

Martial Unity 1421

Chapter 1421: Grow

As much as he would have liked to mimic the naraceen's ability to avoid the mental suppression of the Great Forest of Hypnonarak of bioelectrical phenomena, by completely lacking those phenomena in their bodies, it was not viable.

There were limits to Martial Art, he couldn't alter the fundamental mechanisms upon which the foundations of the human mind were built on. He would have to settle for resisting the mental suppression of the forest with his own powerful mind.

And yet, the path forward was long. The Great Forest of Hypnonarak was gigantic, easily as large as countries, and not the small kind either. Ordinarily, this would not be an issue for Rui.

Rui could zip through countries at extremely high speeds. The issue was that because his senses were hampered, he was quite hesitant to travel at high speeds.

The faster one traveled, the better one's senses needed to be. This was a basic rule of all travel and locomotion. The reason for this was that the faster one traveled, the longer it took to avoid crashing into objects. Furthermore, the easier it was to fall prey to predator ambushes due to all the attention that he would attract traveling at high speeds.

In order to avoid both of those outcomes, one needed extremely sharp and wide senses that would allow one to detect any and all hurdles and threats to it.

In addition to that, traveling at high speeds with hampered senses substantially increased the probability that he would miss the Hypnomaster even if he passed the Martial Master's abode. This was because the amount of time things spent in his field of senses was much less than before.

STEP

Rui frowned as stopped, glancing around, confused and disoriented.

'Have I lost my sense of direction and time?' Rui frowned. His innate sense of direction was completely spiraling out of control, he could be walking back to the human domain for all he knew and he would not be able to tell the difference.

If not for the fact that he was storing his path forward on a map inside the Mind Palace, he would be completely lost. His sense of time had been completely shattered, he felt like he had been walking for at least a few days when the time ticking in his Mind Palace revealed that it had only been an hour.

'No wonder many people never come return after heading into the depths of the forest.' Rui mused, before suddenly stiffening as his eyes caught something in the distance.

His eyebrows furrowed as what seemed like a bunch of light floated towards him, looking to envelop him. Rui avoided them, taking to the air as he studied them.

'Hypnospirits.' Rui narrowed his eyes. 'They cause hallucinations involving one's memories.'

His eyes turned forward as he spotted an unconscious figure, lying on the ground, surrounded by the hypnospirits. Her body was already entrenched on the ground, covered by roots even as she appeared to be in deep sleep.

What was disturbing was that the surrounding flora had already begun absorbing her despite the fact that the Martial Apprentice was still alive. He didn't bother trying to save her.

Not only could he not afford to focus on helping other people, but he didn't want to get anywhere near the hypnospirits. Although he was quite confident in his ability to break out of hallucinations, he did not want to even reach a stage where he was afflicted by them, having to waste precious mental energy to break out.

The forest tried to consume his mind and body in so many ways that he was keenly aware that he was in a delicate situation.

The probability that he would find the Hypnomaster on his first try was quite unlikely. That meant that his exploration of the Great Forest of Hypnonarak was most likely going to take some time.

He needed to make sure he was able to come back safely and soundly after maximizing the amount of area that he covered. That involved making sure his mental stamina did not entirely run out by the time he set back home, which would be quite disastrous.

'I ought to save my Martial Heart for emergencies then.' Rui mused. If he ever was low on mental energy, then it probably was best to activate the Martial Heart to supply a boost to the mind, and then quickly make his way back.

It was a little frustrating how the forest made light of the formidable power of Martial Artists. but unfortunately, most Martial Artists did not have the ability to defend their mind the same way that they could defend their bodies.

With the exception of mind-oriented Martial Artists. Rui was still better than nearly everybody who tried to enter the Great Forest of Hypnonarak. The Mind Palace technique that he originally purchased was only a grade-five technique when he first purchased it. But after countless upgrades and improvements over more than a decade, it had reached a level that astronomically dwarfed its original iteration.

It allowed Rui to resist the effects of the Great Forest of Hypnonarak much better than he would have been able to had he not had it. The same could be said for the Mindmirror Symbiote that had increasingly integrated with his brain over the many years.

With those two advantages in mind, he surged forward heading deeper and deeper into the flora of the great forest. As he did, the density of and thickness of flora of continued increasing.

Furthermore, the size of the flora also continued growing larger. Trees and plants, their branches, leaves, and trunks also continued growing larger, reaching extraordinary sizes and heights. This made his job much more difficult because the vast branches of the various trees intermingled at various levels forming platforms for various fauna lifeforms to occupy.

He couldn't be sure that the Hypnomaster would necessarily be at ground level, that meant that he needed to expand his search to the third dimension. The sheer volume that he would need to search had grown significantly.

'No wonder so few people have managed to find him.'

Chapter 1422: Garden

The difficulty of the task was much greater than if the forest was merely two-dimensional. But alas, it was not to be that easy. He definitely understood that this was a feature of the challenge, not a flaw.

In order to find the Hypnomaster, one needed to possess a powerful mind, or one needed to possess extraordinary perseverance and determination. In both cases, there was a good chance that the Hypnomaster would accept them based on those traits, so it made sense that there was a challenge the key to which were such traits.

Rui didn't spend too much time dwelling on too many thoughts despite how out of character that was for him. Thought consumed mental energy and within the Great Forest of Hyponarak, mental energy was a precious and vital resource that dwindled by the second.

He forged on forward heading deeper and deeper into the forest. At this point, his senses had long lost their ability to determine which direction he was walking on. The worst part was that compasses also seemed to malfunction in the forest due to the electromagnetic disorientation caused by the same phenomenon that caused bioelectrical suppression.

Yet he knew which direction he was walking in thanks to documenting his travel in his Mind Palace. The biggest hurdle that Martial Artists were seeking to travel deeper into the forest was maintaining geographic and directional awareness.

Once these two key things were lost, the bad stuff followed after. Getting lost meant that the probability of returning home before your mind was drained was low, and this was the reason that most missing Martial Artists did not return.

Rui had greatly improved his chances of survival by cleanly avoiding this pitfall. Not only did he have several rejuvenation potions that he could use in an emergency, but he also knew where he was relative to the human domain of the Gereign Region and the forest as a whole.

'Hm?' Rui narrowed his eyes as something entered his senses. He froze, growing alert as he tried to figure out what it was.

"Hel..." The figure uttered as it stepped into Rui's sensory field.

His eyes widened as he saw Martial Squire step in front of him. Yet there was something very disturbingly wrong about him. Flowers had begun growing from every inch of his body, even his eyeballs were missing as beautiful daffodils had sprouted from within his eye sockets.

The man's mouth opened, yet his body collapsed before he could utter a single word.

Rui narrowed his eyes. Thankfully, the Beggar's Sect had not disappointed and he even knew what he was dealing with.

"The Garden of Nightmares," Rui murmured as he sky-walked to a certain altitude, rising high as he got a good look at what was ahead of him.

A dazzlingly beautiful and awe-inspiring array of flowers greeted his eyes. It drew an immense amount of joy from him, such that he almost couldn't focus on anything else.

'Is this some sort of evolved passive hypnotism or is there some odorless airborne substance that makes it extremely difficult to draw away my attention from the garden of flowers?' Rui narrowed his eyes.

Yet the flowers weren't the only thing that caught his eye. There were numerous corpses scattered across the Garden of Nightmares, each of them had flowers growing out of it as roots could be seen spreading across the entirety of their bodies.

It was a particularly grotesque sight that gave him the creeps, that along with his resistance to its strange effect on the mind and he managed to steer clear of the entire area.

'Brutal.' Rui murmured inwardly. One of the things that he didn't necessarily like about the Great Forest of Hypnonarak was that the forest attacked Martial Artists in ways that they were unaccustomed to incurring.

Although mental techniques were used by a decent number of Martial Artists, they were rarely used as the actual attack itself. They were generally used as a way to augment other attacks, specifically in their execution, against the opponent.

Most Martial Artists were unaccustomed to being attacked mentally directly, and that was true for nearly all kinds of Martial Artists. Unfortunately, it was rarely the case that mental attacks were exchanged in battles.

This was true even for Rui, he had only been truly hit with offensive mental techniques during the first round of the main Martial Contest in the Virodha Theocracy.

Thus to go from very little experience to being thrust into an environment that was infested with such things was too drastic a transition for most Martial Artists. That was the reason that there were so many ways in which one could fumble such matters so badly.

If not for the fact that Rui had an edge in this aspect, he wasn't too sure that he wouldn't have fallen for the various sprung traps even with the knowledge of the Beggar's Sect.

The disturbing sight of the many corpses littered across the field was in sharp contrast to the flowers atop and around them. It was brutal, yet such was nature. It was eat or be eaten.

Rui had to admit that it truly was an entirely different thing to experience these dangers in the flesh than to read about them in a carefully curated report from the Beggar's Sect.

Rui carefully evaded the Garden of Nightmares, avoiding it from a high altitude. Yet he didn't want to get too high either.

His eyes narrowed as he gazed up into the dark clouds that were uncharacteristically close to the forest. Unlike normal forests, not even the skies of the Great Forest of Hyponarak were safe.

BZZZ!

Rui grew alert as he heard mass fluttering in the clouds of the forest. He didn't like the sound of those, based on what he knew about the forest, the skies weren't too much safer than the forest itself.

BZZZZZZ!

Rui's eyes widened as an enormous wave of angry hornets flew towards him, ready to surround and consume him in one go.

Chapter 1423: Kinshroom

One of the particularly nasty parts of the Great Forest of Hynnonarak was the fact that Martial Squires and Seniors couldn't simply sky-walk as carelessly as they could before. The ability to sky-walk usually helped Martial Artists in a forest setting, allowing them to evade the land was a good way to avoid threats on the land.

However, it appeared that the Hynnomaster had not wanted to make it so easy to conveniently evade the danger of his forest. Thus he had allegedly bought a species of hornet monsters from the Beast Domain that made their hives inside and from clouds.

It was said that the specimens he had brought over were beyond the Senior Realm in terms of threat level.

He had found it hard to believe, but apparently, the cloud hornets nested their hives in the clouds, making it particularly difficult to spot them. They ambushed prey in the sky, limiting their prey to animals with the capabilities for flight.

Rui immediately turned around and dashed downwards with his Martial Heart, narrowly keeping away from the flux of cloud hornets that chased after him.

BOOM!!!

The man crashed into the ground at top speed, unable to break his fall, causing an enormous crater the size of a hill to be created in the spot that he had fallen into.

"You okay, man?" Kane asked with concern.

"I'm fine," Rui groaned.

"Maybe going in alone was not the best idea," Kane remarked.

"It's not like I have anybody else," Rui dusted his clothes, getting up. Although the impact was quite titanic, it was nothing for a Martial Senior like him.

"Ouch," Kane muttered. "That's a rough way of saying that you can't rely on me."

"Well, you are a Martial Squire," Rui replied. "Become a Martial Senior and then we can think about that."

Rui's expression froze, growing grave as he suddenly leaped away from the spot getting a good look at what he had been talking to.

There had been nobody there despite the fact that he had been clearly talking to Kane for several seconds. He glanced at the crater that he had just created, some bits of the trees and the plants remained.

'Is that...?' Rui narrowed his eyes focusing on a small object. '...a kinshrooms?'

According to the intelligence given by the Beggar's Sect, they generated hallucinations specifically centered around bonds and connections that the victim had.

'Damn, it must have got me the second I crashed into this part of the forest.' Rui cursed. 'I can't believe it is so potent and fast-acting. It basically got me instantly.'

They weren't all that common, but they were known for their potency and it was said that once trapped in their hallucinations, breaking out was almost impossible without external aid.

Rui apparently managed to break that rule, even if he cheated to a certain degree by destroying in his crash. That meant that he didn't have to deal with its effects past the initial intoxication.

However, Rui's mind had managed to break through merely seconds into the hallucination, preventing his mind and body from being entranced by the hallucination for hours, reducing his probability of surviving.

And yet, Rui was displeased.

'I can't believe I didn't see through that instantly.' He clenched his fist. 'My inhibitions were far too lowered. Is that also merely due to the kinshroom?'

He wasn't sure, regardless, he didn't like how things had unfolded.

'I need to be more careful.' Rui narrowed his eyes. 'I let my guard down too much.'

He decided to reduce his pace and take his time evaluating and overcoming threats. While it would increase the amount of time he would need to take to find the Hypnomaster, it certainly was worth it.

He had made sure that he had enough high-quality rejuvenation potions to aid him in his search for the Hypnomaster.

It hadn't even been too long since he had begun his exploration into the Great Forest of Hypnonarak, and he had to admit that he had already come to understand why the forest was so feared and notorious. There were just too many ways that one could die.

In terms of danger levels, it was to Martial Artists what the Shionel Dungeon had been to Martial Squires. The entire forest was filled with predatory flora that desperately was hunting for prey, and the Hypnomaster along with the lucrative narcotics flora was the bait to draw in raiders and Martial Artists seeking one of the two of them.

In order to create a stable filtering system that would ensure only the worthiest Martial Artists of the Lower Realms would reach him, he hadn't hesitated to create a brutal ecosystem where humans were at the bottom of the food chain and sustained the entire forest.

He knew for a fact that the creatures of the forest that had adapted to the forest were certainly not going to create enough of the supply of sustenance for the forest. Thus Martial Artists like him who were largely doomed to fail if they kept braving the dangers were meant to compensate.

'It's a shame because my Phantomind Void technique is effective against plants.' Rui tutted.

'Misdirection, at my level at least, is ineffective against flora. I doubt I'd be able to evade its effects even if I could misdirect the source.'

Rui heaved a deep breath before focusing himself. If he did not gather his mind and bring out his absolute best, he would not be able to overcome the tribulations of the Great Forest of Hyponarak.

It wasn't long before he set out once more, heading towards the center of the forest, in search of the Hypnomaster.

The forest was remarkably diverse in its flora, unusually so for a forest. It was almost as though the Hypnomaster had put in extra effort to gather as many species of flora as he could to make sure that he didn't let any aspiring students get off the hook easily if they managed to figure out the trick to negate one particular species.

Chapter 1424: Rest

As Rui continued traversing the forest, he couldn't help but wonder the increasingly glaring question that begged itself.

'How in the world did the Hypnomaster create this forest?' Rui furrowed his eyebrows. 'Not only that, how in the world did he manage to create such a viable ecosystem that was stable enough to neither expand in territory nor die out? As amazing as the Martial Mind is, I highly doubt that it allows you to figure out how to construct a perfect ecosystem out of many species sharing a similar form of nutrition acquisition.'

In the first place, surely going this far to create such an enormous and fantastical forest that was also a nightmare to be trapped in was not worth the effort?

'Is it also because he's more effective on this battlefield, I wonder.' Rui thought to himself. 'It would be like Kane and the Thundering Valley. Or an aquatic Martial Artist and a water reservoir.'

If that was part of his intentions, then it was more understandable. He was already a powerful Martial Master, and if he could gain a domain advantage, then he would be extraordinarily dangerous within the Master Realm.

It was no wonder that even the Silent Shadow had been unable to assassinate him.

Still, that only answered the why, and not the how. This was especially true when his specialty was mental techniques. Techniques that were exclusively impactful on the mind, and not on non-sentient phenomena.

Rui concluded that there were probably many things that he still did not understand about the Master Realm. They seemed to break common sense to a certain degree with the feats that he witnessed.

Just the fact that there were things nearly every square meter of the forest that posed some degree of a threat to Rui across this entire forest was a testament to the capabilities of the Hypnomaster; that he could treat even this forest as merely a test for his students.

One more thing that Rui hadn't missed was that Great Forest of Hypnonarak was constructed out of species from the Beast Domain.

That spoke a lot about the Beast Domain.

It made Rui regard the mysterious core of the continent that was uninhabited by humans with much more wariness. If the Beast Domain possessed threat levels that were similar and even much above, then it was not to be trifled with.

'Hm?' Rui narrowed his eyes as he spotted something in the distance.

He quickly crouched activating Phantomind Void for good measure nonetheless. Even if it wasn't effective against flora, it was effective against fauna.

He expanded his senses forward, trying to get a good gauge of what was going on.

His eyes widened as he came across a shocking sight. A bunch of humans and Martial Apprentices had had their skulls broken open as a strange creature wriggled inside, consuming a part of their brains. Moments later, the skull and flesh healed, as the bodies were restored to their previous states.

What was even more disturbing was that the bodies woke up moments later, with wide eyes and inhuman glint within them.

'Marionette worm...'

"Help! Help! Help!"

"Somebody come here, I found something."

"Come this way, we found an exit!"

The humans and Martial Apprentices made a bunch of noise drawing attention to themselves, spouting out words that only humans could. It was a horrifying sight to witness humans and even Martial Apprentices being mind-controlled in such a fashion.

It was most likely a tactic to draw in more humans. They were apparently able to manipulate parts of the brain to manipulate the human's actions.

Rui narrowed his eyes. Although these were known creatures who were already marked to be dangerous, but not fatal, he knew that he couldn't let them go on. This was actual inhumane torture and it was not something that he was willing to tolerate.

He didn't even need to activate his Martial Heart.

SPLAT SPLAT SPLAT!

The sheer force of his attacks smashed them into confetti killing them on the spot. He made sure that the potency and speed were high enough that even the Martial Apprentices would have died before feeling even an ounce of pain or realization.

Yet he immediately turned his attention to his surroundings, warily. His actions drew attention and he needed to make sure that he didn't suffer inadvertently from them.

'Damn, maybe I should have taken lessons from a hunter Martial Artist before entering a forest this dangerous.' Rui tutted, glancing at the evening sun. 'Time sure does fly if it is already approaching dusk.'

He needed to find shelter so that he could get some rest. Of course, when he first heard that it was even possible to find shelter in the forest, he was surprised. But apparently, it was true. One could find shelter in very specific niche places in the Great Forest of Hyponarak.

Rui sky-walked a little as he activated his Martial Heart, trying to spread his senses as far as he could to get as much of a gauge as he could of the surrounding topography.

It wasn't too long before he found what he was looking for.

A gigantic boulder devoid of any flora or vegetation on it, extending far past the surrounding forest. Rui quickly made his way to it as he began climbing the boulder.

Yes, climbing. This was to avoid distinguishing himself as a target to any potential cloud hornet nests that were lurking amongst the clouds.

The idea was to dig a hole deep into solid rock in a boulder at a high enough elevation and create enough of a space for one to inhabit, as long as he could do that and find himself a decent place to get some rest, he would be fine.

As long as he could handle the uncomfy living conditions, he would be fine. Hard rock was nothing to a Martial Senior, after all.

As long as he could get that out of the way, he would be able rest while keeping away from the threats of the forest for the time being.

Chapter 1425: Hunting

Rui did not want to run into a swarm of Senior-level hornets. The fact that they had almost caught up to him prior was quite a close shave. Unlike in the Shionel Dungeon where he had come up with specific targeted solutions towards the monsters, he didn't have that here.

His goal wasn't to massacre monsters in the first place, it was to avoid them while he searched for the Hypnomaster. Wiping out monsters and animals the way he had in the Shionel Dungeon would merely drain his energy for no real purpose, even if he did have the means.

He was sure that his Phantomind Void technique would work on the hornets but it was not a viable long-term solution. Furthermore, he figured it was best that he didn't rely on any particularly mind-consuming techniques. In an environment where mental stamina was compromised, mental energy was something that he ought to avoid spending.

Another thing that worried him was the fact that because of the mental energy loss, the time taken for mental energy to be restored was quite long, longer than normal. That included necessary sleep time to rejuvenate the brain.

Rui heaved a sigh as he made himself, as one could be, inside the little hole that he had carved for himself inside the gigantic boulder. He heaved a tired sigh as he closed his eyes, drifting away almost instantly.

His mind jumped at the opportunity to rest, entering a deep slumber very rapidly. Even the part of his mind that was trained to remain alert even when sleeping was more subdued, even if still active. Rui refused to go to sleep without knowing that his body and Heart would awaken at the first hint of danger.

Regardless, many an hour flew by before he finally woke up, much more relaxed and fresh.

'Well, it appears that I'm not quite dead yet.' Rui mused, getting up before taking out some things from his utility belt. One of the things that Martial Artists carried with them was a means to cleanse themselves without having to make themselves vulnerable by relying on an unknown source of water in a dangerous place or making themselves more vulnerable while they cleansed themselves.

A simple and convenient tool that allowed him to rub off any and all sweat and dust across his body rather conveniently. While it was not as satisfying as a shower or a bathtub, it got the job done.

Rui immediately continued his journey to the center of the Hypnonarak forest. It was a simple objective and the best way for him to find the Hypnomaster at the moment. It was believed that the Hypnomaster resides within the core of the forest, even if he avoided the exact center.

The probability of him being found randomly by chance simply rose remarkably the further away from the center he was, for the density of Martial Artists in the forest increased exponentially the further away from the center he was. It wouldn't matter how much his home migrated across the forest, even if the actual number of Martial Artists that made it into the inner section of the forest wasn't all that great, each Martial Artists possessed superhuman senses to varying levels.

Thus in order to maximize the difficulty of finding him, he needed to stay within some distance of the center of the forest.

Rui walked for quite some distance. He took every step cautiously as the strain on his mind and the odor of narcotic drugs rose significantly. So much so that even he felt like he was being affected by the drugs at hand.

That was astonishing considering that he was a Martial Senior, but it explained why being a Martial Senior did not increase the probability of finding the Martial Master all that much.

One thing that Rui was constantly mindful of was his food supply. The food pills that he had stockpiled were quite handy and nutrition-dense, but they were insufficient to sustain him the entirety of the long journey to the center of the Great Forest of Hypnonarak.

Since that was the case, Rui needed to start hunting soon enough. He didn't even want to wait for his reserve of food pills to finish. The reason for that was that it would be quite convenient if he was unable to hunt for some reason. It was best to save the easy and convenient source of food for when he genuinely needed it when there were other options at hand.

This was especially true since he had become a remarkably competent and flexible assassin. Although there were crucial differences between hunting and assassination, there was enough of an overlap that the skills of one transferred over to the other.

It wasn't long after he had begun traveling that he decided to procure some food. Thankfully, the information that he had gotten from the Beggar's Sect distinguished which of the small critters and other animals were safe to eat and which one was something that he ought to have avoided even as a Martial Senior.

Once that was done, it was but a simple matter to hunt them and take them out effortlessly with the Phantomind Void and a Mighty Roar Flash Blast. The only issue was that he needed to fulfill his voracious appetite of a Martial Senior, requiring him to hunt much more than he had expected.

He normally ate food pills, and they were universalized dietary supplements available both in shops and stores as well as in most places that served food. They usually cost as much as a hundred normal meals, though.

He didn't have those here, however, but it didn't particularly matter since he did have an abundance of available prey that he could target to eat. He made do with simply roasting them over a fire to cook them, leaving a giant pile of bones behind him when he was finally finished.

The difference in the size of the meat he ate versus the size of his stomach were quite large, yet he hardly felt heavy.

Chapter 1426: Giant

As Rui continued traveling deeper into the forest, he came across some truly bewildering sights.

'Is that a tree?' His eyebrows furrowed in surprise. 'No, that's a plant. But it's huge.'

Up ahead in distance were almost entirely ordinary plants, with the most classical stem, and leaves and a fresh shade of green. The only abnormal part about it was that it was enormous, as large as a building. Furthermore, behind it was a huge sea of sea of giant blades of grass.

What Rui found incredible was the fact that there were actual trees past the bed of grass. A forest of trees that resembled a magnified version of the one he was in spread out in the distance.

'Damn.' Rui couldn't help but gape at the sight. The flora didn't appear to be the only thing that had been magnified in the distance. He could sense that even the fauna had grown proportionally in the distance.

Furthermore, the land seemed to depress downwards further into the forest, almost as if trying to compensate for the elevated height of the forest.

Rui had heard of this place. The information provided by the Beggar's Sect mentioned something about a Forest of Giants. The information that it covered was scarce, indicating that there weren't enough reports on it for the Beggar's Sect to provide him with information from.

It was a section of the Great Forest of the Hyponarak that couldn't be avoided allegedly. This meant that one could be sure that one was going to run into it if one was trying to reach the core of the Hyponarak.

Rui felt like a little critter or a larger insect in comparison to the large forest. Many of the creatures within the Forest of Giants were clearly of the same species as those within the normal parts of the forest that Rui was occupying at the moment.

He could see giant naraceets in the distance that moved in manners that were identical to their smaller counterparts. Furthermore, based on the size of the creatures, the average creature was probably an Apprentice-level beast at a bare minimum.

Rui heaved a deep breath before taking a step into the giant forest with an expression of apprehension and curiosity. One thing that immediately struck him was how much stronger the mental consumption.

'Interesting,' He mused with curiosity. 'Is that because the flora has grown larger, or because of a greater presence of an esoteric substance that consumes bioelectrical energy?'

Of course, there were a myriad of different possibilities, but the differences were meaningless and trivial, they were represented within the two possibilities that Rui did choose to take into consideration.

He simply stood there for a few minutes, taking in the novel existence of being small relative to most other significant beings of the forest.

He found himself to be part of the myriad of insect life in the forest. Because insects possessed cognition that was quite little relative to their size, they were spared from the forest's mental consumption for the most part.

They served as the food source for the small critters that had evolved to be able to avoid mental consumption. Unfortunately, he was now an insect in the eyes of the many creatures that inhabited the forest.

He found it amusing that many were compelled to look down on him due to his size. He immediately lowered his Mind Mask, unleashing the aura of a Martial Senior.

Instantly, a lot of insects and other creatures in the surrounding area scurried away.

'I wonder how the Hypnomaster created such a strange forest.' Rui found himself thinking for the umpteenth time. He had to admit, that for the most part, he had found his journey into the forest to be quite the exotic experience. It was a preliminary sample experience of the Beast Domain.

Of course, he also knew that the Beast Domain was far too diverse and vast for it to be summed up by a single experience of a niche kind of environment and ecology.

Regardless, it was experiences like these that reminded him how different this world was from Earth. The more time he spent in this world, the more he learned that there were little limits to what was possible and what could be.

In comparison, the human domain was less awe-inspiring and wonderous. If there was one thing that did not change from this world to the last was that human greed and fear shaped human civilization. A race for wealth, territory, resources, power, and influence created a world that Rui was all too familiar with from Earth.

He had distanced himself from it in his previous life. Yet in this life, he found himself entangled with matters of the human domain far more than he had with those of the Beast Domain.

'Maybe I should change that.' He wondered. The Beast Domain was more dangerous, but it probably was a lot simpler than the human civilization. Society was complex and even Martial Seniors needed to be careful even if they had no reason to fear ninety percent of human civilization.

Yet the times that they did could become quite complicated, especially if one chose to wade the swamp that was known as politics. In comparison, the kill-or-be-killed nature of the beast domain was a lot simpler, even if a lot more dangerous.

He paused for a moment as he spotted a creature eyeing him deeply with a glint of hunger.

A serpent.

The creature was enormous compared to him. Furthermore, not only was it not intimidated by his passive aura, it's own intrinsic threat level matched his own.

'A senior-level beast, huh?' Rui's eyes narrowed, as he crouched, ready to engage at any moment.

Yet, the moment had already arrived.

"Hiss!" The snake lashed at Rui with a flashing lunge, incinerating an enormous amount of air with the sheer velocity of its charge. Snakes possessed extraordinarily fast striking speeds, putting this one's velocity particularly high even within the Senior Realm.

If not for Rui's subconscious reflexive emergency activation of the Martial Heart, his ordinary reactions wouldn't have been able to perceive the lunge.

BADUMP!

Time slowed down to a crawl from his perspective as an invisibly fast motion was reduced to a normal attack.

BOOM!!!

The titanic momentum of the serpent crashed into empty grass. The sheer power of the attack was so high that it blasted past the surface, leaving behind a hole that could accommodate a large hill.

Yet its attention had already shifted, its body turned as it faced Rui who had managed to avoid it cleanly as he circled around the creature observing it with sharp eyes.

'Hm, an incredibly fast lunge. It would be dangerous to try and take that head-on. it's not just the speed but also the fact that it's venomous.' Rui noted as he studied the beast. He had not missed the two fangs that precisely aimed at him despite the small of a target he was.

Its body coiled in turns, gathering energy as its muscles tightened and tensed, ready to propel the snake forward at titanic velocities.

"Hiss!"

RUMBLE!

The very world around them shook with the sheer momentum of the serpent. It lashed out with a blazing velocity as its mouth opened unveiling ferocious fangs that threatened to sink the two menacing fangs into Rui's body.

And yet...

WHOOSH

Rui merely leaped into the air, avoiding the attack altogether. Yet he was no longer content with merely dodging.

THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM!

He launched a barrage of Mighty Roar Flash Blasts at the retreating serpent midair even as he put some distance between himself and his opponent.

"Hiss!" The snake shook as the powerful attacks crashed into its body, breaking and tearing its scales as they battered and cut the flesh. The angry creature coiled again, ready to strike.

Yet Rui had no intention of even allowing it to attack.

'You shouldn't attack prey that you can't reach,' Rui mused as he ensured that he was well outside the snake's range of attack. 'Shame you won't be alive to learn from your mistakes, oh well.'

The snake belatedly realized that Rui was actually a flight-capable creature, the type that the snake tended to avoid due to the maneuvering disadvantage. Yet it was too late for it to undo its choice.

THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM!

Rui rained down a maelstrom of attacks one after the other, mercilessly battering the poor creature as it began bleeding profusely from many orifices across the entirety of the snake's body.

Snakes weren't built with defense and toughness in mind, they were incredibly fast and agile in their attacks, allowing them to lash out and sink their fangs into the target in the tiniest fraction of a second. The attack happened so quickly that most prey would be entirely unable to react in time.

Martial Seniors didn't fall into that category, unfortunately, or at least Rui didn't. Not only could he fight the snake head-on with Primordial Instinct or predictions, but he had chosen the cleanest and the most suited fighting style to completely crush the snake with absolutely no possibility of victory.

'It's so easy to adapt to beasts and monsters that I could do it even without the VOID algorithm.' Rui mused.

Because their minds were not sophisticated enough, their combat styles were largely set in stone by their biology. That meant that there were very standard templates for defeating a species. They had pronounced strengths and weaknesses and it was boringly easy for Rui to see through them and instantly figure out the best counter to them.

It wasn't long before the snake perished under a hail of powerful attacks that it could neither defend nor avoid.

'Alright, time to eat you up to replenish my Martial Heart.' Rui mused as he returned to his normal state. The Martial Heart was a reservoir of immense accumulated energy. It demanded a lot of sustenance whenever it was used.

What followed was another long session eating session as he dissected and roasted snake meat.

'Oof,' Rui crinkled his nose as he glanced at the fangs up close as they leaked some of the snake's venom. 'That's a powerful anti-coagulant toxin. It's a good thing I didn't let that anywhere near me.'

He would start bleeding from all orifices if he let that enter his body, he would probably die very quickly if not for potions and Weaving Blood. yet as long as he could avoid the snake's most powerful weapon. Its offense was not a threat at all. Its blunt force was not that much of a problem even without the Metabody System.

'Humans are much more complex and tricky.' Rui mused. 'If not for the fact that the adaptive evolution model has not been adapted to beasts, they would be far too easy to adapt to him.'

It was easy for him to develop strategies and tactics for dealing with specific creatures, the problem was with countering every individual move that a beast made with the perfect individual counter. He had yet

to overcome that problem, and that was probably something that he would need to fix before he became a Martial Master.

He was deeply concerned about breaking through with a flawed Martial Mind and then taking forever to fix that flaw.

'First let's find the Hypnomaster, one thing at a time.' Rui shook his head, before heading deeper into the forest after consuming his meal. The remaining corpse meat was bound to attract predators and scavengers, so he quickly moved on, heading deeper into the forest.

He had long entered the depths of the forest, making sure to avoid as many creatures as possible. If he used his Martial Heart, then he would have to go through the pain of hunting and eating whatever made him activate it, being bogged down once more. This was something that he would have liked to avoid.

Yet his eyes widened with shock as he came across something truly shocking.

"Is that... a giant human?" He murmured, shellshocked as he came across a giant corpse on the ground.

Chapter 1428: Departure

'...What in the world?' Rui narrowed his eyes as he approached the giant corpse. It was a giant male corpse that was approaching the size of a small hill, which was absolutely astounding. With just a single glance, his mind had already computed several anomalies besides its size.

'The visual signs of decay don't match the expected smell profile.' Rui immediately noticed.

The flesh had long sunken and begun eroding in a sickly green and black, the teeth and the nails had already begun falling out, which indicated several weeks had passed. But the odor was much more tame and not as overwhelming as he would expect from a rotting corpse as large as the one before him.

'That's not all,' Rui sky-walked to get a better perspective. 'Why haven't the scavengers taken to feasting on this body when it had first died?'

Rui instantly noticed that the corpse was not mangled or torn apart like he would have expected from the scavengers. That was an inconsistency.

'They either couldn't or didn't.' Rui concluded, before glancing back at the corpse. 'The question that begs itself the most, however, is what the size of the corpse means.'

Nothing in the intelligence supplied by the Beggar's Sect indicated the existence of a giant human species native to the Great Forest of Hypnonarak.

'No, in the first place, I have never heard of a human variant species at all ever, especially one so big. A species that big would be an existential threat if it had the same psychogenetic traits and the fertility of the human species.' Rui sharply analyzed. 'Furthermore, the Great Forest of Hypnonarak is an artificially created danger zone. If this were a natural native species to the Beast Domain, then it would mean that the Hypnomaster brought it along with him.'

Unless Rui somehow had had a massive blindspot and some just missed all information pertaining to this human species.

'No, that's absurdly unlikely as such a species would be an enormous threat if it were a sized-up version of the human species. There is almost no way I could possibly miss such a thing.' Rui narrowed his eyes. 'Especially given that this man was certainly an intelligent being. If he was a different species, it would mean the entire species was as intelligent as normal humans. They would be an enormous threat'

Rui had already deduced that this man was an intelligent being based on hints of a sophisticated tattoo that was nearly erased. It would mean the species was intelligent if they were a different species. The standard human of this species would be much stronger than Martial Apprentices possibly even Martial Squires, and if such an enormous species had Martial Artists then...

'Then we would be doomed. We aren't doomed, therefore the probability of this being a separate species is extremely low,' Rui mused. 'Thus the next most reasonable conclusion is...'

That this was a person of his own species who had experienced some phenomenon that made him grow much larger. He had already concluded the existence of a connection to the Forest of Giants the moment he laid eyes on the corpse and the probability of that simply rose the more he observed and analyzed the corpse.

'The fact that the Beggar's Sect was unaware of this informs me of a lot.' Rui mused. 'I can safely conclude that this was most certainly an extremely rare fluke phenomenon.'

The Beggar's Sect gathered intelligence from nearly every facet of human civilization which made their intelligence-gathering capabilities remarkably high. Thus Rui could deduce almost as much information from their lack of information on this phenomenon as he would have had they actually possessed knowledge on the absurdity that he was witnessing.

'I can conclude that nobody who has seen it has made it back out of the forest,' Rui deduced. 'If they had, then they would have most likely made a report to somebody. If they were searching for the Hypnomaster and were independent like me, then they would have no reason to return at this point in their journey in the forest.'

That deduction told him much about the limits of raiders and the difficulties that lay ahead. Rui had inferred a lot of information from the fact that this corpse had been rotting for a month and nobody knew about it.

'Still, that doesn't answer what happened to this man for him to become so big.' Rui mused. 'However, the probability that it is connected to the size of the Forest of Giants is high, which...'

Rui quickly accessed the documents that the Beggar's Sect had provided him on the Forest of Giants. The Forest of Giants was as large as it was not due to design from the Hypnomaster, but rather due to a ring section of the forest coming into contact with some powerful esoteric substances deep underground with its roots.

The esoteric substance had apparently caused the massive expansion of life leading to the Forest of Death. The phenomenon was similar to dungeonification, however, it had taken this route instead of dungeonification.

Rui thought back to one of the floors in the Shionel Dungeon where an entire town had been swept up by the dungeonification, wiping out most humans except for a handful who managed to survive the poisoned food of the dungeon warping their bodies and minds.

'Is this a similar case?' Rui narrowed his eyes. 'No, if eating anything in the Forest of Giants caused people to overbloat and die or something like that, then it would be well known to avoid doing such a thing.'

All logical considerations pointed to this event being a fluke or a random event that had caused the expansion and death of the male.

'It was the other way around most likely,' Rui realized. 'This person may very well have undergone mass expansion after death rather than before. If the mass expansion does not increase the amount of organic matter despite increasing mass, then it could explain why scavengers haven't feasted on it, or why its smell profile doesn't match its actual decomposition.'

Chapter 1429: Lava Golem

The explanation made sense, but unfortunately, he didn't have any evidence or proof either way. But it certainly made him feel more concerned about remaining in the Forest of Giants. He didn't want to trigger whatever caused this to happen, regardless of how low the probability it was.

'I'll have to make sure I leave the forest as soon as possible,' Rui narrowed his eyes before activating his Martial Heart.

BADUMP!

This was one of the few times that he could approve of using the Martial Heart travel. His body quivered with power as streaks of red lines spread across his body. He launched himself into motion, propelling himself across the forest at incredible velocities.

Every step he took generated an inferno of flames with the sheer friction the speed caused as he flashed past the giant trees and vegetation. At that speed, it wasn't too long before he reached crossed the Forest of Giants, and reached the inner section of the Great Forest of Hyponarak.

Very few Martial Artists made it this far. The reason for that was that most of them could not maintain their minds and thoughts for too long and suffered from the many mental detriments of the Great Forest of Hyponarak. A good part of Rui's progress was thanks to the fact that he didn't need to be too bothered about his mind failing due to all the consumption of mental energy.

He had plenty of it.

Yet when he came out on the other side of the Forest of Giants, the mental suppression merely continued to increase.

Yet he could only widen his eyes with shock when he came out on the other side. Gone was the beautiful scenery of the forest that he had had the pleasure of experiencing before. An apocalyptic scenery of ash and lava greeted him on the other side as he avoided stepping on a large stream of blistering hot lava.

It wasn't that the lava could hurt him, especially with his Martial Heart bolstering his cell walls by accelerating the metabolism that produced them, but even then, he wanted to avoid any harmful esoteric substances that could be contained in it. The entire environment became hostile as a result.

RUMBLE

The land beneath him shook slightly in a periodic fashion. Rui wondered if some seismic activity had caused this entire area to be annihilated by lava. How else could trees be reduced to ashy dead trunks?

That was when he turned his vision into the distance, staring at a hill formation that oozed lava.

He didn't realize it wasn't a hill until it shifted in its place, readjusting for comfort. Its respiration caused its body to expand and contract a little, causing the land around it to shiver.

'Is that... a lava golem?' Rui gaped. 'You're telling me it wiped out this entire region with its lava?'

Rui stared at it with a mixture of incredulity and awe. He had read about this strange species made up of rock and lava, but only now had he actually beheld one in real life.

Lava golems were creatures that were almost entirely inscrutable to humans. Nobody understood how a pile of rocks could come together and become alive and conscious. The only thing that was understood about these esoteric creatures was the fact that they generated lava within their body by crushing rocks together, heating and melting them with friction, and then spewing them out.

Because their bodies constantly produced lava, they constantly needed to consume rocks as a result to sustain their beings, yet they sought out all kinds of energy-high things that could increase the amount of energy in their being.

That included powerful esoteric substances, powerful monsters, and, of course, powerful Martial Artists. Suddenly, the creature's eyes opened.

Its eyes were rocks, but its pupils were burning embers. Rui could hear rocks grinding at its eyes turned towards him.

'Ah shit,' Rui turned off his Martial Heart immediately, hoping to not attract too much more attention, but alas, things didn't work out the way he hoped for them.

Martial Artists were among the few beings that had such an enormous amount of power concentrated within such a small body. The sheer energy density readings of a Martial Senior with an active Martial Heart must have been higher than anything else it had sensed in monsters or animals.

RRRRAAAARRRRGHRGR!

Its roar sounded closer to a volcanic eruption than an actual voice. Yet Rui's expression sharpened as he reactivated his Martial Heart.

He was going to need it.

BOOM!

A massive lava eruption exploded from within its mouth, spewing an enormous wave of lava that would have flattened a city.

Yet Rui was unperturbed.

He inhaled deeply, causing the very skies to quiver, before releasing his technique. Several Mighty Roar Flash Blasts burst forward, blasting enormous holes in the tsunami of lava.

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

The golem roared as even more lava began to spew from its body from multiple orifices. Its arms dug into the ground, gathering enormous of rock and directly absorbing it through its limbs.

Apparently, it didn't need to eat rock through its mouth to consume it. Yet Rui had no intentions of leaving it be.

He rushed forward at top speed activating Gale Force Breathing and Outer Convergence, blazing across the battlefield within a single moment. The very land behind him cracked and broke under the sheer weight of his steps.

BOOM!!!

Rui threw his most powerful attack with his full power as the Flowing Canon crashed into the golem with the full power of Outer Convergence, Adamant Reforging, and Reverberating Lance, as well as the entirety of the momentum that he accrued crashed, crashed into his target.

RUMBLE!

The world around them shook as the sheer impact of the attack blasted away the entire golem to smithereens.

Rui heaved a sigh as he deactivated his Martial Heart immediately. "It's a shame I had to fight him. I can't even eat him to grow stronger. Tsk, I should have deactivated my Martial Heart before I exited the Forest of Giants."

Chapter 1430: Lava Ecosystem

Rui found it particularly stupid that the lava golem even bothered trying to eat him in the first place.

'The power of the Martial Heart is not something he could harness even if he ate me.' Rui tutted. 'It is vast reserves of biochemical potential energy that can only be harnessed with human metabolism and the Martial Path. You're not going to be able to harness it just by eating Martial Artists.'

It was what separated Martial Artists from monsters and beasts. The source of the power of the former did not come from their mass or volume. The source of their power was the various untapped potentials that every living being possessed, a potential that only humans had the sophistication of mind to unlock.

It was why Martial Artists could fight beasts and monsters that were astronomically larger than them and still come away victorious as Rui had. Martial Artists had too many advantages over too many unwieldy beasts. Most of the continent was part of the human domain, and only the core and the central sections of the continent were part of the Beast Domain along with many secondary patches and streaks here and there.

Rui heaved a sigh before forging on forward through the ashy lava territory. One thing he realized he was wrong about was the assumption that a single lava golem was responsible for all of this.

Apparently, he was wrong. The entire region was filled with lava golems.

'Tsk, I can't afford to get into a battle with every single one of them.' Rui tutted. 'For now, I'll avoid using the Martial Heart and use the lesser Phantomind Void technique to avoid garnering attention.'

He quickly activated the technique, misdirecting the golems away from him as he briskly crossed the entirety of the lava forest. One thing that surprised him was that the vegetation grew to become more and more dense and alive as he passed through this territory.

Trees, shrubs, and even grass started to form again in the lava-laden land. Rui's face flashed with surprise as he studied the trees that not only seemed to survive despite the lava but also actively seemed to revel in it.

His eyes widened with shock as he saw streaks and small streams of lava flowing up the barks and the wood of the trees all the way from the roots.

'The trees are consuming the lava!'

He hadn't heard of any flora that was capable of absorbing lava as a part of the nutrients it needed to sustain its existence. But at this point, he was used to being surprised by the fantasies of this world.

However, if there were species of flora that required lava to survive, then Rui could understand how these trees could flourish in an environment like the lava domain of the Great Forest of Hyponarak.

The most annoying part of these otherwise incredible species of flora was that they still consumed mental energy. Rui groaned as he felt the tug on his mind, weakening him minutely with every passing second and minute. As expected, although the Hypnomaster seemed to prefer the diversity of life, the theme of the forest had not yet changed.

Only someone strong and powerful in mind could possibly survive the sheer amount of mental energy drained throughout the journey to the center, a curse that only grew more powerful as time passed.

'However, it makes sense,' Rui realized. 'The golems do not have organic electrical phenomenon sustained by biochemical metabolism. They too would be drained had they possessed such a biology.'

The longer he traveled the more he came across a rich and biodiverse ecosystem that was centered around the abundant lava and magma that the lava golems regularly generated and spewed out. Rui couldn't make much progress in understanding the biophysics and biochemistry of such vegetation.

The lava-laden biodiversity was a sight to see. Every flora lifeform was lava-stridden across their trunks, stems, branches, and leaves. It appeared that these lifeforms no longer relied on solar energy seeing as he couldn't spot any chlorophyll. Instead, they were largely black to contain as much heat as could be harnessed.

He could sense small reservoirs of gathered lava within each of them, being used to heat up a variety of different substances and chemical reactions with their heat. It suggested that the principle was to employ lava as a source of heat rather than directly as fuel.

Perhaps it could generate biochemical energy from great sources of heat. Rui could imagine an endothermic reaction that required a lot of heat to produce a chemical product similar to the human ATP, the molecule responsible for all human energy, that could generate energy in a similar manner.

He had a sinking suspicion he was on the right train. Unfortunately, his background in biochemistry and organic chemistry was woefully shallow. Although his enhanced mind allowed him perfect recall of all the knowledge he had ever known in his previous life, he had never delved into the field all that much.

Regardless, he had no doubt that the strange and magical materials and substances of this world undoubtedly allowed for such a thing to be possible in the first place. He was relatively certain that such lifeforms would have been impossible back on Earth.

Regardless, as fascinating as all of this was for his mind, it was not very amusing to his body that could not consume lava and magma to survive. He wouldn't be able to eat a single thing within this domain to fill up his stomach.

'Not good.' He had already used his Martial Heart twice, and the expended energy would need to be fully restored.

His body would immediately begin the process of restoring the Martial Heart from his conventional stamina if needed, thus not having a source of food after using the Martial Heart extensively was not a good idea.

He picked up the pace, bursting through the lava forest at speeds that far exceeded that of even sound, weaving through trees, and rocks, at top speed, uncaring for the lava that harmlessly splashed on his attire and flesh.