

## **Martial Unity 1431**

### Chapter 1431: Aberrant

The lava ecosystem was an incredibly interesting experience, Rui would have even taken the time to study the biology of harnessing lava in other circumstances. The issue was that the lava ecosystem could not feed him. It was unfortunate, but he could neither eat rock nor lava. His digestion system was far stronger than that of a human in every parameter, but not to the degree that he could digest inorganic materials and substances without care.

He also wanted to avoid using his Martial Heart any longer than he needed to, thus he had been carefully avoiding any and all lava golems in the area through Seismic Mapping, traveling across the area at a rapid pace.

One thing that Rui needed to be careful about was the fact that there were little to no ways in which he could possibly handle any more power than he already had.

RUMBLE

Rui froze suddenly. Loud warning alarms rang in his head as his Martial Heart activated before he could even react out of subconscious reflex.

BOOM!!

An enormous tsunami of white-hot lava erupted before Rui's eyes.

It dwarfed a mountain, so much so that Rui couldn't even see the sky. Yet it was incredibly swift, so much so that had he been a Martial Squire, he would have died. Yet thanks to his subconscious Senior-level reflex, he managed to activate his Martial Heart in time as his mind kicked into gear.

Rather than undoing his progress by going as far as to run out of the enormous range of the lava attack, he instead leaped towards it, preparing a Mighty Roar Flash Blast.

THWOOM!

The attack surged forward swiftly, blasting an enormous hole in the lava tsunami. Rui swiftly jumped through it, securing an easier escape route from the attack. He would rather have avoided taking that attack, given how absurdly hot it was.

In fact...

'This isn't just lava.' Rui's eyes widened as he turned his attention from it to the source of the attack.

Only to grow more surprised.

In the distance, there were enormous boulders laden with lava.

And yet none of them were intact.

Atop a mountain of broken dead golem corpses was a single small figure. A single humanoid figure made up of rocks and lava stood atop all of them. Yet what truly surprised Rui was the size of the creature.

It was not large.

'It's human-sized.' Rui's eyes narrowed. 'How did a human-sized golem destroy all those other gigantic golems?'

Its color was different from the norm as well. It didn't resemble the rocks that the others were made up of. It was jet black in sharp contrast to the lava so hot that sparkled white.

Rui grew immensely curious.

And yet, so did the golem. Its neck creaked as it turned towards Rui, tilting its head in interest to the creature that survived its attack with its strange rock eyes. Rui didn't even bother turning his Martial Heart off, the creature had seen his little maneuver.

'Besides, this one is too intelligent for such a trick to work.' Rui narrowed his eyes as gauged the creature's interest in him. He was able to sense thought behind its rocky eyes and blinding pupils.

Suddenly, its body shifted, creaking as lava boiled and bubbled within its core. Rui's eyes widened at the gesture.

'Strong.'

His expression grew grave as he understood what the creature conveyed.

'Power.'

'Energy.'

'Hungry.'

'...Eat.'

A glint of predatory bloodlust sparked within the depth of its fiery eyes. Rui had mastered Fauna Flow many years ago on a whim, and it came to be of use in the strongest of times and places.

The air grew taut even as it boiled.

Literally. The creature was so hot that the air crackled and sparked. The lava on its body glowed like a flashlight, reaching extraordinary temperatures, sparking and crackling with lightning.

'That's not just lava.' Rui took his neutral stance. '...That's plasma.'

Plasma was the fourth state of matter generally attained when gases reached a temperature so hot that the very atoms began shredding and tearing apart into a cloud of hyper-energetic charged particles.

Yet before Rui could even take a proper look at the state it was in, it was too late.

RUMBLE

The ground shook as the creature's body began glowing.

'Damn!' Rui cursed as he lashed out, leaping at the golem with such furious velocity that the very air around him ignited into an inferno. The ground broke underneath the weight of his leap as the very skies recoiled from the massive sonic booms that he left in his wake.

His fist blurred, surging forward as he initiated a powerful Flowing Canon.

And yet...

BOOM!!

An enormous eruption of white-hot matter blasted out from the golem just before Rui's fist reached it. The plasma and lava surged forth, washing Rui with its enormous power.

And yet.

CRACK CRACK CRACK!

Rui's fist crashed into the creature, crumbling a huge chunk of the rock into pure sand with the sheer power of his attack.

And yet he was not unharmed himself.

"Rgh!" He leaped away grimacing at the third-degree burns that enveloped his entire body, leaving him smoking. 'It's far quicker than I expected! Other golems are practically statues compared to it.'

He hadn't expected it to be able to not only react to his approach but also release an attack before Rui could get in his. Yet he knew that he couldn't give any time for the golem to gain its bearings.

based on his observations of the previous golem, these creatures had immense stamina, while he didn't. That already set the win conditions for both combatants.

His body had already begun healing his burns rather quickly, there was nothing to wait for.

WHOOSH!

He sprinted forward with Gale Force Breathing, accelerating forward at tremendous speeds.

Yet the creature appeared to be more prepared this time. It's body began glowing before Rui could even reach halfway through, releasing yet another enormous eruption in Rui's direction.

BOOM!

And yet...

WHOOSH!

#### Chapter 1432: Crucible

Dodging was a basic part of human combat and Rui had no qualms of using it against the golem. However, he got the feeling that the concept was slightly new to the golem as it didn't react the way one would if one were accustomed to this foundational basic maneuver.

Generally, long-range Martial Artists maintained some measures against the capacity to dodge. Whether it came down to increasing the speed of their attacks or increasing the number or area of effect. However, it was clear to Rui that the golem had yet to make such measures.

'...despite being intelligent. It can be deduced that it hasn't been alive for very long, or hasn't faced any opponent other than golems.' Rui concluded.

Golems were far too unwieldy and large to engage in any amount of evasion, especially from a smaller target.

WHOOSH!

Rui evaded another wave of the fiery lava-plasma mixture with Wind Breathing before racing forward towards the golem, closing a bit more of the distance before the creature blasted away another attack.

The ground beneath them sunk as the creature began consuming more rocks from the land to fuel its attacks.

Even as he dodged the creature's volcanic attacks, he studied its body.

'The damage that I inflicted on its body is already gone.' Rui narrowed his eyes as he side-stepped yet another volcanic eruption.

He had landed his heaviest attack which certainly had crumbled the esoteric ore rocks in its body to sand in a single impact.

'The issue is that it restored itself by melting the sand to rock.' Rui noted. 'An interesting way to use its heat to heal from damage.'

It was stronger, faster, and even more resilient than ordinary golems while also much smaller, making it much harder to target.

'It's like an evolved version of ordinary golems.' Rui realized. 'Is this a statistical anomaly, or is this some sort of growth path for ordinary golems?'

He didn't know.

Unfortunately, he wouldn't be able to find out any time soon.

He had already used his Martial Heart twice before, so he hadn't even gone into this fight at full power. Furthermore, not only did golems have great stamina, but this one seemed particularly adept at absorbing its environment to blast him with attacks.

Something needed to give.

And something did.

"FUUUUU!" Rui exhaled forcefully and deeply as he activated Void Forestep. This metabody was the only one that could not be used without the VOID algorithm, which made it harder to use than the other metabodies, however, it was also the least taxing out of all of them and the most long-lasting out of all of them.

The lava golem seemed taken aback as Rui ran literal circles around it at speeds that it was clearly unable to even perceive, for its attacks had all but stopped.

BAM BAM BAM BAM!!!

Rui shot concentrated attacks impacting a single point to inflict damage as deep into it rather than wide. He had already learned from his previous mistake and had adapted to negate its strengths.

BOOM!

CRACK!

A powerful blow from him exposed the innards of the golem; a massive crucible. He had already figured out the mechanisms of how golems generated heat to heat up rocks into lava, and now, plasma.

It was pressure. The strange geobiology of the golems most likely included esoteric substances that caused the rocks to push and crush against each other with immense force. If the force was great enough, it would reduce the rocks at the center to smithereens and eventually sand before heating it up until it began melting.

That would explain why golems seemed to permanently and passively generate and release lava and magma. It would explain why the entire lava-stridden region he was in at the moment never seemed to run out of lava.

The cores of their bodies had become powerful crucibles that didn't fall much behind genuine active volcanoes in terms of power despite their smaller size.

'Incredible. And yet...'

It was not enough.

**BOOM!**

Rui blasted another hole into its core with a concentrated blow, creating another release valve for all the heat and pressure to escape.

'You can't generate the high heat with high pressure if there is an escape route for all that heat to be expelled into the environment.'

It was similar to all the air in a balloon rushing out the moment a hole was poked into the balloon. The crucible needed to be a closed system where it could apply immense force from all directions.

Once that was disrupted, it could no longer generate heat, making it impossible to spew out large amounts of lava.



Rui circled around the golem at lightning speeds, blasting it with powerful concentrated attacks, damaging the crucible at the core of its body, crippling its offense.

Without its lava, it had nothing.

BAM BAM BAM!!!

A myriad of concentrated blows that dug deep crashed into the golem. Rui focused on cleaving apart the dense and heavy tough material that constituted its body.

CRACK!

A powerful kick literally chopped the golem into halves, reducing it to rubble.

Rui collapsed to the ground once he confirmed that the battle had been won, exhausted. On top of using yet another substantial amount of the Martial Heart for the third time, he had also used the Godspeed technique, tiring himself out even more.

He quickly pulled out a dense food pill quickly consuming it with a little relief, before glancing at the golem rubble beside him.

"If you just knew martial arts, let alone Martial Art, you'd be extraordinarily strong," Rui murmured.

The golem was that strong based on its intrinsic ability alone. Rui couldn't even imagine how powerful it would be had it been actually skilled at combat. Though he was grateful that it wasn't skilled, he would be dead if it possessed even a fraction of the skill and technique that he did.

His mind immediately dwelled back on the oddities surrounding this particular lava golem and why it was so much different from the rest of them. There was much that he didn't know.

It was superior to other golems in a qualitative sense. It wasn't just bigger and meaner than other golems, it possessed much greater power for much fewer flaws and limitations.

Furthermore, based on the insights that Rui had logically deduced and inferred, he had gotten a much greater understanding of how it had come to be than when he first saw it.

'Smelting.' Rui mused. 'Based on the inferred model of its geobiology, it most likely smelts a Senior-level esoteric substance from rocks and ores that it heats and melts in its crucible, before integrating that substance into its body.'

That would explain how the golem came to possess a body made up of this substance. The process of smelting was something used by blacksmiths and mass production factories to extract desired substances from a mixture or an ore, relying on the differences in density of the melted ore and the desired substance.

If the golem used smelting as a way of giving itself a tougher body, then it would explain how it came about to be.

'It would also explain why it shed away its giant large body.' Rui realized. 'In order to heat something by relying on the pressure generated by contact force, the substance doing the pressuring needs to be tougher than the substance being pressure.'

One could not rely on weak substances to pressure and heat strong substances, thus he wouldn't be surprised if the golem shed them away for this new compact form that was entirely constituted of a far superior substance.

'It's essentially reconstructing its physiological foundation through accumulation. It's cultivating its body.'

It was a natural form of self-evolution. It would also mean that this creature most likely wasn't some sort of freak mutant but merely a golem that had managed to take a step in evolution.

'An active self-guided form of self-evolution.' Rui mused with interest. 'How fascinating, I wonder if other species of monsters and beasts have something similar.'

There certainly was nothing about it in the basic scholar's degree that he had gotten at Crexet Town.

'Which most likely means it's a higher-level topic that I haven't touched upon yet.' Rui mused.  
'Interesting.'

Rui definitely intended to do some research on the matter when he returned back to civilization.

Which probably wasn't going to be too soon.

Regardless, it was something that he firmly placed on his to-do list. Despite having lived in this world for twenty-five years, there was still much he hadn't even heard of or come into touch with.

One reason, was, of course, the size of the continent. It absolutely dwarfed Earth enormously. The sheer amount of information across the continent was beyond even his fathoming. The second reason was the lack of ease of access.

There was no internet across the Panama Continent. That crippled his ability to learn things as someone who had taken the internet for granted back on Earth. Information became far more valuable than it ever had been, as evidenced by the lengths that he had to go to in order to purchase intelligence regarding Chairman Deacon.

Still, he didn't necessarily dislike this. If anything, he found it refreshing many a time. It brought back the spirit of adventure and exploration. If he wanted to learn about things, he needed to go out there and find out for himself. One way or another.

'Or pay complete tons of missions and operations for the Beggar's Sect as a commission payment.' Rui mused, shaking his head as he sighed, getting up.

His body was still sore and weak. Yet he still made sure to use the lesser Phantomind Void to make sure nothing came his way, he just hoped that he wouldn't have to deal with yet another tsunami of lava.

'Damn, and I still have quite some ways left to go just to reach the center of the forest, let alone actually find the Hypnomaster.' Rui groaned as he stretched. His wounds had greatly healed and he avoided consuming a healing potion to preserve them for truly dangerous moments where his life was on the line.

Still, he could understand exactly why finding the Hypnomaster had been an extremely difficult challenge.

Rui once again wondered how exactly the Hypnomaster had created such an environment and ecosystem, and how many more challenges awaited him. Thankfully, he was most of the way through. He just hoped that whatever awaited him would not get worse.

He walked over to the rubble of the evolved golem, studying it carefully. He had figured out how the lava-generating systems and the evolution systems of the golem worked, but he had yet to figure out how a pile of rocks had come to gain consciousness in the first place.

Yet, just like with the other remains of the species, he was unable to detect anything that would explain how the rocks came to be sentient. He would have to chalk it up to the mysteries of the continent and leave it at that. He didn't really have any other choice to make.

Regardless, he continued on with his journey, heading towards the core of the forest. Thankfully, he had documented all of his maneuvers during the entire fight in his Mind Palace, allowing him to figure out which direction was which. Ordinary Martial Artists would be completely helpless in such circumstances since it was too difficult to keep track of the exact direction that they were traveling after losing track of it even once.

However, that wasn't the case for Rui. He resolutely continued on towards the core of the continent even as his body healed and recuperated from the damage and energy expenditure that he had done in his time in the lava domain. It wasn't long before he reached the end of the lava domain, weaving and avoiding all threats and anything that would drain a lot of energy from him.

Thankfully, a forest that resembled what forests could be spotted in the distance as the terrain and environment began gradually shifting away from the lava-stridden systems that the golems had created.

## Chapter 1434: Blind

Yet once Rui left the lava domain and entered a normal forest once more, the mental suppression he experienced only grew in time. He was starting to truly approach the core of the Great Forest of Hyponarak, and it wouldn't be too long before he would enter the core of the forest.

Yet the tribulations seemed to spike up, as if in preparation for that. A strange mist was ever present within the forest. He couldn't prove it, but he felt as if just breathing the mist in hampered his mind as well.

The radius of his sensory range also reduced significantly. Because it wasn't directly hampering his mind and hampered his senses instead, not even Riemannian Echo was spared.

For the first time in a long time, he truly got to experience what it was like to have his senses hampered, especially since he hadn't experienced that in the Shionel Dungeon.

The true threat of the Great Forest of Hyponarak seemed to begin from here on out. Rui had a lot of respect for anybody who could make it this far, especially if they weren't of the Senior Realm.

He reduced his traveling pace significantly, he couldn't afford to travel so fast when his senses were hampered. He also began scanning the environment for prey that he could hunt and eat.

He quickly sky-walked to a low degree, scanning his surroundings as well as he could. He found that his vision was the least affected out of all his senses. It had been a long time since he had relied on it over all other senses.

'There's a cave over there. Maybe I shou-' His eyes widened as he suddenly leaped off the tree, somersaulting backward.

**BOOM!**

He glanced back at the spot that he had been just a moment ago, it had been completely blown apart by some collision. His eyes flashed around, catching merely a glimpse of the projectile that did it.

It had wings.

As well as a body covered in white scales.

Furthermore, it had an undeniable reptilian tinge to it.

Rui's eyes widened as the glimpse he caught matched that of a creature recorded in the database of fauna that the Beggar's Sect gave him.

'An Illusionary Dragon!'

Apprehension and incredulity flashed across his face. This was the first time that he had come across a dragon in this world, and he sure hoped that it wouldn't be his last.

Dragons.

In most fictional settings, dragons were at the top of the food chain, the apex predators. Gaia, too, had followed suit. Dragons were extraordinary apex predators that were nigh unmatched, barring other fantasy apex predators that also existed in this world.

That already made Rui quite careful and cautious about having tangled with such a creature. Normally, he should have done his very best to keep away from such a creature and get away as far as he could.

'But...I wonder if I can adapt to it.' Curiosity sparked in his eyes. His rational mind knew that retreat was objectively the best decision. But the Martial Artist side of him refused.

"ROOOOAAAAR!" The dragon bellowed out a haunting roar that echoed across the mist forest. Yet what Rui found strange was that it wasn't just an ordinary roar, it was a roar that seemed to harness the power of the mist. The mist that had been stagnant suddenly shifted rapidly along with the powerful roars of the dragon.

Rui didn't know what that meant yet, but he did know that the Illusionary Gragon targeted the mind. Unfortunately, he had no experience with mind attacks. He did break out of an illusion in the Virodha Martial Contest, however, that had been weakened to the point to allow a Martial Squire to break through.

He didn't think the Illusionary Dragon was going to be nearly as kind and considerate.

And he was right.

One moment the world around him was just fine and dandy.

The next moment?

It was gone.

He was in a bottomless void of darkness.

It was a powerful illusion, and yet;

WHOOSH!

Rui activated his Martial Heart, leaping to the left.

"ROOOOAAARR!" The creature bellowed as Rui evaded its charge. It stared at Rui with its reptilian eyes, clearly surprised that Rui had been able to evade it. It was sure that it had cleanly managed to make Rui fall for its trap.

And yet...

WHOOSH!

Rui leaped away once more as he avoided yet another charge, avoiding being shredded by the dragon.

A grin emerged on his face. "Man, I'm so glad I decided to go to the Shionel Dungeon. I bet you're pissed, huh, dragon?"

"ROOOAAAR!" The dragon roared as it circled back for yet another charge, determined to shred his latest prey like he had done so to the countless prey that came before him.

Rui grinned even more.

Rui couldn't actually hear or see the dragon, yet he knew the dragon was undoubtedly angered.

Here he was, completely caught in the spell of the mental illusionary technique of the dragon, and yet it was unable to even lay a claw on him as he casually avoided it.

He couldn't see it, but imagining the dragon helplessly chasing after him was incredibly humorous.

"Hahaha!" Rui's mirthful laughter echoed throughout the forest, enraging the dragon even more.

"RROOOOOOARRR!" The dragon's eyes flashed with anger, before inhaling deeply and exhaling a strange drag gas with such force that it spread through the entire forest in a mighty shockwave.

BOOOM!!!

Suddenly, the dragon began to emit light, emitting such bright light that it spread across the forest, entering the eyes of all creatures in the forest.

"AARRGH!" Rui cursed as extraordinarily excruciating pain flashed all over his body, almost crippling with how severe it was. he hadn't experienced something this horrific since the evolution process of the Squire breakthrough.



However, unbeknownst to him, he was not the only one.

The entire forest began wailing as countless animals began screeching in agony.

"CHIRP CHIRP CHIRP!"

"Roaaaaaar!!"

"KREEEEEEE!"

However, animals were not the only ones who suffered. Humans, too, fell prey to the dragon.

"AAAAAAAH!"

"WHAT IS THIS?!"

The entire forest turned into an uproar as the Illusionary Dragon seemed to cast a spell that caused unfathomable agony to all those within the range of its effect.

Chapter 1435: Drive

The sheer range and magnitude of the pain-induction ability that the forest had been drowned in was enormous. It was an ability that didn't even seem to belong within the Senior Realm.

'This isn't real!' Rui gritted his teeth as he calmed down. 'I can feel my own body, and there is nothing that could cause this much pain, the damn dragon is casting an illusion of pain by messing with my nervous system!'

It was the dragon's turn to gloat.

And, gloat it did.

"ROOOOOAAAR!!!" The dragon released an enormous bellow that echoed across the forest. It arrogantly took a moment to pause its hunt as it inspected its work across the entire forest, deeply satisfied by all the creatures that had fallen prey to its ability, before turning to Rui, looking down on him.

It had initially hunted Rui for food, but now it no longer cared about that. Now its main motivation was killing the creature that dared to dishonor its pride.

"ROOOOAAAR!" It flapped its mighty wings, rushing down at Rui with its jaws wide open. It would instantly eat him whole in a second, it even planned to undo the illusion so that it could experience Rui's despair and suffering as it chomped down on him.

And yet;

WHOOSH!

Rui sidestepped the charge at the last moment before.

BAM!

A powerful blow crashed into the creature's neck, containing more force than the creature had expected from someone as small as Rui. The impact permeated deep, passing through the outer scales, and striking its more vulnerable tissue and flesh.

"RROOOOAAAR!" The creature grimaced in rage and pain.

"Hehe..." Rui took a neutral stance before removing his Mind Mask, and unleashing his Senior-level aura, instantly catching the creature off-guard. "Man, I'm glad I created this technique."

He would be dead had he not created Riemannian Echo. While the technique had not been immune to the dragon's sensory blackout, it was not entirely sealed. The reason for that was that the Riemannian Echo was not connected to Rui's nervous system.

'From the pain illusion and the fact that the dragon could entirely seal Riemannian Echo, I can logically infer that its illusions are more based on the nervous system or the part of the subconscious parts of the brain that process the input from the sensory organs.' Rui concluded. 'The fact that I can feel my own body proves that it isn't absolute. It cannot get entirely rid of my sense of self.'

Riemmanian Echo was not based on any sensory organ. It was based on Rui's ability to internally sense his own body, which had not been suppressed since Rui was able to sense himself even though all his other senses were voided.

'Furthermore, as long as I have the ability to indirectly sense through the partially functioning Riemannian Echo, Primordial Instinct will be able to function as well.' Rui grinned.

Primordial Instinct was not a sensory technique. It was merely a technique that emerged from putting the subconscious danger sense of the mind through extreme training, improving its effectiveness and capabilities to an extreme extent. As long as Riemannian Echo was partially effective, he could rely on Primordial Instinct to help him avoid danger.

That was why he was able to avoid the Illusionary Dragon's charges towards him. Yet, that was all he was able to do.

"ROOOOAAAAR!" The dragon lunged at him. The sheer force and speed of the physical attack were remarkably high.

And yet;

WHOOSH

Rui calmly evaded the attack distancing himself from the source significantly. And yet, by the time he landed, he felt a deep sense of danger acutely to his left.

WHOOSH!

He somersaulted backward, avoiding the dragon's powerful sweep. Yet the creature was not done, not by a long shot. Rage filled its prideful eyes as it raised both its forelimbs, before bringing them down on the ground with tremendous force.

BOOM!

An enormous crater the size of a hill emerged as an entire chunk of the forest was instantly leveled. The ground beneath Rui shook and erupted in a volatile manner, throwing him off the ground and off-guard.

Yet, his face coiled in alarm as he felt a spike of danger coming from the forward direction.

THWOOM!

"RROOOOAAARR!" The dragon bellowed in pain as a powerful sound projectile flew into its wide-open jaws, crashing into its throat before it could reach Rui. Rui panted as he landed away, relieved at narrowly avoiding death.

'This isn't viable in the long run,' Rui gritted his teeth. 'I can sense danger from the vestiges of environmental information that the suppressed Riemannian Echo supplies me, but I can't sense the layout of my environment. If I leap back to avoid an attack and there's a mountain impeding my path, it'll impede my maneuver and I'll die on the spot.'

He knew that as long as he continued simply maintaining this stalemate, such a thing was going to happen. It was not statistically unlikely that his environment would get in the way, causing him to make mistakes that would get him killed.

It was just a matter of time before he would die. In the first place, it was miraculous that he was still alive. Had it been any Martial Senior of the same power level, they would most likely be dead.

Unable to sense the environment.

Unable to sense the opponent.

Under the spell of excruciating pain.

Victory against such a perversely powerful creature should have been nearly impossible.

Only a handful of those at the pinnacle of true power were qualified to pursue victory.

What the dragon didn't know was that Rui was one of them.

'You'll come to learn why.' Rui's closed his eyes as a boundless drive rose from deep within his heart. He couldn't even suppress the smile that cracked at the edge of his mouth. 'If you think robbing me of all perception and drowning me in pain is enough, you're kidding yourself.'

His mind furiously raced into action as he disconnected his consciousness from his pain, employing the principles of the Mind Mask technique to minimize the impact of the pain on his mind as he began furiously analyzing and processing his circumstances to come up with a plan.

It was a race against time.

A battle against a dragon.

Chapter 1436: Strategy

WHOOSH!

Rui evaded yet another attack from the dragon. 'Think.'

WHOOSH!

He somersaulted away, narrowly avoiding a swift claw swipe.

'I'll need to prioritize acute problems that threaten defeat before tackling chronic hurdles towards victory.' Rui thought as he compiled a list of all problems before sorting them in a priority list based on this criteria.

WHOOSH!

He evaded yet another lateral swipe, crouching with a split.

'First priority, minimize the probability of environmental disruption.' He thought. 'The greater the area I cover with my evasive maneuvering, the greater the probability I run into a sturdy tree or another beast, or a mountain that hampers my path. Therefore, I need to minimize the area I cover.'

WHOOOSH!

"RROOOOAAAR!" The dragon raced after him in frustration.

'Do not cover new ground. Stick within a certain amount of area that I have already maneuvered through before and know that I can. This reduces the probability of environmental disruption by an order of magnitude.' Rui concluded as he immediately computed a solution for the environmental problem.

By sticking to known and vetted areas, free of environmental hurdles, he could reduce the probability of a clash with his surroundings. It also helped that the dragon leveled the area.

'I could also launch more omnidirectional attacks to level things myself, but that's far too energy-consuming. Let the dragon do all the work for you. That is optimal efficiency.' Rui's mind swiftly processed through as it mitigated the highest priority issue.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH

Rui evaded a barrage of wide claw swipes, because of the size of the dragon, he needed to maneuver more, yet he made sure not to delve into uncharted area as much as possible. He would rather face a dragon than an unsensible unknown environment because Primordial Instinct could only help against the former.

WHOOSH

He pirouetted away from a direct charge, cleanly avoiding it.

'Next, stamina constraints. Minimize movements, make sure that the dragon expends more energy than I do.' Rui noted. 'Use the stamina metabody to a partial degree.'

Rui partially activated the Reaper's Dew poison before activating Final Breathing, this was enough to alleviate his energy concerns for now.

He heaved a sigh, before his eyes narrowed. "Now then, time to work towards victory rather than just avoiding defeat."

He needed to kill the dragon. That much was clear. The dragon's pursuit of him was obsessive, which matched the personality profile of the creature that the Beggar's Sect's intelligence contained. It was not going to let him go. The only way this battle would end was if one of them died.

'Assassination is... not viable.' Rui tutted as he avoided yet another blow. 'Phantomind Void is not advisable without a good grasp of environmental and opponent location.'

Sympathetic Death Lance and Death's Sympathy would be extremely difficult to use in combat even without the sensory hamper. In these circumstances, it was absolutely impossible.

'That means I'll need to rely on normal attacks to pepper it. Or get in a good hit on an extremely vital spot with Flowing Canon or Transverse Resonance.'

WHOOSH!

He evaded yet another attack, swerving to the side rather than retreating away, making sure that he didn't leave known territory.

'Which means I need to know its exact position and orientation.' Rui tutted. 'Since I can't sense it, I'll either need to work on dispelling this illusion, or...'

His eyes narrowed. '...Or I'll need to create a predictive model.'

Had anybody, from Earth or from Gaia, heard that thought, they would have laughed at him. Even his research team would have burst out laughing at the idea of applying the VOID algorithm to an opponent that could not even be perceived. Not even the cutting-edge AI software that they employed in their labs running on all the processors and servers in the facility would be able to accomplish such an absurd feat.

It was categorically impossible.

And yet...

'I can do it.' Rui grinned. 'I will do it!'

The air grew taut as a wave of determination wrung the very atmosphere.

An enormous amount of pressure erupted from Rui's sheer drive.

His mind spurred on with powerful drive as he began analyzing and computing his circumstances. 'In order to create a predictive model, one needs a lot of empirical combat data on the opponent. However, I do not have that empirical data since I cannot observe my opponent. I can only sense the vague direction of incoming danger. Thus, it is logical to conclude that a predictive model cannot be concluded due to a lack of empirical data.'

Yet a glint of excitement flashed in his mind. 'But... what if I predict the empirical data that is needed for a predictive model?'



If he could not observe his opponent collect the empirical data like he normally did, then he could predict the empirical data that he could not observe.

'It's not so much as predict as much as eliminate all possibilities except for the truth.' Rui mused. 'Every time I sense danger, I know it's an attack. However, there are limited possibilities as to what the attack could be since my opponent is a dragon.'

Dragons had claw attacks of all kinds, wing attacks, tail attacks, jaw attacks, and bullrushes.

Those were a lot of possibilities every time he sensed danger, but it was not too much to keep track of. As long as he kept track of all of them, he would be able to develop many possible predictive models based on the many possible permutations of possible empirical data.

Yet out of all the possible predictive models born out of all the permutations and combinations of possible empirical data, only one predictive model was correct. Every individual had only one truly accurate predictive model, be they Martial Artist or beast. That meant that Rui could begin eliminating incorrect predictive models by comparing the predicted outcomes of the possible predictive models with the actual outcomes.

If a prediction didn't match with reality, then the predictive model was wrong.

if it matched with reality, it was possibly correct.

Only after he eliminated every single possible predictive model except one, could he be sure that the final predictive model was correct.

WHOOSH

Rui avoided another powerful attack, rolling to the side.

'It's going to be enormously tiring, but it is possible, especially as long as I reduce the precision requirements of the predictive models, making them easier to develop compared to my normal

predictive models. I can refine the correct one after I've found it by eliminating all other possible predictive models.' He narrowed his eyes, as he retreated. 'However...'

It was going to be extremely taxing.

A race against time. He knew that the dragon would kill him if it got even a single strike in. Although he was slightly faster than it, its power was far greater than his own.

Combined with his highly compromised state, it would be game over.

And yet, he had no intention of giving up.

On the contrary, he couldn't even hide his mirth.

It was as though the intensity manifested in the air, washing over everything around them.

"Come," Rui challenged. "Let's see who reaches victory first, dragon!"

"ROOOOOOOOOAAAAAAR!!"

Chapter 1437: Clashes

WHOOSH!

Rui twirled backward as his mind raced into action, furiously computing possible predictive models based on all the possibilities that the attack he just dodged could be.

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

"RROOOOAAAAR!" The dragon bellowed a roar as its powerful physical attacks swung all over, aiming at Rui only to miss him.

Rui had come to avoid attacks one after the other with increasing proficiency and smoothness as time passed. The dragon was more than intelligent enough to notice. It roared with frustration and rage as Rui managed to avoid its best efforts at killing him.

A small smirk emerged on Rui's face. 'It can't do anything other than physically attack. All of its special abilities are centered around the mind. Its only means of physical attack is through its body.'

He was able to deduce this because he had yet to encounter a wide-range or long-range attack. The reason he knew that he hadn't encountered those was because of the angle between consecutive attacks.

If the distance between himself and the dragon was high, then the angle between consecutive attacks as Rui avoided them would be low, but if the distance was low, the angles between the attacks would be low.

It was thanks to this that Rui was able to deduce that the dragon had yet to launch a single long-range attack. Thanks to that, he could conclude that it was unable to. There was no reason to hold back its abilities so much when it was struggling to get a single hit on him.

TAP

Rui avoided an attack even as he placed his hand partially in the way to get a feel for the dragon's body and gain more information about its movements that way. He could speed up his elimination of possibilities this way.

That was one of the many tactics that Rui employed to speed up the process of developing a predictive model of his opponent.

He was actually impressed by the dragon's relentless fortitude to keep pursuing him. Surely, from the perspective of a predator, he was not worth chasing to this extent. Predators usually sought meals with the most amount of energy for the least amount of effort.

It was completely illogical to continue attacking Rui to this point, and any normal predator would have left him alone.

But apparently, the Illusionary Dragon was too proud.

Unfortunately, it was also intelligent. Although it was incapable of fathoming the sheer magnitude of information that Rui was processing, it understood that Rui was playing the long game where he planned to improve as time went on until he was no longer restricted to defense.

Unfortunately, it had run out of options. The problem was that it didn't understand how Rui could proficiently avoid its attacks so well in the state that he was in. It was utterly incomprehensible to it. Ordinarily, it could effortlessly hunt creatures that were much physically superior to it thanks to its sensory blackout and pain induction mental abilities. These two abilities rendered even the most powerful apex predators vulnerable.

Yet even though it didn't understand how Rui was able to avoid its attacks so proficiently, one thing it understood well was that every creature had its limit. And Rui was certainly not an exception.

SPLAT

Rui grimaced as he somersaulted back, putting his palm to his chest as he felt a light flesh wound caused by the creature's claw.

"ROOOOAAAAR!" The dragon bellowed triumphantly at finally having drawn first blood.

'Tsk, looks like the dragon has a stamina advantage over me even with a partial stamina metabody active,' Rui tutted. 'The issue is the Martial Heart's limits.'

Because the gap between his power with and without the Martial Heart was so enormous, it meant that when his stamina wore off, he would weaken much more than other creatures who didn't nearly have as much of a gap between their exhausted state and peak.

BAM!

Rui narrowly evaded yet another powerful attack as he increased the degree of the stamina metabody to preserve his remaining strength better. Thankfully, the predictive model deductions were going well. By having reduced the precision of the predictive models, it was several times easier to create them. He was also quickly getting used to the rigor.

Furthermore, he had purposely avoided sky-walking. A winged creature would have an enormous advantage in a fight midair against a Martial Artist, furthermore, it was easier

His predictions of the dragon's attacks were getting increasingly more accurate and precise. This allowed him to evade the dragon better with less effort than he did before.

The question was whether he would make it in time regard to his stamina. They had been fighting for a long time now, and while the dragon was certainly strained with his stamina, Rui would suffer a lot more than he was.

STEP

Rui's eyes widened as his balance crumbled, where there was supposed to be hard ground, was a gaping hole, preventing him from stepping back at a crucial moment.

BAM!

Rui grimaced as a powerful claw swipe crashed into his guard, flinging him a huge distance away. The actual damage done by the attack was certainly painful, but he was worried about a lot more than just flesh gashes that would heal eventually.

'I've been flung into new territory!'

He cursed even as he was completely immersed in darkness. The psychological toll from not being able to sense his surroundings was high. It certainly grounded down on his mental fortitude to be able to contend with such uncertainty.

The dragon, however, was not kind enough to offer him respite.

"ROOOAAAR!" It swiftly surged forward toward Rui, sensing blood. The crucial moment of the battle arrived as the dragon lunged forward with its jaws open as it sought to eat Rui whole one one go.

Rui leaped backward, looking to distance himself from the dragon.

BOOM!

He bumped into a cliffside, breaking down the bedrock, but there was just enough resistance to prevent him from evading the attack entirely. He ducked, struggling to avoid the attack at the last moment.

But he was unable to.

CLASP!

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

The dragon soared to the skies, having caught Rui within his claws as he slammed Rui across enormous rock foundations and bedrock, hoping to knock him out so that it could eat him in peace.

Rui gritted his teeth as he began bleeding and bruising all over his body.

Chapter 1438: Intelligent

The dragon understood that this was perhaps the only way it could take Rui out firmly, thus it maintained an iron-clad grip over him. Unfortunately, although he was faster than the dragon, that creature was undoubtedly stronger than him. This was the power that came with sheer size, it was not something he could easily overwhelm, especially when he was trying to conserve his physical power.

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

Rui gritted his teeth as he did his best to bear the weight of the many collisions that the dragon subjected him to. He crashed through cliffs, hills, boulders, and even mountain peaks.

Even as he bore a substantial amount of damage, he wriggled within the dragon's grip, finally managing to meet his arms together while they slid across each other.

The tattoos on his arm flashed for a moment before the Thundercoil technique activated. The dragon froze for just the briefest moments as a momentary wave of paralysis and weakness flashed through his body.

"Rgh!" Rui gritted his teeth as he did his best to exploit what was perhaps his only opportunity to break free. He momentarily activated Hypertrophic Surge as he pushed through with all his might, blasting open the dragon's powerful grip as he plummeted through the sky.

He didn't even bother sky-walking to break his fall, in fact, he sky-walked to plummet down faster, he needed to get out of the air where he certainly no chance of winning and have solid ground beneath his feet.

Throughout the fight, he had been tracking all of his movements and thus tracking his position across the forest. The dragon hadn't held him for too long, a few minutes at most. Yet it was so fast that they had moved several thousands of kilometers.

Furthermore, it had taken him in the direction of the center of the forest for some reason. Which meant that it had managed to get him to where he originally wanted to go.

He didn't know how or why no cloud hornets had emerged in pursuit of the dragon, but he was glad. Dealing with those nightmares in his current state was as good as suicide, even for him.

BOOM!!

He landed heavily into the forest, uncaring to try and reduce his speed to lighten the impact. The sheer weight of his fall created an enormous crater as wide as a town, leveling the entire forest around him.

"ROOOOAAAAR!" The dragon swiftly charged down at him, racing to catch him off-guard in an uneven and non-uniform environment. Rui's damage from earlier, the disadvantaged environment that he would need to map all over again reassured the dragon of its victory.

And yet...

"You were too late," Rui murmured.

WHOOSH!

He swiftly avoided the charge of the dragon, somersaulting backward. He opened his eyes mid maneuver finding himself upside-down, staring into the dragon's eyes as it charged towards him.

SPLAT!

"ROOOOAAAAAAR!" The dragon bellowed in pain as Rui struck the creature's eyes with a powerful palm jab, making it bleed.

The dragon felt a surge of rage, unlike anything it had ever experienced before. Not only did Rui avoid its attacks the entire fight despite falling prey to its handicaps. Not only did he make a mockery of the proud creature.

But now, he had gone as far as drawing blood from it.

"ROOOOAAAAAAR!" The dragon threw an enormously powerful blow at Rui, hoping to crush him.

Yet Rui raced forward into the attack, much to the creature's surprise.



WHOOSH!

The attack crashed into an empty image, dispelling it away, much to the creature's surprise.

It was a feint.

Rui was able to use Phantom Step once more now that the predictive model showed him the creature's due movements. He swiftly weaved his way through the creature's inner guard.

WHOOSH

He cleanly evaded a tail attack, before leaping at the creature's face once more. He ignored the incoming attack that threatened to crash into him, firmly aiming for the creature's eyes

SPLAT!

BAM!!

The dragon's claw swipe crashed into Rui, but not before he gouged the dragon's other eye, crippling its sense of vision before he was batted away.

"ROOOOOAAAAAAR!" The creature writhed in pain as it lost its main sense, crippling it forever.

"Rgh..." Rui grimaced as he got up, still shot with pain from taking that attack unguarded. Yet his eyes widened as he opened them.

"...The sensory blackout illusion is gone!" He exclaimed as he glanced around, able to perceive his surroundings just fine. "The phantom pain is gone too."

He glanced back at the writhing dragon, walking over to the helpless creature. "Well... the documentation did mention that you have extraordinary vision but your other senses were shit."

The dragon paused before its body shifted in various ways, and a soft growl escaped its mouth.

'Humans.'

His eyes widened as he understood what it conveyed to him.

'A truly insufferable species.' It menacingly growled even as it stared at him with its blinded eyes. 'I will never forgive you.'

'Interesting...!' Rui's intrigue was peaked as he applied Fauna Flow. 'They did say you were highly intelligent. But this is truly remarkable sophistication.'

"ROOOOOOAAAAAAR!" The dragon's face warped with even rage and hatred. 'HOW DARE YOU LOOK DOWN ON ME!'

It lashed out against Rui haphazardly in vain.

BOOM!

Rui applied Outer Convergence and Reverberating Lance as a powerful impact crashed into the creature's jaw, causing immense blunt force trauma.

The creature's body slackened as it collapsed to the ground, unconscious.

"So intelligent and yet so bound by its instincts and irrationality," Rui murmured. "It would explain why it's still a beast in its lifestyle despite its intelligence."

Although it certainly possessed human-like intelligence, it was extraordinarily powerful and extremely instinctual. Intelligence wasn't the only factor that determined the sophistication of lifestyle. It had no need to apply its intelligence the way humans did.

Its own innate and intrinsic power was beyond the capabilities of anything that he had ever seen, it had no need for sophistication when it had such power.

Rui sharpened his hand into a flat palm jab, before rushing in to kill it. He needed food to restore his energy and the dragon would do just fine.

And yet...

WHOOSH!

His eyes widened as his attack hit empty air.

The dragon was gone.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," An elderly voice remarked.

Chapter 1439: Story

Rui felt a surge of fear as he failed to comprehend what just happened.

Did teleportation technology actually get invented and mass-produced while he was in the forest?

The only times he had experienced such a thing was with a Martial Master.

His eyes narrowed. "...Do what? Kill a dragon that spent several hours doing its best torment and try to kill me?"

"Precisely." A voice behind him replied.

Rui leaped away as he turned around, facing a man with a long flowing beard. It took him no more than microseconds to evaluate the man's power.

'Martial Master... so it's him.' Rui stared at him with caution as well as the unconscious dragon behind him. "That creature is extraordinarily persevering and hates me with venomous intensity. It's a threat to me if I don't kill it."

"Not unless I wiped out its memories of the past day while I froze time," The man remarked.

Rui's eyes widened with shock at the man's words. "Wiped out memories...? Froze time...?"

"For you, anyway," The elderly man replied as he peered at Rui. "You would be surprised how susceptible the mind's perception of time is to external influences."

Rui contained his surprise as he stared at the Martial Master with awe and shock. "You are..."

"Zeamer Ger-Vil, at your service," The elderly man replied apathetically, before glancing at Rui. "Still, another male, eh? Shame."

Rui tilted his head in confusion.

"Well you see my last and current mentee was male, and now you are too. It's a shame, but oh well," The man shrugged lethargically.

Rui wasn't sure what to say. His impression of the mighty Hypnomaster was overturned entirely.

"Still... I suppose that's too shallow a reason to reject you, even for me." The man glanced at Rui with a vague hint of interest glinting in his eyes. "Already spent a little under three years as a Martial Senior at the of twenty six eh? And a mind the likes of which I have almost never seen before."

Rui simply stared at him silently.

"It's no wonder you have come this far, and persevered this long." The man remarked, before glancing at a badge on his Martial Art attire. "Not to mention, you're Reina's pupil too. Tsk tsk, you went to her before you came to me? Are you saying I'm inferior to her?"

"She was closer geographically." Rui insisted, before balling a fist and bringing it to his palm in a respectful gesture. "Please accept me as your pupil."

"Only if you're interesting," He shrugged. "You're male so you already have a handicap in that regard."

Rui narrowed his eyes as he stared at the Martial Master. "Interesting?"

"Tell me, why do you seek my tutelage?" The man asked. "What drives you? You're obviously not an assassin, yet you sought Reina's tutelage, that means you seek to kill someone, right? Someone powerful too. Go on, spit it out to this bored old man. You can rest assured that you can't earn my tutelage if you're a boring man."

He sat down on top of the unconscious dragon whose eyes were magically healed somehow. It lent credence to the idea that he had frozen time for Rui. He folded his legs, resting his head on his hands as he watched Rui with an amused, bored, yet intrigued expression.

"That's personal," Rui narrowed his eyes.

"So are my acceptance criteria," The man shrugged. "So what's it going to be? Privacy? Or my tutelage?"

He smirked at Rui mischievously.

Rui was already starting to dislike him. Yet he contained his displeasure as he stared at the man. "How do I know I can trust you?"

"You don't," The man shrugged. "If your story is interesting, I'll accept you as my pupil and keep your juicy secrets safe. If not, who knows...?"

Rui clenched his fists as he tangled with the ultimatum that the Martial Master offered. "You're an asshole."

"Hahaha!" The man guffawed. "Well, that's not a bad start. I like a little feistiness, but it's not enough."

Rui considered the cons. If Rui did not fulfill the man's strange criteria, he might spread Rui's secret.

However, he did not find the probability of this to be particularly high. This was based on the personality profile that he had already begun creating for the man. The idea that he would make the effort to go as far as sabotaging Rui was quite low.

"Don't omit or lie," The man warned. "You cannot deceive me, I assure you."

On the other hand, the man's tutelage was highly desirable. The fact that he had the ability to freeze people's perception of time, and could wipe out memories was astonishing. Rui had never heard of such powerful hypnosis.

After all the effort he had taken to come all this way, he couldn't afford to miss this opportunity. He heaved a deep sigh, having taken the time to weigh the pros and cons, having come to a decision.

"Fine," Rui replied. "I accept that challenge. I'll tell you the most interesting story you have heard."

"Hahaha! That's more like it!" The elderly man laughed. "Now then, get going. I won't interrupt you."

"..." Rui stared at him for a moment. "...It all started more than six years ago. I had decided to go to participate in the Shionel Dungeon raid with my friend..."

Rui continued on narrating his story.

Little by little, the man's expression changed as he grew more and more immersed in Rui's tale.

"...I soon came to be known as the Voider..."

"...Guildmaster Bradt accepted my scheme..."

"...Esosale Suppliers became the most successful..."

"...And then I saw a massive root at the bottom of the dungeon..."

"...One of them had survived, and tattled on me to Chairman Deacon..."

Then, Rui paused, staring at the eager man.

"Continue," The man urged. "What happened next? I need to know!"

"Not so quick," Rui smirked. "Let us discuss some matters first."

The Martial Master stiffened as he realized that this was Rui's plan. "...What do you want?"

Rui grinned. "Accept me as your pupil, then I will tell you the remaining story."

Chapter 1440: Cloudia

"Grrr..." The man understood Rui's ploy. "You paused the story at the most intense and suspenseful moment, knowing that I would have no choice but to accept this deal. Hmph!"

Rui shrugged with a smirk.

"Alright then, young man, I accept you as a pupil," The man snorted. "Now continue immediately."

Rui smiled. "After that, I had a tough choice to make. Either submit to the Martial Union and essentially forsake my agency until I became a Martial Senior because of their grasp over my family, or use all my wealth to buy a decade of Senior-level protection from them. Guess which one I chose?"

"Hm, a prudent decision," The man remarked thoughtfully. "You wouldn't be the youngest Martial Senior if not for that. Martial Squires must fight for their own drives to reach the Martial Heart. But how did you escape Chairman Deacon?"

"I dedicated a portion of my wealth to misdirecting him with a lot of Guildmaster Bradt's resources to convince the man I really was in a place that I was not," Rui replied. "He thinks I'm hiding and scurrying around in the Kandrian Empire. Thankfully, he hasn't discovered the truth."

"He eventually will, of course," The Master remarked. "In fact, it's quite surprising that he hasn't, yet. The Kandrian Martial Union must be going out of its way to do more than you have paid for, for him to have not discovered the truth. But it is a matter of time."

Unfortunately, Rui knew that this was true. Chairman Deacon was far too sharp to be fooled for too much longer. It was actually quite fortunate that he had been fooled as long as he had been.

"But that's fine," Rui remarked as his eyes grew sharper. "I have grown stronger. I have mastered the art of killing. Now I hope to master the mental techniques that I possess such a strong affinity for. I have already commissioned the Beggar's Sect for absolutely any and all intelligence that is even slightly relevant to killing him and have been completing commissions and operations for them in exchange."

"Another prudent decision." The man nodded. "The Beggar's Sect is the only intelligence powerhouse that sells intelligence for commission. The information they give you will be absolutely accurate and entirely whole. This is quite rare and something only the Beggar's Sect can universally maintain as their standard."

Rui nodded. "And so, here I am."

"Hold on now," The man insisted. "You still haven't talked about what you did in the five to six years while you were running away. You also didn't reveal how you broke through to the Senior Realm."



Rui stared at Master Zeamer before shaking his head. "...I don't intend to reveal that at this point. You have already accepted me as a student, I've told you the main reason that I have been training to grow stronger. That's good enough for now."

One of the reasons that he didn't mind sharing the truth about Chairman Deacon was because he didn't fear the man nearly as much as he did more than five years ago. In the time that had passed since he left the Shionel Confederation, he had grown truly strong and formidable.

His general Martial Art ability. His ability to kill. He was not an enemy that any force would want to make an enemy out of. If not for his family, there really was not much that Chairman Deacon could do against him in his current state.

Rui could always obscure himself and wait for the right moment to strike. Chairman Deacon would have to spend his days waiting for Rui to strike, unable to reach and hurt him in any way, living in fear for the moment Rui was struck.

It was unfortunate, but his family was his weakness that allowed Chairman Deacon to be the hunter and Rui the hunted instead of the other way around all this time.

However, the same could not be said for Master Uma and the Virodhabhasa Faith. She was still far beyond him despite all the gains that he had made. Unless Master Reina or Master Zeamer happened to be around if she attacked him, he would not make it out of that situation alive.

He still didn't trust Master Zeamer entirely. The man was a whimsical sexist man who sought entertainment from the misery of others. He was different from Master Uma whom Rui had come to develop some affection for and trust in.

And he hadn't even told her the truth.

"Tsk tsk, not very revealing are you?" The man tutted. "Shame, well, it is true that I did accept you as my pupil. I have to grudgingly admit that you are an interesting lad."

"Glad to hear that. Now let's get started immediately. I don't have time to waste." Rui remarked.

"Hold your horses kiddo," The man snorted. "Let's return to my abode first. I'll have you meet my other pupil first. The two of you have a lot in common, you know?"

"I did hear that you had accepted a pupil eight years ago," Rui frowned.

"Hm, it's the same one. He returned to the Great Forest of Hypnonarak two years ago and has been with me since then," The man remarked.

"I see..."

The man began sky-walking straight upward to the skies, earning a frown from Rui, who followed suit.

'What about the cloud hornets? I suppose they are insects to him, but where is he even going?'

Rui wasn't sure, but he followed the man nonetheless. He was curious about where they were going.

As they kept rising, the cloud hornets didn't emerge for some reason, despite the fact that he was heading towards a huge dense cloud that looked like it housed an abysmal amount of cloud hornets.

Rui could even sense them when they reached the cloud, but the man apparently didn't care and simply circled around as he traveled to the top of it.

STEP

"Welcome to my abode," The man gestured as he physically landed on the cloud. "I call it Cloudia. Creative, aren't I?"

Rui's eyes widened as he beheld an entire palace built on top of the huge cloud.