

Martial Unity 1411

Chapter 1411: Mind-consuming

This was not the first time that she had mentioned that to him. The Hypnomaster resided in a forest known as the Great Forest of Hypnonarak. The man had surrounded himself with a hazardous forest that was actually quite dangerous to enter and exist within.

Rui had access to the intelligence that the Beggar's Sect had supplied him with, he knew what he was getting into.

However, soon enough, it was time for him to leave the Shadow Isles.

He had achieved everything that he came here for. He had become an incredibly competent assassin in one go and was confident that he had acquired the tools that would allow him to kill Chairman Deacon.

He was half tempted to run over to the Shionel Confederation, sneak past all the security, and kill the man on the spot. However, even he knew that it was wiser to wait for the intelligence supplied by the Beggar's Sect. There was no harm in learning everything there was to learn.

He could take his time to plan out the perfect assassination, perhaps even one that satisfied him if he had that leeway. Regardless, that would take time, and it would also require him to fulfill his commission payment to the Beggar's Sect. Clearing out the assassination industry cleanly wiped out a huge chunk of the payment, easily completing many years' worth of normal commissions and operations in one go.

Even the Beggar's Sect's commission payment for their services was rather manageable if Rui maintained this rate.

He would need to find a good way to pay off the remaining with some operation in the region of the Great Forest of Hypnonarak.

It wasn't long before it was time for him to bid farewell to Master Reina.

"Kill him good." She threw him a thumbs-up.

"I will. Goodbye, Master." Rui bowed his head before taking his leave, exiting Area Crina.

He immediately activated the basic version of Phantomind Void, quickly making his way through the people as he made his way through the Shadow Isles. It was annoying that he couldn't just sky-walk away, but that would give himself away to the Beggar's Sect.

He intended to abide by his word to Master Reina and ensure that no one learned that he had gained the tutelage of the Silent Shadow.

It wasn't long before he made his way out of the Derschek Region.

"Alright then..." Rui accessed a map in his Mind Palace. "Time to get going."

He had no reason to delay his trip to the Great Forest of Hypnonarak. It was located further east of the Shadow Isles, and it would take a while for Rui to get there.

Yet even as Rui began his journey towards his next target, his mind accessed the intelligence of the Beggar's Sect, sifting through what he had learned from them as well as Master Reina.

The Great Forest of Hypnonarak was an artificial danger zone that Master Zeamer Ger-Vil had created to obscure his abode. Just that fact alone told Rui that this Master probably had a few screws loose.

Then again, Master Reina created an infested assassination industry in the Derschek as a consequence of her choices.

It appeared that Martial Masters were incapable of just accepting students like normal teachers, for some reason.

Regardless, the Great Forest of Narak was an especially strange kind of danger zone because it was graded abnormally. Normally, danger zones corresponded with Martial Realms to convey how strong a Martial Artist needed to be to not be in danger of dying.

However, things were complicated with the Great Forest of Hyponarak. It didn't have a standard grade. Martial Artists across all three of the Lower Realms could survive and thrive in it.

Apparently, the danger that a Martial Artist experienced in the forest was dependent on their Realm. Martial Seniors experienced more danger than Martial Squires, who experienced more danger than Martial Apprentice.

Rui initially had trouble understanding how such a thing could naturally unfold. But the intelligence documents he had stored in the Mind Palace actually contained the reason for how such a thing was possible.

It had to do with the reason why the forest was graded a danger zone in the first place.

Most danger zones were classified as danger zones because the threat level of the flora and fauna had reached a level where normal humans could no longer sustain life. In the case of the Great Forest of Hyponarak, the forest appeared to be engineered to contain a kind of threat.

The threat to the mind.

The Great Forest of Hyponarak was dangerous because it afflicted the minds of all creatures within the forest. It was said that the flora of the forest consumed the mental energy of all those who entered the forest.

This also made Rui scratch his head. Mental energy existed in a colloquial sense when talking about mental stamina, but it was not a kind of energy that existed in a physical sense like kinetic energy or heat energy.

'Maybe it absorbs or inhibits bioelectric phenomena or just electromagnetic phenomena in general.' Rui mused as his interest in the forest grew.

According to the intelligence of the Beggar's Sect, creatures with greater mental energy experienced proportionally greater consumption and consequent suppression of mind, which was why Martial Artists

did not experience any difference in the suppression they faced from the forest regardless of the Realms they belonged to.

From that Rui could infer that whatever was causing the consumption of mental energy was not a static phenomenon. It was neurodynamic, it changed depending on the neurological parameters of the target.

It could either be an evolved trait in the flora of the forest that the Hypnomaster had put together, or it could be due to an esoteric substance whose absorption of bioelectric activity increased exponentially the greater the bioelectric activity present in any given creature.

Rui's scientific mind kicked into action as he curiously reread all the intelligence that the Beggar's Sect had given him.

Chapter 1412: Danger Zone

The Beggar's Sect was kind enough to also include scientific literature on the Great Forest of Hypnonarak, including confidential internal evaluations and reports of the Panamic Ecological and Environmental Association.

The fundamental mechanism and principle of mental energy consumption were entirely unknown to researchers and scholars who had looked into the matter.

'That's because they don't understand the phenomena of thought from a perspective of physics or chemistry.' Rui mused.

However, they had nonetheless done a lot of due diligence when it came to the scientific method of inquiring into the Great Forest of Hypnonarak. They conducted many experiments examining the correlation between the neurological parameters of a subject and the effects of the forest on it.

They found that both quantity and quality mattered. Larger brains experienced proportionally high suppression due to the consumption of energy while greater intelligence and cognition also corresponded with greater suppression.

'That does explain why it has a greater effect on Squires and Seniors.' Rui mused. 'Higher Realm does correspond with more powerful bioelectric activity. After all, stronger Martial Artists tend to have much greater senses which requires a correspondingly greater mind to process.'

The result was such that mind-consuming flora weeded out a lot of fauna. Life was rather unviable for them as the very nature of the flora was hostile to their state of being.

The greatest threat of the Great Forest of Hyponarak was not giant beasts like phoenixes or dragons that could tear one apart. The greatest was actually the silent plants, shrubs, and trees that silently fed on thought.

The Hypnomaster had apparently taken his time selecting a wide variety of various plant lifeforms from across the Beast Domain that had such predatory traits and then decided to shove them all in one place.

'Man, I don't know how much I'm looking forward to meeting him.' Rui sighed.

The mind-consuming traits of the Great Forest of Hyponarak were not its only threats. The forest was apparently infested with Noremin, Clacomel, and Dresatone.

These were esoteric flora species that produced and released substances that had a hallucinogenic and stimulant effect on the nervous system and the brain, causing the victim to enter an intoxicated state of mind.

In other words, there were plants that naturally produced narcotics to cause the victim to lower their guard, eventually causing them to die, turning them into nutrients for the flora over time.

While Rui found the scientific insight into that interesting, what he was more interested in was the effect that the Great Forest of Hyponarak had on human civilization in its geographic vicinity.

It turned out that a substantial proportion of the drug trafficking industries in the broader geographic vicinity of the continent were actually sustained by the supply of narcotics harvested from the Great Forest of Hyponarak.

Rui tutted when he reread the reports on the flow of narcotics from the Great Forest of Hyponarak to many places around the continent, including the Kandrian Empire.

Humans were going to human regardless of which world it was. The drugs that could artificially generate the experience of blissful happiness and joy were naturally clamored for by countless people, desperate for the alleviation from the horrors of reality that these narcotic substances provided them.

And, of course, there were countless people willing to take advantage of that. If one could gather an abysmal amount of wealth by harvesting some plants, processing them a bit, and then selling them for substantial profit margins over enormous scales, then why wouldn't they?

Unfortunately, Rui couldn't even blame them even if he disapproved of the entire business. At the end of the day, the market for these products not only existed but was quite large.

People wanted these drugs and voluntarily went out of their way to purchase them despite knowing the long-term effects that they had.

It would be one thing if drug dealers and trafficking rings forcefully shoved it down their throats, but such a thing did not happen. Those that never sought it, would never be affected by the drugs or those that sold them.

Rui was a believer in personal responsibility. If an adult voluntarily and actively went down a self-destructive knowing the consequences of their actions full well, then the responsibility on any third party that facilitated that path was drastically lessened.

Regardless, of his views on it, there wasn't much he could do about it in the first place. He was under no illusion that he could cripple the narcotics industry, that was a force that he was not strong enough to confront. It was a whole other beast compared to a local assassination industry like the Shadow Isles of the Derschek Region.

Regardless, because of how profitable the narcotics industry was, gathering the various plants needed to produce the narcotics products was also an extremely profitable endeavor.

Naturally, a market formed around the harvest of Noremin, Clacomel, and Dresatone plants. Martial Artists and even humans were commissioned by various organizations and patrons to gather large amounts of the drugs. There were even broker associations formed that allowed clientele to easily commission raiders to harvest narcotic plants.

Yet, the reason the raiding profession was profitable wasn't just because of the demand, it was also because the supply was fraught with risk and danger. The Great Forest of Hypnonarak was a forest that hampered the mind in many ways. Entering it immediately compromised the greatest and most important survival asset that a raider had, their mind.

Furthermore, the forest was extraordinarily large, exceeding even countries in its total area. It was said to contain many especially esoteric and exotic phenomena within its murky depths.

Strange and bizarre creatures that had adapted to the circumstances.

Fantastical phenomena that beggared the imagination.

Sights that were said to be otherworldly.

Many people swarmed the forest, be it Martial Artists looking for the Hypnomaster, or even the Martial Artists looking to generate wealth as forest raiders. Many a raider set foot into the forest, seeking.

Yet regardless of what they sought, many perished within the forest nonetheless. Regardless of strange quirks, a danger zone was a danger zone.

Chapter 1413: Arrived

Out of the many Martial Artists who chose to traverse the Great Forest of Hypnonarak, a solid proportion of them died. What was surprising was that the rate of death of Martial Apprentices, Squires, and Seniors was not nearly as large as one would expect.

Rui felt like he understood why this was the case. Given that the Hypnomaster had created the forest, he assumed that this was an intended outcome.

'Is he trying to equalize the difficulty for all Martial Artists that come to seek him?' Rui wondered.

'Maybe he wanted to make it fairer for Martial Artists of all Realms so he didn't weed out worthy Martial Artists of the Lower Realms.'

He wasn't sure, but that didn't change the challenges that he had to overcome. The journey to the Great Forest of Hypnonarak was long and tedious. Rui had to cross many nations, mountains, forests, seas, and even an ocean as he made his way to the forest.

The forest was in a region of the continent known as the Gereign Region. The Gereign Region used to be a rather lowly populated and rural part of the continent before the Hypnomaster came along and created the forest that served as his abode.

The event completely changed the fate of the Gereign Region, turning it from a place within nothing in the middle of nowhere to one of the biggest supplies of narcotics drugs.

According to the intelligence supplied by the Beggar's Sect, most of the black markets across many nations directly got the supplies they needed from the Gereign Region, which was there were a lot of vested interests.

If not for the fact that the Hypnomaster was said to be a particularly powerful Martial Master who had claimed the entire forest and surrounding region as his domain, Martial Masters would have also been deployed by many forces to enter the forest.

However, the reason that this did not happen was exactly due to the fact that they would be infringing on his domain. While the Martial Master apparently tolerated Martial Artists of the Lower Realms trying to gain his favor, he had killed Martial Masters over that offense.

'Interesting...' Rui mused in thought as he revisited the intelligence. 'Finding him may be a challenge, I should probably gather more intelligence from the Beggar's Sect. Speaking of which, I hope they have a good branch in the Gereign Region.'

He still had the badge that Sian had given him in the Derimont Bazaar. It was the only way he had to actually contact the Beggar's Sect without any hassle. He also had to undertake operations from the Beggar's Sect to repay the remaining part of his commission payment.

However, given that the Gereign Region was infested with matters surrounding the Great Forest of Hyponarak, he was sure that whatever missions and operations he was assigned would also be related to the forest.

Still, he wasn't entirely averse to it.

'If I'm not wrong, I should have an advantage in the Great Forest of Hyponarak.' Rui mused.

He wasn't entirely sure because the mechanics of the more dangerous effects of the forest were unknown to him, but he ought to have a better time against those than his peers.

In a broader sense, there was a reason that the Hypnomaster created a forest like the Great Forest of Hyponarak. It didn't take a genius to figure out that it was most likely to filter out people who didn't have powerful minds or an affinity for mental techniques since his specialty was hypnosis.

If that was the case, then surely Rui stood a better chance of clearing the entire forest and reaching his objective. Once he did, he could freely learn mental techniques from the Hypnomaster.

However, he wondered how appropriate that was now that he had learned the truth about the breakthrough to the Master Realm.

Mental techniques did not correlate with the Martial Mind. He wasn't sure how much he ought to invest into it now that he learned that they do not further his path to the Master Realm.

'I possess far too much of an affinity for them for me to reject though.' Rui mused. 'Besides, while mental techniques don't inherently correlate with the Martial Mind, that doesn't mean I can't create a system of thought that is centered around the application of a given mental technique.'

He wasn't sure how that would end up looking, but he was confident that he could do it.

'In a sense, one needs to expand their Martial Art in order to develop their Martial Mind. The larger your Martial Art, the more ways it can be applied, and thus the greater the ease with which the Martial Mind can be developed.'

With that out of the way, it would probably be greatly beneficial to him if he added an extra layer to his Martial Art, it would increase his flexibility and versatility. With that extra element at hand, the permutations and combinations of the various applications of his Martial Art would rise greatly.

Furthermore, it would probably give him the final set of tools he needed to be truly confident in taking down Chairman Deacon. The assassination training he got from Master Reina certainly helped as well, but whatever training he would get from the Hypnomaster would be sure to improve his power on a qualitative level.

Much time passed until Rui finally reached the Gereign Region, overlooking it from atop a mountain.

The murky forest at the center of the region was absolutely gigantic, and also extremely dense and thick.

A strange mist occupied the inscrutable forest, giving it an eerie edge. Yet the regions surrounding the forest felt much more lively and energetic to Rui's instincts. While the dangers were certainly difficult, there were all too many people who were willing to risk it to strike it big.

'Alright, time to see what the hype is all about.'

Rui was curious about what all the hype about the forest truly was like in person. There was a difference between reading and experiencing for one's self.

Chapter 1414: Distribution Enterprise

It didn't take long before Rui entered the surrounding regions of the Great Forest of Hypnonarak. The region was not divided into nations or any other political entities.

There were no kingdoms or even duchies, and certainly no empires. The reason for that was that the natives had been limited to villages and towns even before the forest was created.

However, once the continental forces learned about the forest and what it had to offer, the poor natives never stood a chance. They were completely overrun by forces that colonized and settled around the Great Forest of Hyponarak.

Thus the only thing that Rui found was a large commercialized area that was entirely centered around the harvest and supply of narcotic flora. There weren't even divisions across the establishments throughout the region such as towns or villages.

Apparently, nobody cared for such things. And why would they? None of them cared to create an economy or a society. Each and every one of them were only there to make money.

Either off of raiding the forest and harvesting narcotic flora. Or making money by taking harvests, processing them, and supplying them to relevant markets elsewhere.

'Wow.' Rui took in his first glance at the establishment around the Great Forest of Hyponarak.

A broad borderless and largely lawless sea of commercialization.

Poor civil engineering, infrastructure, and a dense population. Furthermore, an odd odor characterized the air. It came from the large stacks of plant harvests he saw being carted around by various people.

'Tsk.' Rui crinkled his nose, before walking into the large establishment that seemed to stretch forever. He already had an unpleasant impression of the entire place at first glance but got worse the more he walked in.

It reminded him of the Derimont Bazaar, though that place was far worse in his books.

At least it wasn't nearly as noisy.

"Hey! Move along!"

"Get out of the way!"

"A hundred silvers per kilogram?! That's outrageous!"

"Raider for hire!"

Rui sighed as he made his way past the crowds, glancing at all the establishments.

[Veyron Raider's Guild]

[Felethunder Raider Party]

[Vinfranian Noremin Processing Factory]

He wasn't even surprised that most of the establishments were centered around the narcotics sector. It was just far too profitable to expect too much else. However, it wasn't as though there was nothing.

[Ecological Survey Corps]

[Environmental Commission]

There were apparently some groups centered around other aspects of the forest.

[Clues into the Hypnomaster]

[History of the Hypnomaster]

"Interesting," Rui murmured as he strolled past several establishments that looked into the Hypnomaster who actually created the entire forest. of course, given that he had purchased a lot of information that looked into the forest and the Master, Rui didn't actually need any aid, but it was good to know that there were plenty of people who still cared about gaining the tutelage of the vaunted Martial Master.

'In fact, I'd say most Martial Artists here are actually here for the Hypnomaster.' Rui mused. 'The forest raiding is just a good way to sustain them while they're here.'

The Martial Artist population of the region was not scant.

Even as he walked through the dense populations, he could sense a large number of Martial Apprentices, many Martial Squires, and some Martial Seniors. They gave him an entirely different vibe from the assassins of Shadow Isles.

For one, purely off of a first evaluation, he did not get the sense that they were here for commercial purposes. Most of them were Martial Art attire and uniform, and most of them did not reek of narcotics in the way that only people who consumed them did.

Those clues alone were enough for him not only to infer why they were here but also to gain a broader understanding of the dynamics of Martial Artists in this region.

The assassins of the Shadow Isles had lost sight of their original objective under the highly favorable circumstances of the Shadow Isles. This place was one of the few places where assassins could safely come out of the shadows and practice their profession out in the open.

It was inherently attractive to them.

However, the same could not be said for the Martial Artists of the Gereign Region and the forest raiding and harvesting. There was nothing attractive about cutting and gathering plants, it was menial labor.

The Martial Artists that remained here were those of deployed forces from various organizations and mafias around the continent who were interested in the narcotics supply of the Great Forest of Hypnonarak, or they were people who were interested in the Hypnomaster.

In fact, Rui could go as far as gauging which of the two any given Martial Artist fell into. Martial Artists associated with organizations usually had emblems or crests of their respective organizations on their Martial Art attire.

Independent Martial Artists were less well-equipped.

"Ah, young man. I have a letter for you." A postman stopped him, giving him an envelope.

Rui narrowed his eyes as he opened it.

[Gereign Distribution Enterprise]

"...I see." Rui mused 'This is the Beggar's Sect's foreign affairs department in the Gereign Region.'

A distribution service sounded like a good cover for the base of operations of the foreign affairs department. He didn't even know such a thing existed, but such things tended to blend into the background, which was good for the Beggar's Sect.

He immediately headed towards the address specified, leading him to the closest executive branch of the distribution service.

It wasn't long before he was waiting side to be approached by a man.

"Ah, Senior John, we apologize for the wait, we have some matters to discuss regarding your commission payment, can we talk about it in a more private setting?" A man asked.

"That's fine by me."

He didn't mind the blatant exposure of the matter he was here for, since anybody listening would obviously assume that it was a commission payment for a transportation commission, rather than an intelligence one.

He was interested in completing the payment as soon as possible so he would have access to the intelligence as soon as possible.

Chapter 1415: Seal

It wasn't long before he found himself in an office that was sealed off with anti-espionage measures.

"Senior Falken, please have a seat." An executive gestured.

The man was a mid-level executive within the company, officially at least.

"A book market, a library, and now a distribution service," Rui remarked. "The Beggar's Sect sure is diverse in its covers."

The man smiled. "Thank you. It's a safety measure, you see."

"Even if a single base is compromised, it won't turn into a point of failure for the entire sect because all the various bases of operations of your foreign affairs department," Rui guessed.

"That, and more. However, I believe you're not here to discuss this topic," The man continued. "Considering that you have already purchased the intelligence you sought on the Hypnomaster back in the Derimont Bazaar, I suppose you're not here to purchase information."

"Well, it has been more than two years since I visited the Derimont Bazaar, but yes, I'm here for opportunities for my commission payment, and to confirm the status of my commission," Rui replied.

"Your commission has already been completed, Senior Falken." The man remarked. "We have gathered an extensive amount of information on the security measures undertaken by Chairman Deacon at all times, as well across his entire regular schedule and for all considered circumstances. We will supply you with it the very moment you complete your commission payment."

That was good news. Rui had been concerned about the results of their efforts, but it would appear that the Beggar's Sect

"I'm glad to hear that my commission has gone well," Rui replied. "However, I do have to say that I am a little concerned with how inflated the commission payment is."

"Hm? Please elaborate."

"In particular, I'm concerned about the value of the commission payment versus the value of the contributions that I've made to the Beggar's Sect," Rui remarked. "The contributions I made to the Derschek branch were rather enormous, don't you think? I cleaned out an entire assassination industry, killed many Martial Seniors, and completely got rid of a problem that had become a headache for even the Beggar's Sect. In comparison, the general value of the intelligence surrounding Chairman Deacon seems much lower."

"You're not wrong, Senior Falken," The man smiled, earning Rui's surprise. He didn't think that they would concede that point so easily. "However, the reason that the intelligence of Chairman Deacon is high is because of the seal placed on the intelligence."

Rui tilted his head in confusion.

"You yourself have placed a seal on your information, have you not?" The man asked.

"...You mean paying the Beggar's Sect not to sell my information?"

"Correct," The man nodded. "That places a seal on your information, making it much more expensive to purchase your information. Chairman Deacon has placed an even greater seal on his information, thus the commission payment to purchase it is naturally very high."

Rui understood the system, it was quite a simple but ingenious way for the Beggar's Sect to earn an enormous sum of money from various wealthy tycoons across the continent.

He was willing to bet that every nation and powerful or influential individual put a seal on their information. He couldn't even begin to fathom how much the Beggar's Sect was profiting from the arms race of intelligence that they themselves had put into play.

'No wonder they can afford such extravagant bases like the Derimont Bazaar.' Rui mused.

The Derimont Bazaar was obscured by a huge amount of anti-espionage esoteric materials that he recognized to be coming from the Shionel Dungeon. Considering that he had made many billions off of Esosale Suppliers, he knew just how expensive the creation of the Derimont Bazaar must have been.

'Tsk. It's a game everybody is forced to play, a game where they are the gamemaster.' Rui tutted inwardly. "Increase the seal on my information ten-fold."

The man smiled. "Are you sure about that? That will cost you. You will most likely have to make an equally large contribution as you did in the Derschek Region."

"Yes, I'm sure," Rui replied.

Although he highly doubted that someone as pious and stuck-up as Master Uma would lower herself to complete commissions for the Beggar's Sect, he did not want to take any chances. As long as he could increase the difficulty of her getting to him, that was good enough.

It would not do for her to appear out of the blue one day while he was minding his business and then abduct him.

"Alright then, I'll be sure to initiate that immediately. Normally, we do so after the payment has been made, however, our working relationship with you has been quite pleasant thus far, so we will make an exception." The man replied. "However, I believe that still isn't the primary reason why you're here."

"I'd like to fully pay off all of my commission payments in one go," Rui replied. "I have no interest in running around completing small missions and operations to accumulate my commission payment over a long time."

"That is how most Martial Artists pay it back, it's more convenient for them that way, but we understand," The man replied. "You have demonstrated truly impressive abilities. Particularly, your ability to assassinate is truly astonishing for a Martial Senior as young as you are, as demonstrated by your feats in the Shadow Isles."

'Oh, you have no idea.' Rui mused. "I am a highly competent assassin, yes. I am confident I can pierce through to anybody not protected by Martial Masters."

Although he wasn't too fond of the idea that his combat skills were not as valued monetarily as his assassination skills, it couldn't be helped. Eliminating targets was just too lucrative. Adaptive evolution was nice and all, but it didn't earn him the huge amounts of wealth he needed.

"I believe I have just the perfect operation for you," The man remarked. "If you can complete these, then I believe your commission payment will be complete."

Chapter 1416: Requirements

"And what might that be?" Rui asked. "I hope you're not going to ask me to shut down the supply chain of the entire narcotics industry centered around the three drugs found in the Great Forest of Hypnonarak this time. Forget about it. It's not going anywhere."

"We are aware that that would be an absurd demand of any Martial Senior," The man smiled. "We do not require you to destroy the narcotics industry, the only thing that we would like for you to do is to strain it."

"...Strain it?" Rui tilted his head.

"That's right, we would like for you to increase the risks and dangers associated with harvesting narcotics flora," The man explained. "As long as you can do that, you will be able to significantly diminish the supply chain for a brief period."

Rui frowned. "Yes, but it's only going to be temporary and momentary, the second I stop, it's going to end. There will be absolutely no long-term impact. You surely are aware of that, so that implies you're simply looking for a window of time, rather than a permanent outcome."

"Correct," The man smiled. "We are aware that there is no long-term or permanent impact on temporarily causing a lot of deaths. However, there are still things that can be done while you're active in suppressing forest raiders."

Rui analyzed the man's words as his mind got to work. 'If there were something that they want to accomplish while I strain the narcotics supply chain, then it can be inferred that it is something that can only be done while it is strained. In which case...'

"...Are you trying to phase out narcotics from regions particularly afflicted by drug addiction, or are you trying to cripple drug trafficking rings with razor-thin margins?" Rui wondered. "Straining the supply chain manifests only in its impact on the supplier and consumer, so I can only infer that one of the two is your goal. I would deduce that it is the latter, considering that an epidemic of assassinations was disruptive to your intelligence-gathering operations, an epidemic of drugs in a given region is probably worse."

"That was astute of you," The man remarked, smiling. "Since you have figured out the truth, I shall not hide it any longer from you. We are currently engaging in an effort to stabilize our intelligence stronghold in certain particularly drug-afflicted regions not too far from the Great Forest of Hypnonarak. Unfortunately, the supply of narcotics in these regions is far too high and the price is far too low. If we are to instate stability, we will need a brief period of time where the cost of production rises far more than it currently is. We need to reduce the amount of narcotic drugs flowing into the region."

It was just as Rui had figured. In a sense, the agenda for the Gereign branch of the Beggar's Sect was similar to the Derschek branch's. In general, the Beggar's Sect's greatest priority was always intelligence, thus anything that threatened its ability to gather intelligence was always a threat. Tremendous instability was the kind of thing that they seemed to avert in order to restore order so they could resume their intelligence gathering.

In the first place, because there were so many agents of the Beggar's Sect across the entire continent, it meant that they had a lower threshold for failure. Any region that was in too much chaos would disrupt its operations. Because they had to maintain the covertness of their vast intelligence operations, their intelligence supply chains were more fragile than those of other organizations that relied on highly trained agents and sophisticated esoteric technology.

This allowed them to maintain intelligence supply chains even in chaotic socio-economic regions.

The Beggar's Sect could not rely on such means. It was impractical to train every single one of their agents into a highly skilled elite covert operative. It was also impossible to equip every single one of them with covert communication technology.

These things made it much more difficult to cope with chaos and instability, even if not impossible.

Still, that wasn't any of Rui's business.

"Such a thing will take an immense amount of time and energy," Rui narrowed his eyes. "I did not just come here to fulfill my commission payment."

"We are aware of that, Senior Falken," The man remarked. "We do not intend to attempt to prevent you from training under the Hypnomaster. You can commence the operation before, after, or even during your training with the Hypnomaster, if you do succeed in finding him."

Rui considered the man's words for a second. "How long do you require me to be active for?"

"For about half a year," The man replied. "By then we can provide crucial aid to drug-afflicted regions, detox them, and focus on reducing the demand for these drugs while increasing the stability of the region. These narcotic drugs inhibit the nervous system in a manner that causes the user to be likelier to engage in violence. However, the detoxification process is much easier than one would expect, so long as one has the necessary means and measures, which we do. But it only works if the user no longer has access to these drugs."

"So you plan to detoxify entire countries of these drugs and also reduce their demand in the time that I keep the narcotics supply greatly hampered?" Rui asked with a skeptical expression. "If it not for the fact that the Beggar's Sect is as powerful as it is, I would laugh at that plan."

Perhaps it was because he had seen the effects of narcotics on his home nation in his past life, but he found himself skeptical that erasing such a problem could possibly be so easy.

"It is because we are the Beggar's Sect that we can undertake such operations with remarkable chances of success," The man smiled with a hint of pride. "However, we do require the aid of someone highly

adept at elimination. You've already proven yourself to be a highly elite assassin, and thus we believe you have what we need."

Chapter 1417: Mafia

The Beggar's Sect expressed a lot of confidence in Rui's capabilities, however, Rui wasn't sure whether their confidence was justified or not.

"The circumstances of the Great Forest of Hyponarak are completely different from those of the Shadow Isles," Rui narrowed his eyes. "First of all, the size of the narcotics supply operations is vastly larger than the assassination industry of the Derschek Region. That alone makes even straining all of it much harder than taking out the assassination industry. Second of all, the Great Forest of Hyponarak is a dangerous place even for me, and I can't afford to focus on hunting others in it."

"We do not require you to work against the entirety of all drug trafficking rings that harvest supplies from the Great Forest of Hyponarak, Senior Falken," The man replied. "We require you to work against a specific number of drug trafficking operations. As long as you oppress them, we will gain what we need."

The man procured a document from a shelf, before passing it to Rui. "These contain the list of the organizations and nations whose mafia we require you to suppress."

Rui grabbed the document before opening it, looking to scour through the list and add it to his Mind Palace. Yet his eyes froze on the first name.

[Carnil Mafia; Kandrian Empire.]

Below the title was a list of organizations and their locations in the region surrounding the Great Forest of Hyponarak. Apparently, these organizations were a shell-front for the Carnil Mafia that was based in and operated out of the Kandrian Empire.

"...Carnil Mafia?" Rui murmured, this was the first time he had heard of the name.

"It's the part of the Kandrian underworld that is ruled by Don Carnil Reoulia," The man explained. "The Kandrian Empire's underworld is divided into six distinct mafias centered around a specific black market or set of black markets. Don Carnil oversees the mafia surrounding prohibited substances and products. The mafia under his rule is known as the Carnil Mafia."

Rui stared at the name with narrowed eyes. "I was not aware that the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana, the Republic of Gorteau, and the Kandrian Empire had such large drug trafficking problems."

Rui threw in a bunch of names in addition to the Kandrian Empire to obscure his interest in that nation in particular. The man explained the situations of the mentioned nations, before arriving at the Kandrian Empire.

"The Kandrian Empire is our most important target," The man remarked. "In particular, the Throne War of the Kandrian Empire has long entered its cold war stage as the various powers of the Kandrian Empire are bracing for what may very well be a civil war within a decade."

"What does this have to do with that?" Rui asked, narrowing his eyes.

"The underworld of the Kandrian Empire is highly invested in the outcome of the throne war. What they seek is a libertarian ruler who will get rid of prohibitions and restrictions, allowing them to legitimize themselves under the law, increasing their market capture." The man explained. "For that purpose, they have been taking many measures to increase their political capital by spreading narcotic drugs across more impoverished parts of the nation. Smaller towns, villages, settlements, orphanages, that sort of thing."

It took a lot of effort and all his diplomatic training to ensure not a single trace of his internal reaction to the word 'orphanages' leaked out. However, he was tremendously displeased by what he heard.

"By increasing the demand for narcotics, the new ruler, whoever they are, will be immensely pressured by many stakeholders to either eradicate the narcotics industry or legalize it," Rui mused. "Eradicating it from within the country is basically impossible."

The man smiled. "The Kandrian Underworld is a powerful force. Its military might makes it the third most powerful entity of the Kandrian Empire and it is protected by Sage Aggragor, who is also a don of

the underworld. Attempting to erase it will take immense resources and wealth, even by the Royal Family's standards. Furthermore, the resulting conflict will weaken the country."

Rui narrowed his eyes at those words.

"However, increasing demand isn't the only extent of their efforts. We believe that they have a prince or princess."

Rui already understood what direction this was going. "They have someone who bears royal blood. So they can fight for the throne themselves."

"Correct." The man nodded. "The narcotics trafficking ring is just one part of a much larger political lobbying effort. This is their only chance to legitimize themselves and thus avoid persecution. It is an outcome that the Beggar's Sect would rather avoid, thus we intend to oppress their operations."

'He's being remarkably candid.' Rui mused inwardly. 'He's hoping I have some connection to some of the nations on this list, such that I may be persuaded to agree to this operation.'

Unfortunately, it was working. He had heard about the throne war from multiple different sources by now, and unfortunately, that was not something that could be avoided.

However, for the first time, he realized that it was harming his interests directly.

"Alright, I accept," Rui sighed. "But I don't intend to complete this operation until I train under the Hypnomaster. The Great Forest of Hypnonarak is an extremely dangerous place, and if I intend to operate within it, then I want to make sure that I have everything that I need in terms of my Martial Art."

The man nodded. "We understand, that is a prudent measure. We hope for your success in finding the Hypnomaster and gaining his tutelage. Some of the most powerful mind-oriented Martial Artists are those who have gained tutelage from the Hypnomaster. Your chances of successfully completing the operations we need from you will also significantly go up if you do gain his tutelage."

It appeared that the Beggar's Sect had been impressed with how cleanly he had wiped out the assassination industry of the Derschek Region, hoping that he would be able to partially replicate the feat temporarily in the Great Forest of Hyponarak.

Chapter 1418: Threats

Rui hadn't expected that he would be indirectly entangled with the Throne War in such a fashion.

The Beggar's Sect was basically hoping that he would wage war against the Carnil Mafia inside the Great Forest of Hyponarak.

That was something that Rui was not sure was too good of an idea.

The Kandrian Underworld was a force that Rui was not qualified to take on under normal circumstances. However, the narcotics operations of the Great Forest of Hyponarak were sort of limited to the Senior Realm, even if its importance exceeded that Realm.

The reason the limit existed was because the Hypnomaster did not tolerate other Martial Masters in or near his domain. According to the intelligence supplied by the Beggar's Sect, this was enough of a deterrence to prevent any force from deploying Martial Masters.

"He once eliminated four Martial Masters in a single fight," The executive explained. "In the first place, the Hypnomaster is a highly experienced and powerful Martial Master over four hundred years old. Furthermore, the Great Forest of Hyponarak is his domain not just in a political context but also in a Martial Art context."

Rui had already come to figure that part out. "A stronger mind will prevail in a battlefield that weakens the mind. This place is perfect for him."

The man nodded. "That is why you can rest assured that you won't be running into Martial Masters and certainly no Martial Sages."

If that was the case, then the plan was a lot more viable than he had expected. Although he was quite wary of the powerful Martial Seniors of the Kandrian Underworld, he was also confident in the recent gains he had made under the tutelage of the Silent Shadow.

He was not afraid of them discovering his identity thanks to the Master-level mask, and the disguise ability that he had gained. Furthermore, his Phantomind Void technique was something that would work well in the forest. Although the technique was not as smoothly combat-applicable as Kane's Void Step due to the much greater mental burden, it was still something that would be highly useful when eliminating his targets.

"Alright, that's enough on that matter," Rui heaved a sigh. "I want all the intelligence that the Beggar's Sect had gathered on the Hypnomaster and the Great Forest of Hypnonarak, just put the price on my tab."

"We will be sure to procure that for you." The man smiled before fiddling with his terminal.

It wasn't too long before Rui got his hands on a large stack of documents. he quickly took his pile away, before scouring through the detailed reports and analyses.

The intelligence that he had purchased from Sian in the Derimont Bazaar was preliminary, to give him a good idea of what he was going up against, but it wasn't everything.

The intelligence offered by the Beggar's Sect was quite detailed and pertinent, as he had expected. It went into even greater detail than the information he had prior. It went into the many challenges that all of those who sought to travel the expansive forest in search of the Hypnomaster.

There were special monsters and creatures in the Great Forest of Hypnonarak that had specifically adapted to the mind-consuming nature of the forest, allowing themselves to be sustained in its depths. They were few and far between, but it was true that they were quite powerful.

[Illusionary Dragon]

This was a special species of dragon, one of the apex predators of the Beast Domain that had the ability to generate illusions by manipulating both, the senses of its victim as well as its environment. It was

capable of applying its ability to generate illusions to obscure itself in a stealthy manner, or to confuse its target in combat while also exploiting openings to kill its target.

it was particularly dangerous within the environment of the forest that compromised the mind.

[Nightmare Oases]

Apparently, even the water sources in the forest were compromised with mind-suppressing and hallucinogenic esoteric substances. Drinking water from these sources was highly inadvisable, yet they had a strange psychological effect of greatly increasing the physiological urge and thirst for water, causing people to become unsuspecting victims of it, only to be consumed by the surrounding predatory flora.

Rui wondered what possessed the Hypnomaster to create something that cruel. It appeared that Master Reina was right when she said that the Hypnomaster was not as kind as her.

This was especially the case when the intelligence provided by the Berggar's Sect went into great detail as to how nearly every species of flora within the forest was predatory and carnivorous in nature.

The sheer amount of meat that the entire forest as a whole needed to consume meant that unless it got a regular supply of food from the outside, it was not something that could be sustained very easily.

'Ah, that's why there is so much narcotic flora.' Rui realized. 'He wanted to incentivize as many people to enter the forest in search of the drugs, or him, and thus feed the forest's voracious appetite.'

It was the only way to sustain such a large carnivorous forest. If that was the case, then the Hypnomaster was truly a ruthless man who had no qualms about the misery that inevitably unfolded from his desire to have a convenient system in place.

He especially felt so as he skimmed through the intelligence on the various threats that existed within the Great Forest of Hypnonarak.

From a relatively small number of creatures and species that had managed to adapt to the conditions of the Great Forest of Hyponarak, the Hypnomaster's own residence was apparently something that was not constant and changed every day, making it harder to track him based on existing information.

Furthermore, the forest as a whole caused one to lose their sense of time and direction within sufficient depths due to the mental energy consumption, causing people who were otherwise capable of surviving to die due to being unable to gather their bearings and get out.

It was a forest that had claimed the lives of many a Martial Artist, including Martial Seniors.

"Great, sounds fun," Rui murmured unhappily.

Chapter 1419: Considerations

The forest was quite fiendish, yet Rui couldn't help but be curiously drawn towards the many strange things that were said to be present within it. There were many traits and properties of the forest that contributed to its overall threat level.

One of the consequences of the mental consumption of the predatory flora of the forest was the fact that it affected the sensory capabilities of all people who entered the forest. It didn't actually affect the senses of the victims, however, suppression of the mind led to suppression of the senses indirectly, for the mind processed senses and understood the world around them through that.

As a result, the range of senses decreased remarkably, leading to an increased difficulty in the search for the Hypnomaster's location.

'That's probably also on purpose since the sensory range of Martial Seniors would otherwise be able to allow them to scour the entire forest within a reasonable timeframe.' Rui mused.

The issue was the fact that there were little to no ways to accelerate the search, not even with the Martial Heart, it appeared. That meant if Rui wanted to find the Hypnomaster, he would need to get exploring like every other Martial Artists who had come to the Gereign Region.

One of the options that he could explore was joining an adventurer's guild. Allegedly, there were guilds centered around the exploration of the forest, disconnected from the narcotics industry.

These guilds fostered cooperation between Martial Artists, allowing them to work together to find the Hypnomaster. However, Rui highly doubted that the Hypnomaster approved of such means to reach him.

He also doubted their effectiveness when it came to locating the Hypnomaster. From the available information, the Hypnomaster did not accept too many pupils. Allegedly, the last pupil he had accepted had been from more than eight years ago.

From that Rui could infer that there were obstacles and impediments to finding that couldn't be overcome with teamwork alone. The Beggar's Sect had done a remarkably good job at collecting all the pertinent information surrounding the Great Forest of Hyponarak.

As far as Rui was concerned, it was good enough for him.

It wasn't long before he had completely stored and organized the data provided by the Beggar's Sect in his Mind Palace.

"I appreciate the aid," Rui told the executive. "I will keep in touch and inform you when I'm willing to begin my operations."

"That will be appreciated," The man smiled. "We wish you good luck in your endeavors."

It wasn't long before Rui found himself traversing the messy streets of the Gereign Region, considering his next move. Although he would have loved to jump right into the forest right away, he decided it was probably more prudent to ensure that he was at his absolute peak physically and mentally.

Although he certainly wasn't exhausted, it was true that he had spent quite some time traveling.

"I'm going to have to actually live in this place," Rui tutted disapprovingly. He found the Gereign Region to be genuinely unpleasant and filthy, it was even more undesirable than his living quarters in the Derschek Region.

While the Derschek Region was more chaotic and highly assassination-prone, it was otherwise fine, definitely much less unpleasant than the Gereign Region which reeked of narcotics substances and was generally more degenerate due to that.

However, he managed to find a decent inn and secured a room for himself. He didn't think his circumstances were secure, however, he was confident in defending himself if the time ever came.

As he lay in bed, trying to relax, his mind drifted across many thoughts. He wondered what the orphanage was up to. He wondered what Master Deivon was up to and how he had handled the aftermath of Master Uma's ambush.

He wondered what Master Reina was doing now that he was gone.

'She's probably super bored.' He mused. In the first place, she used Rui as a way to alleviate her boredom, but now that he was gone she didn't really have all that much to do.

'Furthermore, the assassination industry is gone too.' Rui noted. 'So she's probably just lying around bored to death.'

The thought of it brought a wry smile to his face. 'She shouldn't even bother anymore. The whole business of accepting pupils seems tedious and tiring in the first place. I don't know why Masters even bother.'

There had to be a reason that Martial Masters like Master Reina and Master Zeamer went out of their way to put in all the effort to filter out pupils through complicated means. There had to be a reason why in both cases.

Regardless, he was grateful that they did. Master Reina's distilled insights and training in regard to assassination were far more valuable than any training technique scroll that he could have purchased from some organization.

He probably would have never come to develop a powerful technique like the Phantomind Void had he not been trained under her.

It would definitely be incredibly useful when he began crippling the narcotics supply to specific regions, like the Kandrian Empire.

His eyes narrowed at the thought. He thought back to all the information that he had gotten his hands on from the Beggar's Sect regarding the narcotics supply. He was going to be facing off against the Carnil Mafia of the Underworld of the Kandrian Empire. It was a scary prospect, he did not underestimate the power of the mafia just because it was below the Royal Army and the Martial Union in terms of militaristic and Martial power.

It was still at a level where it could crush him effortlessly. However, within the Great Forest of Hypnonarak, it was quite limited in many ways. The fact that they could not deploy any Martial Master without provoking a violent response from the Hypnomaster was definitely quite the hurdle. They didn't have as many Martial Masters as the Martial Union did, each Martial Master was an extremely precious and strategic resource.

Chapter 1420: Commence

Eventually, the flood of thoughts in his mind dimmed as his consciousness darkened, before he fell asleep. He hadn't been concerned about his vulnerable position given that the inn was hardly a secure place, but he had confidence in his passive senses and emergency reflexes.

If his subconsciousness felt threatened, then his Martial Heart would blaze into full power. Of course, he would do a lot of damage to his surroundings inevitably, but it was much more acceptable than allowing any harm to befall him.

Regardless, he was finally ready to get started. It wasn't long before he had freshened himself up and was ready to get started and head on to the Great Forest of Hypnonarak.

STEP

Rui stepped past the large fence that separated the rest of the Gereign Region from the forest.

A large eerie and murky forest stood before him. The forest was silent in sharp contrast to the bustling human domain behind him. It reeked of the same odor that could be smelled across the human domain of the Gereign Region. The same narcotics that were harvested and processed in the Gereign Region may as well have been omnipresent in the Great Forest of Hypponarak.

One of the reasons that the narcotics supply sector was viable despite the danger of the Great Forest was because one did not have to go in deep to harvest the narcotic flora.

The only ones who chased deeper were the Martial Artists. While the dangers of the forest were not low, the rewards of succeeding were worth it. Furthermore, to a certain extent, Rui felt his inner adventurer coming out.

While the allure of the unknown wasn't something that Rui was too driven by, he was not immune to it. This had also been the case when Rui had explored the Shionel Dungeon. A nightmarish place to others had been much more adventurous to Rui.

"Alright then," He heaved a sigh, before heading into the forest. The moment he approached a certain radius of the flora, he had already begun experiencing pressure on his mind, which continued to rise until he fully entered the forest.

A sort of fuzzy weight that clouded his perception of the world and his mind. On top of that, the odor of the narcotics flora grew even stronger. Although his body and mind were too resilient to be affected by it, he could see why so many were addicted to it.

Furthermore, he knew that the odor was only going to get stronger from there on out. It was one of the ways that the flora of the forest predated visitors of the forest.

He could feel his sensory prowess diminishing as he traveled deeper into the forest.

'I wonder if I could create a stealth metabody based on the principle that the flora suppressed the mind and senses.' Rui wondered.

It was an interesting thought, but he quickly pushed it out of his mind. He didn't have much leeway to focus on much else now that he had entered the forest.

As diminished as his senses were, his range was still large enough to perceive hoards of people cutting away at plants and placing them within large crates. The outermost layer closest to the human domain was filled with people cutting away at the flora of the human domain.

The quality of the narcotics flora increased the deeper one went, yet the dangers and risks also spiked as one went deeper. Higher-quality narcotics could only be found when one went deep enough into the forest, a job that only Martial Artists were qualified for.

The pressure and the odor continued mounting on Rui even as he traversed the forest, heading in deeper and deeper. As powerful and vibrant as his mind was, even it had a limit. Although his limits were far higher than those of his peers, it was definitely going to push him to his absolute limit.

The flora of the forest continued growing more colorful and vibrant the deeper he went. It went from the familiar green that he was accustomed to, to a strange myriad of colors that flashed across the entire forest.

It was alien, and yet it was beautiful, even he couldn't help but stop and admire the breathtaking sights that he beheld standing on a cliff that oversaw a vast section of the forest that extended far beyond what the eye could see.

He came across many little creatures that had somehow managed to adapt to the hostile flora environment of the Great Forest of Hynnonarak.

"Chirrup chirrup," A strange squirrel-like creature with wings and six limbs landed on his hand.

Rui's eyes narrowed as he activated his Martial Heart to actively empower his sensory techniques as he tried to gauge how the creature had managed to survive in such a hostile environment.

The close-range scan from his senses revealed some interesting revelations.

'The neurobiology of this naraceen isn't based on a bioelectrical system.' Rui's eyes widened with surprise. 'It has evolved to develop a consciousness and cognition without relying on bioelectrical phenomena.'

It was a truly shocking revelation, but his sharp senses told him that it relied on a chemical system to process and store information.

'That's shocking.' Rui noted as he studied the docile creature with interest. The intelligence supplied by the Beggar's Sect had mentioned the creature, however, it hadn't mentioned this trait.

'Then again, the Beggar's Sect has no idea how the brain actually works.' Rui mused. 'Still, for there to be creatures that have developed an entirely different genetic... That's incredible, it shows that the biodiversity of the Panama Continent is vastly greater than that of Earth.'

Of course, this wasn't surprising given how much larger the continent as compared to all landmasses of Earth. However, it was still shocking when he saw how that manifested.

'Back on Earth, all intelligence and cognition in the animal kingdom was entirely based on a bioelectrical neurotransmitter system.' Rui thought as he continued studying the creature. 'Even octopi, which developed remarkable cognitive capabilities in an entirely different line of evolution compared to mammals, still rely on a bioelectrical system for cognition.'

He set the naraceen away, watching it scurry away before turning back, and heading deeper into the forest. He had initially wondered if he could develop a Martial Art technique based on the principles of the naraceen resisting the mental suppression of the forest, but that proved to be impossible.