come to gain a good understanding of their many capabilities and few shortcomings. This will work as long you don't mess up. Now go, get started. I'm not teaching you a damn thing until you get this done right."

Rui sighed as he got up leaving Area Crina discreetly as he immediately began executing the plan that she had provided to him.



## Chapter 1396: Aftereffects

Rui could only suppress his reluctance as he executed the series of actions, traveling around, changing rides, and changing attire, among other things. The entire process took a few days in total, but eventually, he made it back without a single person possibly noticing his return.

The measures that the Silent Shadow had taken were tedious and complex, but Rui could understand why they could fool even the Beggar's Sect. They were the kind of measures that were extremely difficult to instate and could not be done more than once.

It was only days later that he finally found himself back in the Shadow Isles and Area Crina.

The Shadow Isles were still recovering from the damage that he had inflicted on it. However, almost none of the assassins who left the Shadow Isles came back. It appeared that the Martial Squires and Apprentices simply couldn't stay in a place where they didn't have any agency.

Rui had also mentally tormented them with his bloodlust amplified with the Mind Mask. He had non-verbally conveyed to them that as long as they remained here, they were forever going to be his target.

He told them to leave the entire geographic region.

Most of them obliged, not willing to die. According to the Beggar's Sect that he had spoken to briefly before pretending to leave the Derschek Region, which had been part of Master Reina's plan, the majority of assassins that Rui had driven had gone on to leave the Derschek Region as a whole, putting as much distance between them and the Shadow Isles as possible.

"Your plan has been a mighty success." Professor Carl noted. "Clearing away the problem that has plagued our branch of the foreign affairs department of the Beggar's Sect is a massive contribution to the Beggar's Sect."

"How much of a dent does it put in my commission payment to the Beggar's Sect?" Rui wondered.

"A lot. You have cleared half of your commission payment, roughly speaking. We can show you the actual bills and receipts if you're a stickler for detail."

Rui shook his head. The Beggar's Sect had worked hard and long to cultivate reputations of fairness, trustworthiness, and credibility, they would never squander decades if not centuries of hard work by deceiving their benefactor just for some paltry extra profits. The intelligence community as a whole would learn of it very quickly if Rui complained and their reputation would suffer.

"Still... half, huh?" Rui murmured.

He wasn't sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing. He had put in a ton of effort and achieved extraordinary results, and yet that had been only half of the payment he made.

"It's a good thing, the intelligence that you have requested can only be obtained through the system we have in place that was created over centuries of development behind it. It is actually a little bit shocking that you have managed to repay half of your commission payment in just six months. At this rate, you could potentially be the first Martial Artist of your age to repay such a big commission payment so quickly. Half a year is nothing for Martial Artists like yourself." Professor Carl explained.

Rui left it at that. As long as he completed the payment and got the strategic intelligence on Chairman Deacon that he needed.

"So I assume that the Beggar's Sect will regain control over the region?" Rui asked.

"Of course, we have begun not only stabilizing our influence but also ensuring that the assassination industry never entrenches itself back into the Derschek Region." The man declared.

The entire had begun to have tales and legends spun around it, making it a taboo for assassins. The Beggar's Sect delightfully hastened that process with its ability to control public opinion and cognition as well as it did.

Regardless, Rui didn't care about the state of the Shadow Isles and the Derschek Region. He had succeeded in achieving the objective that he had come to achieve and nothing else really mattered to him.

"Oh, you're finally back?" She mused when he had re-entered the secret training chamber externally through a hidden entrance that Master Reina had managed to conceal even from the Beggar's Sect. "You better have not made any mistakes. I would spank you if you did. Don't think I'm joking. I'll do it."

"Tempting," Rui sarcastically replied. "But I'll decline. let's get started with the training."

It wasn't long before they found themselves in certain sections of the training chamber, ready to embark on a training voyage. Rui had chosen to begin with developing his own disguise technique.

"As I mentioned before. The disguise technique that I showed you is based on an amalgamation of many different mechanisms and principles, which is unusual for a single technique. It is impractical for you to master all of them unless you truly intend to live a life where impersonation-level disguise is very important and significant. A handful of principles and mechanisms is enough to make you unrecognizable."

"What kind of principles would you recommend I master? How many options do I have to choose from?" Rui asked.

"Oh there are many things you could master," She remarked. "You could, for instance, master the principle of adjusting the water retention of your flesh, changing the volume of your flesh."

She closed her eyes, activating a breathing technique. Her face slowly grew larger and more bloated, changing her appearance to a certain degree.

"You could focus on adjusting skull structure and shape by manipulating the individual bones that comprise it."

"Or you could focus on changing secondary features like facial hair or eye color."

"Or you could focus on changing skin color by adjusting pigmentation."

"You could alter your perceived height and perceived body shape with pelvic tilts and spinal extensions or contractions, a low-grade technique but actually quite effective."

Rui watched, amazed and disturbed, at the proficiency at which she altered her appearance so well. "I don't need too many, just enough to make me unrecognizable."

Chapter 1397: Mechanisms

"In that case, it's better to minimize the number of mechanisms and techniques you go for." She remarked. "There's no point in complicating things more than they need to be."

Rui nodded. "I think the head reshaping, the skin volume, and color-altering principles work for me."

"Only three?" She mused. "That may not be reliably enough."

"I have my own application in mind," Rui mused as he considered the prospects of developing his own appearance-manipulating disguises. "I will create a fourth of my own."

The application that came to mind was one based on Hypertrophic Surge. Hypertrophic Surge bloated his muscles, and if he could figure out how to selectively and partially apply it only to his facial muscles, then he would be entirely unrecognizable compared to his normal appearance when combined with the other three facial-altering mechanisms.

"It's not easy developing such a principle." She warned. "One reason that there aren't so many such techniques floating out there is that it requires an intimate general understanding of the mechanisms of the body. Although we still haven't peered past the depths of the cell much, if at all, we still have a remarkably detailed overview of the functioning of the human body. You require possessing that knowledge and understanding to develop disguise techniques."

Rui tried his best to suppress a smug smile that threatened to come on his face. He was far from a qualified biologist, but he did have an extensive education in the field of biology not just throughout school, but also in his bachelor's and diploma. Not to mention, the decades of combat sports study and research that came after, that did work with the human body.

Although this level of biological expertise was trivial back on Earth, that was not the case in Gaia. He would be surprised if there was anybody who could match his knowledge and understanding.

"I think I'll be fine."

"If you say so."

"Though I suppose just altering my facial appearance isn't enough. It's best to involve an element that changes my body figure as well." Rui mused. "That makes it so that there are little to no ways in which people can recognize me just by analyzing my body figure."

Something like the pelvic tilt and spinal extension and contraction sounded fine and easy enough.

It was easy for most people to make identifications based on body figures. In fact, from a distance and from many angles, body figure was the first thing that was used to recognize people.

The ability to no longer need his mask and to be able to freely travel without any worries about being identified was something Rui yearned for reasons beyond just the applications in assassinations and stealth operations.

The fear of being found by Chairman Deacon or Master Uma was always annoying, and the need to wear an annoying mask all the time that only drew more attention to him was also not pleasant.

This was a technique whose greatest benefit was increasing his daily quality of life. The fact that it didn't need the Martial Heart was quite good too.

"Since you've made your choices, I won't delay the training any further." She nodded. "These principles altogether will take some time to master, but they shouldn't be too difficult, I will begin by explaining how the principles of these techniques work."

She paused for a moment before getting out a set of documents from a shelf outside of the section of the training chamber. They contained various anatomical diagrams of the body and the face, displaying several physiological systems of the body in the face.

"Let us begin with the flesh thickness manipulation principle. This principle is based on increasing the amount of water retained in the skin and flesh by increasing the amount of salt in your blood. There are broader templates for manipulating bodily functions by associating mental triggers to them, this can be applied to trigger the mechanism of increasing the amount of salt released in your bloodstream." She explained.

Doing such a thing was dangerous for normal humans since it increased blood pressure, and the rapid increase in salt without giving the body the time to acclimatize could be dangerous for the heart.

But such risks did not exist for the Martial Body.

Rui nodded. "That trigger mechanism works fine, though I could create physiological triggers rather than psychological triggers for the techniques if needed."

"That also requires a good understanding of the human body, so I would be careful if you did decide to go that route." She advised.

Rui wasn't too concerned with that, but he did appreciate psychological triggers more since they didn't require him to alter his body too much. They were much cleaner than what he did with Thundercoil and Lightning Tap.

"The skull shape-altering mechanism was something I developed after paying attention to skull structure and realizing how fragmented it is. They are held together by little stitches that can be changed at certain locations by rapid micro-damaging and healing, this particular technique does require the Martial Heart for the rapid healing part." She explained. "It will not be easy and the training can be dangerous if done incorrectly, thus I will supervise the most dangerous parts myself."

Rui nodded. The mechanism sounded rather fascinating, but he didn't find the danger amusing. Manipulating the fibers that held together the skull that protect the brain was obviously dangerous, and not something that one ought to embark on lightly.

"The pelvic tilts and the spinal extensions and contractions are centered around muscle manipulations and alterations to fascia, the connective tissue that binds the entire human body together." She explained. "The various principles are simple and as are the outcomes. However, when put together, they can allow you to disappear into the background such that nobody can find you."

Rui nodded. The entire continent opened up to him now that he had access to these techniques. Entire parts of the continent that he had constrained himself from visiting because they were too close to Chairman Deacon or Master Uma were now open for travel.

#### Chapter 1398: Range

The disguise technique was quite new, unexplored territory regarding techniques as far as Rui was concerned. The triggering mechanism was something that he had delved into before, but the actual techniques themselves were quite unlike anything Rui had learned before.

He had never heard of a skull-altering disguise technique before. Nor had he heard of disguise techniques that allowed one to completely impersonate another person without any problems.

That was why he was rather certain that most of these principles were probably something that Master Reina had developed herself over her long career as the Silent Shadow.

With such a powerful technique, he couldn't imagine just how many extraordinarily well-protected people she had managed to successfully assassinate. The numbers surely had entered the quintuple digits by this point.

Just thinking about it left Rui in awe.

"Can I ask you something?" He said to her out of the blue.

"Can you?"

"Why did you retire?" Rui wondered. "I doubt it was because your ability had deteriorated and I bet there are countless people who are willing to pay a lot of money to commission your services."

She paused from the book she was reading, glancing back at him. "Well, if you must know, I got bored."

"Is that all?"

"Well, you try doing something for centuries and not get bored." She snorted.

"Hm." Rui could understand the sentiment, but he got the feeling that she was hiding something. Regardless, he didn't pry. If she cared to reveal the truth, she would in time. It wasn't that big a deal even if she didn't.

Time passed as he dedicated his time to training.

In addition to the disguise technique, he was also working on two additional techniques. The misdirection technique and the close-range assassination technique.

He had refused help from the Silent Shadow because he was sure that he could do something about it on his own. He had even developed his own ideas for it when he was mastering Death's Sympathy.

A close-range version of Death's Sympathy was definitely a good idea. Although he could technically use the long-range version at any range, it was impractical at close range due to the time it needed to be launched compared to close-range attacks and the inefficiency of the attack compared to close-range attacks.

In exchange for vast range, long-range attacks were generally less efficient than close-range attacks and less powerful. The reason for that was the fact that long-range attacks generally relied on a medium to inflict attacks through, namely the atmosphere, there was inevitably some proportion of energy loss from generating an attack through the atmosphere compared to if that same power had been directly inflicted on the opponent.

In this case, of course, the power didn't really matter too much since the whole point of Death's Sympathy was inflicting damage to an extremely vital organ such as the brain, which was so delicate that it did not take much power to kill the target.

Rui had considered the possibility of relying on Reverberating Lance to generate the resonance frequencies needed to bypass exterior defenses and strike an extremely vital organ.



Reverberating Lance had never been able to generate sound back in the Squire Realm, but he hadn't tried doing so in the Senior Realm yet.

BADUMP!

He activated a breathing technique along with the Martial Heart. An immense wave of power encompassed his entire body, invigorating all of it. The Martial Heart empowered the Martial Art rather than the Martial Body, for it was the Martial Art that actually unearths the Martial Heart and squeezes out the potential energy from deep within the body.

This meant that only the parts of the body being employed in a Martial Art technique would be empowered by the Martial Heart. Of course, thanks to breathing techniques in passive defensive techniques, the entirety of the body was under the influence of the Martial Heart when activated.

However, for this technique, Rui was only interested in his arm.

He began vibrating his arm back and forth, and immediately, the Martial Heart aided him, increasing the vibration frequency and the oscillating speed to far greater heights.

VMMMM!

A smooth yet loud humming sound arose from the Reverberating Lance as it seemed as though Rui had two right arms that largely overlapped with each other. He glanced up at a target that was uniformly made up of a certain Senior-level alloy, before launching a powerful attack.

VMMMM!

The impact was heavy, but most of the momentum was permeated away straight through the target without resistance.

"Wow," Rui murmured.

The principle of sympathetic resonance was extremely compatible with the principles of Reverberating Lance. The two were a match made in heaven and had great synergy with each other.

"It's a shame that this isn't a combat-oriented technique in the first place." Rui sighed.

It took him days, along with the help of a musician to figure out what his target's multiple innate resonance frequencies were. This was not something he could accomplish in the middle of a fight, within the fight.

However, it was a great assassination technique. All he had to do was begin mastering the pitch of the Reverberating Lance the way he had mastered it for the Mighty Roar Flash Blast, and then he would be able to precisely target the innate resonance frequencies through the technique, allowing him to assassinate his target in close-range with no imperfections.

The best about this project was that its success was all but guaranteed because he was relying on principles that had been proven to be effective and were well within his comfort zone, what he was really doing was making the best out of the available resources.

With this technique, he would be deadly at all ranges as an assassin. Even those assassinations that he was unable to accomplish at long range due to power and sensing constraints could be easily executed at close range with this technique. It reduced the prospects of his target surviving an assassination attempt from himself.

'Including Chairman Deacon.' Rui narrowed his eyes.

Chapter 1399: Progress

While the training of the close-range Death's Sympathy and the disguise technique went well, the misdirection training under Master Reina had also commenced.

"You need to master the image." Master Reina instructed. "The stronger the image, the more effectively your subconsciousness will be fooled. The more effectively your unconsciousness is fooled, the more effectively your opponent's subconsciousness will be fooled."

Rui visualized the image of a grave threat, like Master Uma, while minimizing his own. He visualized every detail that he could recall, picturing her determined self out to hunt him down so that she could indulge in her crazy delusions of grandeur when it came to Rui.

The threat was very real. His body had not forgotten the first time it experienced the sensation of the true power of a Martial Master. The deep terror that one who was, at the time, two Realms above him was not something even Rui had been able to brush off.

As the image in his mind grew increasingly detailed and realistic, he could feel a portion of that anguish returning. His subconscious mind followed suit and his body shifted, twitched, and made a number of micro-actions that would subconsciously convey to any sentient being the threat of Master Uma, causing them to look in the direction that Rui had created the mental image in, within his mind.

When the image was created, almost every cell in Rui's body recoiled as if Master Uma had manifested in real life ten meters away from him, threatening to capture him. Anybody who looked at him at that moment would undoubtedly have become convinced that there was a much graver threat that was much more important to pay attention to, causing them to divert their attention away from him.

At that moment, Rui would become insignificant in their minds while their minds subconsciously diverted their attention to the threat of Master Uma.

A non-existent threat.

Master Reina's eyes widened as she momentarily felt a mild urge to do the same. The sheer magnitude of his misdirection was something that beggared the mind.

Literally.

'Incredible.' She narrowed her eyes. 'What an extraordinary mind to conjure up such a powerful image so easily and early on.'

"Fuuu..." Rui heaved a sigh, opening his eyes.

"It's impressive that you managed to create such a powerful image in your head without any extended practice." She stated. "Now all you need to do is be able to conjure up that image on demand instantly. You cannot afford to waste minutes on conjuring up such an image when working on an assassination. However, this will take a long time. You will need to do this over and over until the image is burned in your mind since you obviously cannot store that image in your mind otherwi-!"

Her eyes widened as she abruptly stopped talking as Rui instantly replicated the misdirection, tugging on her attention.

"You mean like this?" Rui asked.

She stared at him. "...How did you do that so quickly? You took five minutes to reach that level before."

"I just recalled it from memory."

"...You memorized a detailed image enough to replicate it perfectly?"

"Yeah, I just stored it in my Mind Palace," Rui replied.

"Mind palace? Ah, that technique. I don't understand, that technique is limited to memorizing a lot of words and numbers. It is entirely unable to store detailed images." She frowned.

"Images are information," Rui replied. "I broke down the detailed image I conjured for the misdirection technique into one million smaller images and stored them all in a million adjacent locations in my Mind Palace. Every time I want to recall that image, I just swoop past all of them in a line and put them together in a particular algorithm to restore the original image. That way, I don't need to create the image from scratch. It's much easier to reconstruct a simple puzzle than to paint a painting."

"..."

"It's really not that big a deal." Rui shrugged. "Honestly, I thought Martial Masters could do that too."

She simply stared at him with sharp eyes.

It was an expression that Rui recognized. It was the same expression that he had seen on the face of every Martial Master he had ever met since becoming a Martial Squire.

As if they somehow saw something that they had never seen before. Master Reina had done a good job hiding it, but apparently, Rui had crossed a line.

She heaved a sigh. "Talent really is an eyesore. To think that you would accomplish months of progress in five minutes. Absurd. But ironically enough, that only makes your path to the Master Realm much more difficult."

Rui furrowed his eyebrows narrowly. "What?"

She shook her head. "Never mind. Let's continue. At this rate of mastery, you will have an incredibly powerful misdirection technique ready by the time we're done."

"I want to go back to what you said before."

"Don't read too deep into it. You have enough on your plate already. If you're too distracted by other matters, your progress with the misdirection technique will slow down drastically." She remarked. "Let's continue, I'm actually quite excited to see what kind of stealth you will achieve."

Rui stared at her.

"I said don't read too much into it. You'll be fine, just fine. Now get started." She remarked.

"...Fine. But when we're done with training, I'm going to have you explain."

She considered his words, before nodding, much to Rui's surprise.

"You promise? No going back on your words."

"What do you want? A blood oath? I said I'd do it. Just get started already!"

Rui put aside thoughts as he continued his misdirection training. His powerful imagination refined the three-dimensional image of Master Uma that he had conjured up, increasing the quality of the image, and making it easier for him to grow immersed in the image and fool his subconsciousness into thinking it was real, which would in turn fool others and misdirect them as a result.

He meditated quietly with a sagely appeal, having become an artist who was embellishing his work, when an idea popped into his head.

"What if I create a video instead of an image? Wouldn't that lead to a much more technique?"

#### Chapter 1400: Video Project

The idea set off an explosion inside his mind, blowing away the image that he was refining in his head.

"What's the matter?" Master Reina asked. "Why have you stopped cultivating the image for the misdirection?"

Rui ignored her question as his eyes swum around, completely lost in his thoughts. 'Videos are probably easier to get immersed into since they are identical to the manner in which our minds interpret vision. As a series of chronological images.' Rui realized. 'That means that if I use a video or GIF instead of an image, won't the misdirection be much more effective on my targets and opponents because it's much more effective on me?'

His mind worked furiously as he extrapolated the outcome of a video in place of an image for a misdirection technique, modeling the response of the human conscious and subconscious mind.

"It works!" Rui exclaimed, excited.

"What are you doing?" She frowned.

He had been wondering how he could leverage his evolved mind to create a more powerful misdirection technique beyond simple applications when he logically arrived at this simple answer.

Perhaps creating a three-dimensional simulation video of a hostile Martial Master was impossible for Martial Seniors, but it was within the Realm of possibility for Rui. If he could achieve this, just how absurdly powerful of a misdirection technique would he be able to create?

"I have never been ignored to such a level in my life, barring misdirection techniques."

'However, while the output of the technique will be much higher than any ordinary misdirection technique, the burden on the mind will also be proportionally higher.' Rui realized. 'Normally, this isn't such a big problem, but the issue is that my mind is already filled with other burdensome things.'

The VOID Algorithm, the ODA System, Transverse Resonance, and Death's Sympathy. Each of these was a technique that required a lot of brainpower. The ODA System was something that Senior Ceeran had managed to reluctantly partially master after more than a year of hand-holding from Rui personally. There were times when Rui used all four simultaneously, like when assassinating his targets.

To add on top another mentally burdensome technique on top of all of them was too much even for Rui.

'At least, it's too much for the video misdirection technique.' Rui realized. 'It's manageable for an image misdirection technique.'

In that case, perhaps it would be better to create two misdirection techniques.

'To be more precise, two levels of the same misdirection technique.' Rui noted. 'One for when my mind is unburdened. And the other for when my mind is consumed by other things. Still... this is indicative of a larger problem.'

He was starting to reach a stage where even his mind was starting to have trouble juggling all the techniques that he was coming up with. It was like a computer with too many programs running, consuming the processing speed of the computer.

'The only way to go forward is to find a way to resolve this.' Rui realized.

He wasn't sure how, but it was not an acute problem. 'I definitely cannot compromise the VOID algorithm. Everything else will have to make do.'

It was possible to use the video-misdirection technique if he was only using the VOID algorithm and nothing else. Thus, there was still plenty of room for him to use the misdirection technique since the other mind-consuming techniques were a lot more niche.

The resulting technique would be extraordinarily powerful if he employed it with the VOID algorithm, however, its utility in combat in direct combat would be much more restrained because of how much it would delay his reactions and reflexes.

'Kane's Void Step doesn't nearly suffer from the same problem because it relies more on maneuvering than misdirection and maneuvering is a fundamental part of combat while misdirection isn't.' Rui realized enviously. 'Oh well, I will have to live with the fact that my stealth will far exceed his by the time I'm done even if it isn't smoothly applicable in combat.'

Nonetheless, the impacts of this technique would be absolutely staggering!

"I exist, you know, at some point, you have to acknowledge me." Master Reina complained.

Rui couldn't imagine just how absurd his misdirection ability would become when he mastered the technique that he sought to master. If Void Step was any indication, Rui could practically consider himself undetectable within the Senior Realm entirely with such a technique.

While he had yet to meet a high-grade Martial Senior, but he was willing to wager that not even they would be resistant to his new idea.



He grinned excitedly as he immediately began working on his idea. He needed to quickly establish the goal in concrete terms.

'A long video may be unnecessary, it's much more practical to work with medium-sized video that will play in a loop as a GIF in my head.' Rui's eyes swam as he grew immersed in his mind. 'Also, it may be worth it to rely on my memories to form the template of the GIF in my head. I can significantly ease my burden and complete the project within remarkably reasonable timelines.'

These kinds of video graphics and CGI projects would take months back on Earth even when highly skilled people had actual high-quality computers and premium software.

Rui was going to do the same but with nothing but his imagination and memory. An absurd feat that would be absolutely impossible to even comprehend for anybody except Rui.

And yet, to him, it was not only possible but inevitable. He forged forward with confidence as streams of thoughts flashed through his mind.

'Let's set the epicenter as the perspective of the three-dimensional simulation. Let's keep the framerate at about sixty FPS from my perspective. Let's set three parallel information tracks, one for vision, sound, and touch to get a better sense of realism for the misdirection to be more effective. That should be a manageable project.'

BAM!

"Ouch!" Rui groaned.

"I said stop ignoring me!"