

Martial Unity 1471

Chapter 1471: Factors

Master Zeamer's smile curved with amusement. "Haha, you seem rather confused."

"I am," Rui insisted. "How is such a thing possible? Martial Paths are not something that can be changed willy-nilly."

"Your understanding of what is or isn't possible is incomplete," Master Zeamer remarked, amused. "It is not your fault, either, these are high-level concepts that one comes in touch with only in the Upper Realms ordinarily. The factors and variables that are responsible for the Martial Path are more complex than we can comprehend. However, Martial Paths are usually profoundly connected to the experiences, memories, or emotions that most define a person and their life. Those same experiences, memories, and emotions that define a person are also almost always the foundation of one's Martial drive."

"So you're saying that a person's Martial drive and their Martial Path are connected because they are both impacted by the same experiences, memories, and emotions defining a person's being?" Rui asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Yes, or at least, generally yes. There are exceptions to all rules when it comes to us humans." The man remarked. "However, they are not among the only variables that determine the nature of the Martial Path. A person's affinity for the various Realms is also a large factor in impacting the Martial Path. In this case, the change in that variable is what has allowed for this rapid change in his Martial Path."

Rui narrowed his eyes, turning back to Ieyasu, deep in thought. "In our fight, he said that the Martial mind, or at least initial prototype attempt at it, was what allowed his Martial Path to evolve. The Martial Mind is the Realm of thought, which means..."

Rui's eyes widened.

"It seems you've arrived at the answer. Sharp as always," Master Zeamer chuckled, turning back to the unconscious Ieyasu with a soft expression. "A person's affinity for the various Realms impacts their Martial Path. Some people have weak bodies and thus may develop a Martial Path devoid of an affinity for the Squire and Senior Realms. Some people might have grown up with a rash and erratic mindset

and temperament, causing them to lose an affinity for the Master realm. These things impact the Martial Path... They impact the Martial Path deeper than you can imagine."

He turned towards Rui. "For example, the lack of an affinity for the Master Realm can cause a Martial Path that should have been assimilative evolution to degrade into imitative evolution."

Rui nodded with a knowing expression. "Figured as much. It's unbelievable, but Ieyasu's imitative evolution was antithetical to thought in a way. Because he embodied the cognition and the decision-making that he read in other people's minds, he himself did not develop a habit of cultivating thought. He simply reflected other people's minds rather than cultivating his own. I'm guessing this is the reason that Ieyasu failed to develop an affinity for the Master Realm due to this.

"Indeed," Master Zeamer remarked. "I foresaw this day would arrive, ever since he developed his Mind Eye technique, at least. He would be forced to cultivate the power of thought when he arrived at the Senior Realm if he wanted to reach the Master Realm. What do you think Ieyasu has been doing for the past four years?"

Master Zeamer turned towards Rui. "Thinking."

"...Thinking?"

"Yes, amusing, is it not?" Master Zeamer chortled. "But he has been cultivating the power of thought for the past four years. Day in and day out. He has been thinking about how he can employ the power of thought."

"That's a lot of thinking," Rui muttered.

"Indeed, but it was necessary. That is how starved for it he was. About two years ago, a little before you arrived at Cloudia, he arrived at the answer," Master Zeamer informed him. "Using the power of thought, he would apply copied Martial Art more powerfully than he ever had, squeezing the absolute best of what he copied. With a new direction, he spent two years trying his damndest to come up with a framework and system of thought to process data based on a handful of variables and receive an output that would help him fight with his copied Martial Art better."

He turned to Rui with a knowing expression. "Frankly, I was shocked that he came up with something such a sophisticated idea on his first attempt. How did someone go from no thought to such complex thought combat-wise? However, after I met you, I understood where he got it from."

Rui glanced at Master Zeamer with a wary expression. "Just how much are you able to see with that mind of yours?"

"Hahaha!" Master Zeamer guffawed heartily. "I'm just an old man with a good eye for the interesting."

He turned back to Ieyasu with an endearing smile. "His Martial Path emerges from a desire to grow stronger, as well as some unique life circumstances. The moment he cultivated some affinity for the Master Realm by acclimatizing himself to thought and realizing the power of thought, it opened a new dimension for his Martial Path that he had previously rejected. Allowing his Martial Path to reach its full potential. Though that too is a bit of an oversimplification."

"Seems complicated," Rui sighed.

"The Martial Path is," Master Zeamer agreed. "There are many theories and frameworks that try to build primitive models for the development of the Martial Path throughout one's life, however, it is an esoteric field that is the hardest to make progress in."

Rui was curious if his insights into neurology could help, but unfortunately, he was far from an expert in the field, he simply had some tangential knowledge that he had gained in his education and years of research in a distant field. Regardless, it was only a curiosity and not a main interest of his. He didn't care to take away time from his Martial Art to dedicate to research.

"By the way, are you going to get him treated or what?" Rui turned towards him.

Chapter 1472: Return

It wasn't long before Ieyasu was quickly treated and healed. He took the loss with grace, much to his credit.

"Know this. Next time, I'll win," He declared to Rui with sharp eyes, before returning to his training.

Rui made a complicated smile. It wasn't that he wasn't happy about getting a win on who was perhaps his only equal, but he knew more than anyone how skewed the match-up had been in his favor.

'He was that strong after integrating a handful of Martial Art into one,' Rui realized. 'Just how astonishingly strong would he be had he done the same with the thousands of Martial Art he has mastered? The stipulations of this battle hurt him more than it did me.'

Of course, Rui knew that Ieyasu was almost certainly unable to seamlessly assimilate and integrate such a gigantic number of Martial Art into one flawlessly. His current system of thought was certainly flawed, limited, and incomplete. He could sense that much.

Still, he had his work cut out for him, and knowing how driven Ieyasu was, he was going to squeeze every iota of energy and drop of energy and dedicate himself to training and improving his Martial Mind prototype. No matter how much time, effort, or perseverance it took.

'If I slack off, he'll break out of the deadlock and shoot way past me.' Rui narrowed his eyes.

That wasn't to say Rui was dissatisfied with his own efforts or progress. The Hypnomatrix staved off Ieyasu's powerful techniques by oppressing him mentally with all kinds of shackles and pain, literally.

Without it, Rui would have instantly lost. The only normal techniques he had were Adamant Reforging which was always there passively and some assassination techniques that were highly preparatory. Ieyasu would have knocked him out on the spot with such an arsenal.

Godspeed would certainly have staved that off had he used it right off the bat, but its stamina had reduced by half ever since Rui upgraded it. It would not have been able to take down someone with as powerful a constitution as Ieyasu.

The first iteration that he had created was worthy of his Martial Path and a fine addition to his Martial Art. It also contributed to his Martial Mind by a decent amount, reducing the distance between him and the Master Realm.

He had thoroughly achieved his purpose for arriving at Cloudia and gaining the teachings of the famed Hypnomaster.

"Leaving so soon?" Master Zeamer asked him when he saw Rui with his bags packed.

"Yes, Master," Rui remarked. "I have achieved all the objectives I came for, and I have other matters that need my immediate attention, even within the Great Forest of Hynnonarak. Therefore, I must take my leave."

"Hmmm..." He turned to Rui. "Well then, It's been interesting."

Rui smiled. "I suppose it has. Thank you for everything."

Rui bowed, expressing gratitude and respect for the Martial Master. Although he didn't have the highest opinion of Master Zeamer's tendencies, the man had come to prove his power and wisdom in the two years that they had been together.

"Good luck with that Deacon fellow. Hit him for me as well." Master Zeamer called out as Rui departed.

Ieyasu didn't bother bidding Rui goodbye, then again, he hadn't bothered the first time either. Nonetheless, Rui knew that they would meet again one day. If only because they had no other equal of their caliber in their generation.

They didn't share a chummy relationship, so Rui didn't mind his absence. It was more comforting this way.

"Now then..." Rui's mind returned to matters outside Martial Art for the first time in two years. "I suppose I should go visit the Beggar's Sect. I wonder if they still remember me."

He may as well have forgotten about them in the past two years. However, now that he had concluded his training, it was time to get down to business. His commission payment to the Beggar's Sect had waited long enough, it was time to finally finish the payment and acquire all the pertinent and relevant intelligence on Chairman Deacon.

His fists clenched as his muscles trembled with force.

His eyes narrowed.

He had waited a long, long time. As patient as he was, even he was itching to put an end to everything. A rabid drive to kill Chairman Deacon drove him forward. Just thinking about the man made Rui restless with bloodlust.

A deep bloodlust that had been cultivated over seven years of tribulations. Now, he finally had the power and the confidence to eliminate this cancer from his life. Of course, it wasn't going to be easy, but he was more than qualified to take on this challenge and its difficulties with the power that he currently possessed after spending four years in the Senior Realm.

Several days later, he exited the Great Forest of Hynnonarak without a single scratch. The past two years of hunting in the forest had given him a greater ability to navigate forests and other natural habitats and untouched topographies. He was a much more qualified hunter than he was before, which was a good development considering his future intentions to visit the Beast Domain.

It wasn't long before he found himself navigating the human domain of the Gereign region. Rui actually had some trouble acclimatizing to the bustling unruly crowds of the Gereign region. Cloudia has been quite the serene and peaceful place surrounded by a forest that was exotically beautiful when it wasn't trying to kill you.

His tolerance for humans had reduced.

He sky-walked away, avoiding the crowds, quickly heading to the Gereign Distribution Service, the base for the foreign affairs department of the Beggar's Sect in the Gereign in Region.

"Welcome back, Senior John. We have awaited your return," A manager soon came to greet him once he revealed his identity. "Let us speak in a more private setting. I'm sure we have a lot to speak about, after all. Come this way."

"I'm ready to complete the remaining part of my commission payment," Rui calmly informed him.

Chapter 1473: Deterrent

"Yes, the time has come, hasn't it?" The manager remarked, smiling. "By the way, my name is Fern. I will be aiding you while you complete your commission payment during your time here in the Gereign Region."

"I look forward to that. Now, from what I recall, the operations that the Beggar's Sect wanted me to undertake was sabotage and elimination, correct?" Rui asked. "Specifically, you wanted me to eliminate the operations that the Carnil Mafia had set up in the Gereign Region."

"That's right," Fern nodded. "That was, and still is, one of our main agendas. We would like for you to eliminate the drug trafficking ring set up by the Carnil Mafia in the Gereign Region."

Rui recalled the conversation he had with the Beggar's Sect two years ago. "It was in order to prevent them from spreading the drug in the Kandrian Empire, correct? So that they would be unable to generate a market for it?"

"Indeed," Fern nodded. "The underworld of the Kandrian Empire seeks to change the status quo that has been around for centuries during Emperor Rael's reign. By normalizing and generating demand for it, they hope to be able to decriminalize the black market and its various goods and services by supporting a prince or princess to become the next ruler of the Kandrian Empire."

"Do they have a prince supporting them?" Rui asked, raising his eyes. "Would a prince or princess of the empire really have any incentive to work with the scourge of the Empire? That's no different from throwing the privileges, authority, and power of their status."

"You have a valid point, Senior John," Fern replied. "However, there are princes and princesses born with the emperor's blood without much of the privileges, authority, and power that comes with being a prince or princess."

Rui raised an eyebrow. "I'm assuming this refers to princes or princesses lower down the inheritance line?"

"As well as those whose mother is of lower birth," He remarked. "Most of the powerhouses princes and princesses who have a real chance of ascending the throne are children of the Empress or His Majesty's royal concubines. However, there are plenty of princes or princesses who had been born to commoner women."

"...I see," Rui murmured. "Interesting. So which prince or princess is being supported by the underworld?"

"This isn't publically known information, but it is young Prince Rajak El Kandria," Fern replied. "Born to a commoner mother, he turned to the underworld to obtain the power he needed to eventually contend for the throne."

It was a name that Rui hadn't heard about before.

"Interesting stuff," Rui murmured. "I have heard about the Kandrian Throne War, but it looks like it's boiling up."

"Indeed, the Kandrian Empire is a continental powerhouse with a whopping fourteen Martial Sages, over a hundred Martial Masters, and over a thousand Martial Seniors. Furthermore, it possesses a large developed military with nigh cutting-edge military technology," The man explained. "Whoever ascends the throne will possess the power to affect the dynamics of the geopolitics of the entire continent."

"..." Rui narrowed his eyes.

He would have liked to have asked the Beggar's Sect for a deeper account of the Kandrian Throne War, but he knew that expressing any more interest than this would significantly the probability that the Beggar's Sect would tie him to the Kandrian Empire.

Of course, he shared a decent working relationship with the Beggar's Sect so it wasn't the worst thing in the world, but he didn't trust them very much. He would have to learn about the Kandrian Empire's political turmoil from another source.

"Alright, let's get back to business," Rui heaved a sigh. "Carnil Mafia. Specifically, what do you want to be done to them?"

"Please inflict enough damage to their operations that will make them abandon them altogether," Fern firmly requested. "We would like you to make their cost-benefit plummet towards losses. We would like the detriments of operating in the Gereign Region to far exceed any profit that they could ever make."

Rui narrowed his eyes. "That's a hefty goal. The underworld of the Kandrian Empire is extremely powerful. What makes you think a young Martial Senior like myself can take them on?"

"It is true that the Underworld of the Kandrian Empire is astronomically more powerful than you," Fern remarked. "However, the forces of the Carnil Mafia gathered in the Gereign Region do not exceed the Senior Realm. I'm sure you already know why."

A smirk appeared on Rui's face. "The Hypnomaster."

"That's right," Fern remarked. "The many forces operating in the Gereign Region come from parent forces that do have Martial Masters, yet none of them deploy them. That is because the Hypnomaster does not tolerate Martial Masters in the Gereign Region. There was once a time when twelve Martial Masters arrived at the Gereign Region as political tensions between several forces rose. Do you know what happened to those Martial Masters?"

"Let me guess," Rui made an amused remark. "They all died, except maybe the females."

"It appears that you have an intimate understanding of what the Hypnomaster is like," Fern remarked. "He dismissed the directive levied against him by the Master Council of the Panamic Martial Federation for creating such a hazardous zone in the middle of human civilization. He is an Elder in the organization, allowing him to get away with a lot. As a Martial Master who is over four centuries old, he is part of the second generation of Martial Artists ever and has accrued an enormous amount of power across his long life. According to our intelligence, he is close to the ceiling of the Master Realm, a powerhouse Martial Master who is not to be trifled with."

"Ha..." Rui smiled, amused. Such high accolades and reputation were hard to reconcile with the impression that Rui had formed of the shameless lecher. However, he knew that they were true.

"The one and only Martial Master known to make Master Zeamer retreat was the Silent Shadow, however, she is also of the same caliber as him. Conversely, he is one of the few to have ever survived

an assassination from her. Furthermore, he is even stronger near the Great Forest of Hynnonarak. To put it simply..." Fern continued. "The Carnil Mafia will not deploy Martial Masters under any circumstances. So rest assured that you will not be dealing with forces far beyond you."

Chapter 1474: Interests

"Even if they cannot deploy Martial Masters, they can deploy powerful Martial Seniors. The Kandrian Empire produces powerful Martial Artists, and it certainly has enough high-grade Martial Seniors," Rui remarked.

"We have strong reasons to suspect that not even Martial Seniors can entirely diminish your ability to kill," Fern remarked. "Regardless, you are not our only solution. We have already deployed other Martial Seniors, unsuccessfully. If you are not enough, we will deploy even more assassins."

Rui knew that the Beggar's Sect was not short of the funds needed to erase the Carnil Mafia's operations. However, unlike the underworld of the Kandrian Empire, the Beggar's Sect was spread across the entire continent. Although the organization possessed immense power and influence, it was also true that it was spread very thin.

Rui couldn't even begin to imagine the sheer number of agendas and objectives that the Beggar's Sect tackled daily. It had to be extremely taxing even for a powerful organization like the sect. That's probably why it would like to rely on Rui alone.

He knew that the intelligence that he had commissioned from the sect had already been gathered. This meant that the Beggar's Sect could resolve the Carnil Mafia agenda without having to spend any additional funds if Rui could get the job by himself. They would just supply him with his commission once he was done without having to spend any more wealth.

Perhaps that was why they were willing to wait for quite some time for him to return from his training under Master Zeamer. They hoped that once Rui gained power training under the famed Hynnomaster, he would become strong enough to pose a threat to the Carnil Mafia.

Well, he couldn't say that their hope was misplaced. Unfortunately, he still didn't have a very accurate idea of where he ranked in the Senior Realm in terms of power. However, his direct combat power wasn't too relevant in this case.

'What matters is whether I can kill them or not.' Rui mused, narrowing his eyes.

He was confident in his ability to kill. His training with Master Reina had built a great foundation for assassination and Master Zeamer allowed him to truly tap into his mind's power. Furthermore, he had always been extremely strong with preparation. Preparation usually allowed him to not only contend with forces far beyond him but also overcome them.

"I'll need to some intelligence and relevant information on the Carnil Mafia's operations in the Hypnonarak Forest," Rui insisted. "I'll make a decision after I've gone through it. If it's too unreasonable, then I'll reject it."

"That is quite reasonable," Fern smiled, before fiddling with a communication device. "I have arranged for it, it should be here in some time. In the meantime, if there are any other questions or concerns that I can clarify, please don't hesitate."

"I have nothing left to ask in regards to this little operation," Rui replied. "It's straightforward and simple, rather I'm curious about the Beggar's Sect's tendency to spend such enormous funds and wealth on matters that don't earn it profit. The Carnil Mafia, the assassination sector of the Shadow Isles. Is it really worth it to take them down?"

"As an organization that derives its power from the common folk, the state of human civilization is of great importance to us," The man replied. "Ordinary men and women are not soldiers, trained agents, or Martial Artists. Their psychological capacity to tolerate extreme circumstances that threaten their lives or livelihood is not as high as that of trained combatants who regularly experience dangerous circumstances."

He heaved a sigh, continuing. "They panic, despair, break, and engage in all kinds of chaotic, destructive, and self-destructive behaviors if the state of civilization deteriorates. Wars, famines, disease pandemics, natural calamities, and other such catastrophes usually strain society and civilization to the point of breaking. In such circumstances, we find that our operations are severely compromised. In a world of the Age of Martial Art, it doesn't take much to push civilization to the brink."

"I see..." Rui mused. "I was informed that the assassination sector of the Shadow Isles did compromise your operations in the Derschek Region, however, I had assumed that was because your sleeper agents

were assassinated, but I suppose it was also because the Derschek Region is an extremely chaotic region."

"Indeed, it is the latter more than the former. The spontaneous assassinations were annoying and hard to predict, but we have far too many sleeper agents to be assassinated," Fern remarked, before stirring. "Ah, looks like the intelligence you requested has arrived. You may come in."

An assistant brought in a box of documents and bowed before leaving.

"These are all the files documenting the Martial Power of the base of operations that the Carnil Mafia has set up in the Gereign Region," He remarked, feel free to go through them in this study. I'll leave an assistant here that will aid you in any way you need. You can contact me once you're done. Then..."

He said, getting up.

"Appreciate the free intelligence," Rui remarked.

"We would be foolish to leave you uninformed when it comes to operations affecting our own objectives and agendas, after all."

Soon enough, Rui was left to his own devices. He quickly unearthed the documents from within the box, skimming through the first one.

'A report on the current logistical affairs and state of the Carnil Mafia...' Rui raised an eyebrow, going through all the details.

It didn't take more than a moment for him to realize that the Carnil Mafia had been busy. With many bases established across the entire human domain of the Gereign Region, the Carnil mafia had invested quite a lot into the development of the necessary warehouses to store harvests of the narcotic plants, as well as the necessary infrastructure to process the plants to a certain extent, making it easier to store over longer periods of time.

The Carnil Mafia apparently had an oligopoly on the black market for criminalized substances, resources, and raw products due to the industry-level quality standards they maintained. Thus they had one of the most expensive operations anywhere in the Gereign Region compared to the shabby smaller forces around them.

Chapter 1475: High Grade

"A few dozen warehouses for storage and processing, a facility to produce and maintain the equipment and tools needed for optimal extractions, a general management facility, a recruitment and training facility, even housing sectors to provide basic housing requirements for long-term deployments..." Rui murmured with widened eyes and a surprised tone. 'He wasn't kidding when he said the Carnil Mafia is investing a lot in these operations.'

Rui wasn't an expert on narcotic drug rings, but he was relatively certain that such expenditure was not normal. This level of expenditure was approaching industry standards for legal substances that were also high in demand.

However, the fact that the Carnil Mafia was able to sustain and had decided it was worth sustaining this meant that the sheer mark-ups at which they sold their products were extremely high, it was probably a lucrative enough business to justify such expenses.

'It's not just the profits, but moreso normalizing and building demand for the product, putting pressure to decriminalize it, which would make it easier to do decriminalize if they do win the Kandrian Throne War and instate their prince.' Rui mused, narrowing his eyes.

He didn't like the idea of drugs spreading in the Kandrian Empire. The impoverished were always the most vulnerable to drug epidemics, and he came from a background that was originally impoverished and was not far from that economic class.

That meant that they were particularly susceptible to falling victim to such substances. And once they did, it would be extremely difficult for them to come out of it.

The one thing that truly grated on him was how vulnerable adolescents were to the substance. The Quarrier Orphanage housed many children and adolescents and Rui would be particularly enraged if they fell victim to these narcotics due to the Carnil Mafia's shenanigans.

As far as he was concerned, that was plenty of reason to annihilate these operations. So much so that completing his commission payments may very well become his secondary motivation.

Furthermore, this also awakened him to the dangers of the Kandrian Throne War. The many powerful forces that had been in play were willing to do anything to get to the throne, even if the people of the empire were harmed in the process. He recalled what he had heard about the princess that had been foiled by the Beggar's Sect and her authoritarian communistic political agenda.

Rui had been born in an era when the Soviet Union was still in power back in his previous life, and he had a low opinion of them despite his apathy and abstinence from delving into politics.

If the Beggar's Sect felt the need to sabotage her, then she almost certainly was a threat to the stability and harmony of the common man.

"Huff..." Rui heaved a sigh, narrowing his eyes. 'I may have underestimated how much of a problem this annoying throne war could become. The orphanage may not be as safe from it as I'd once hoped.'

If that was the case, Rui may not be able to avoid partaking in it. Even if it was limited to supporting the most palatable prince and political faction, it was better than nothing. Martial Seniors had reached a stage where their impact on military and political capital could be felt, especially if they were strong and talented.

However, these were matters to be considered after he returned to the Kandrian Empire as he hoped to. He had much more immediate concerns and priorities like taking out the Carnil Mafia's operations and getting the intelligence he needed to eliminate Chairman Deacon.

He turned his attention back to the reports that the Beggar's Sect had provided him, skimming through them. The net annual product produced by the Carnil operations was measured in sheer tons rather than kilograms, which showed the scale of the operations set up by the Carnil Mafia.

'Considering how much each gram sells for, they must be making billions. This is the kind of operation that would normally be protected by Martial Masters...however...'

In this case, deploying Martial Masters was something that could not be done due to the Hypnomaster. Furthermore, deploying the notorious Sage Aggragor was also impossible due to far greater priorities. That was the only reason such an expensive and important set of operations was being guarded only by Martial Seniors.

'However, the Martial Seniors that have been deployed by the underworld are highly competent,' Rui narrowed his eyes as he arrived at the most important parts of the report; the security measures.

His eyes lit up with interest. 'As expected...high-grade Martial Seniors.'

There were a total of ten Martial Seniors deployed by the Carnil Mafia, out of which three were grade twelve or above. Rui read through the intelligence gathered on them.

This was the first time he had actually seen graded Martial Seniors. It felt odd to see grades higher than grade ten since grade ten had been firmly set in his mind at the peak, seeing grade twelve Martial Artists was quite strange.

However, their power was real. Each of them was a Martial Senior whose age had already hit the triple digits. One of them was even three hundred years old, which was very old for Martial Seniors.

The fact that he had been stuck in the Senior Realm for so long meant that he was having extreme trouble creating a system of thought that could elevate his combat prowess greatly. It could also mean that the man had a non-existent affinity for the Master Realm and was simply too rigid to make a change.

'Not everyone can spend nearly every second of every day for four years simply thinking endlessly for the sake of cultivating an affinity for the Master Realm and discovering an additional dimension to their Martial Path, evolving it,' Rui mused as he thought of Ieyasu, when he saw how slow people progressed and how weak they were, he was able to appreciate the sheer genius of someone like Ieyasu.

Chapter 1476: Tiger

He knew that the Martial Seniors he had fought thus far were not on par with high-grade Martial Seniors. Unless there were truly special circumstances, the average Martial Senior was vastly below a

Martial Senior who had lived for centuries. The sheer amount of time and experience to train their body, and develop powerful techniques with immense individuality that possess great affinity with their Martial Body and Martial Art.

Furthermore, Rui was sure that pretty much all Martial Seniors had made some degree of progress with their Martial Mind, even if they hadn't reached the critical threshold.

They were immensely superior to the Martial Seniors that Rui had fought in every single parameter, he wasn't too confident if he would be able to overcome a huge gap in the power of their Martial Hearts, Bodies, and sheer quantity of techniques, experience with just his Martial Art.

That would remain to be seen. The best part of this mission was that he didn't have to duel them, he just needed to kill them.

The intelligence gathered by the Beggar's Sect was detailed and vast. Not only did it go into the identities of the various Martial Seniors who had been deployed to safeguard the precious narcotics ring that the Carnil Mafia had meticulously built from the ground up.

Each of them had been a student of the Martial Academy at some point and had even been a legal Martial Artist for a long time. However, they'd been tempted by the great wealth one could make by catering to the black market. Because it was illegal, the price of services offered was higher than that of the Martial Union.

Thus, a small proportion of Martial Artists were roped into the underworld every year.

The Martial Seniors that were assigned to the narcotics ring were notorious too. At the Senior Realm, Martial Seniors gained a very individualistic reputation from the public compared to Martial Squires who were generally unknown individually.

Martial Seniors possessed too much individual strength to be ignored. As long as one wasn't incompetent, they would come to cultivate their own recognition and sometimes even their own monikers.

[Veritable Tiger]

The leader of the security detail assigned to the narcotic ring. The division was considerable and consisted of far more than just the ten Martial Seniors deployed, however, the rest were irrelevant to Rui. The hundred Squires and nearly a thousand Apprentices deployed by the mafia were irrelevant to Rui, they could not impact the outcome of the battle as long as Rui didn't make an incompetent blunder.

Senior Zenshin, also known as the Veritable Tiger, was a powerful Martial Senior who wielded some authority in the Carnil Mafia. The man had been part of the Underworld even before he became a Martial Artist and was one of the most trusted leaders amongst the Lower Realms by the upper echelons of the Underworld.

That was one of the reasons that he was entrusted to protect the Carnil narcotics operations in the Gereign Region.

Rui didn't care that much about his history, however. What he did care about was the man's Martial power. The man's epithet had actually been straightforwardly taken from his Veritable Tiger Fist, a rather uninventive moniker.

What Rui found interesting was that this was a Martial Art that was based on the predatory hunting of big cat beasts and monsters. It was said to mimic the powerful jaws and claws of big cats that could be used to slash and tear apart the prey.

According to the intelligence, Senior Zenshin had worked as a part of a wildlife sanctuary before he had gotten involved in the Underworld, it was said that he developed an immense fascination for the wild cats that he had been serving as an assistant in caretaking.

Apparently, his admiration for the predators was great enough to affect his

This wasn't the first time Rui had come across Martial Art centered around an animal's fighting style, but this was the first he had seen in the Senior Realm. He always found it fascinating that Martial Paths could be centered around mimicking or replicating the principles of creatures of entirely different species.

Of course, there were plenty of such martial arts back on Earth. China had countless such martial arts, starting with the most famous Ng Ying martial arts featuring styles centered around tiger, crane, snake, leopard, and dragon.

He had been surprised to see them become the foundation of Martial Art in this world, though. Martial Paths were the manifestation of the essence of who one was, what kind of inclination toward beasts did one have to possess for them to serve as the foundation of their Martial Path?

However, he could also understand why they could serve as viable Martial Paths. Human physiology was not maximized for predation on an individual basis. If not for the fortunate evolution of human intelligence, humans would be much further down the food chain than they currently were.

Humans lacked claws sharp enough teeth, as well as the speed and strength to even take down other creatures of the same mass.

The two things that humans had going for them were stamina, which was used in long-term hunts, and their intelligence which allowed them to develop powerful tools that could allow them to actually kill other prey.

On an individual basis, however, humans were much inferior to other apex predators pound-for-pound in their ability to hunt and kill using only their physicality, thus a Martial Path that sought to mimic the manners in which they leveraged their physicality to hunt prey could do well.

Evolution was not perfect, but it was pretty good at its job, there was no need to waste time finding the best way to leverage power to hunt when nature had already done that and proven its results.

Martial Artists who sought to make use of the tried and proven principles of nature to enhance their combat prowess were naturally formidable for the most part, and Rui was looking forward to see how one who had done that for centuries would fight.

In addition to the Veritable Tiger, there were two other high-grade Martial Seniors that protected the Carnil drug trafficking ring. Rui quickly informed himself of their capabilities as well, before memorizing all other security details.

It turned out that Martial Artists protected each harvesting and gathering operation. Martial Apprentices were enough for gathering operations that only ventured to a brief depth into the Great Forest of Hypnonarak.

Martial Squires protected teams that ventured deeper to get stronger and more potent extracts, while Martial Seniors went for the deepest in order to get the most potent extracts for premium products.

Rui smiled.

This was far from sufficient protection.

His biggest concern was Martial Seniors with powerful senses. It was harder to misdirect powerful senses and it could possibly end up screwing him later. Particularly, if any of them had grade-ten senses, then he definitely had to make sure they died early, otherwise they could become a great impediment.

'Thankfully, such Martial Artists are quite rare-' Rui froze as he went through the profile of the final Martial Senior.

[Senior Nereau]

A stealth-oriented Martial Artist, according to the intelligence, was confirmed to possess extraordinary senses with the All-Seeing Eye technique and the Miasma Sense technique.

Both of these were grade-ten sensory techniques, according to the intelligence provided by the Beggar's Sect, he even knew one of those techniques.

'Dammit.' Rui groaned. 'I guess I can't expect it to be as easy as it was with the Martial Seniors of Shadow Isles.'

With grade-ten sensory techniques as powerful as that, she would be able to detect Death's Sympathy as it arrived and deflect it. Which meant that he couldn't just snipe them from a distance as effortlessly as he did in the Derschek Region.

The Kandrian Empire was of a different caliber in every regard, including Martial Seniors and the techniques they wielded. Rui noticed that the grade of techniques wielded by the Martial Seniors assigned to protect the Carnil Mafia's drug trafficking ring was higher than what he had seen elsewhere. They were remarkable techniques developed based on powerful principles and mechanisms and refined through great training resources.

'It's actually incredible that the Beggar's Sect got a hold of such great details about the techniques and fighting styles,' Rui was impressed with the Beggar's Sect's ability to gather information.

Thankfully, he would not make the blunder of trying to use Death's Sympathy with Senior Nereau around. Unfortunately, the Carnil mafia made large joint ventures where they grouped together a large number of Martial Artists and deployed them as a group to protect large numbers of extraction teams.

That meant that Rui could not avoid her all that much to target only the Martial Seniors who weren't accompanied by her.

'It makes sense that they would send a Martial Senior with powerful senses, but it's rare to find Martial Seniors that have mastered one grade-ten sensory technique, let alone two. Then again, this is the Kandrian Empire.' Rui mused.

The Great Forest of Hyponarak was dangerous, for everybody, Rui could definitely understand the wisdom of wanting to have a powerful sensory Martial Artists who could warn them of any threats or dangers well ahead of time.

'Thankfully, I'm not a one-trick pony assassin like I was before meeting Master Reina.' Rui mastered powerful stealth techniques, and close-range assassin techniques, not to mention, several mental techniques that would certainly help in the context of the domain of the Great Forest of Hyponarak.

'I can do this. It's just one final stage and then I'm done with my commission payment.' Rui narrowed his eyes, before memorizing all the data that the Beggar's Sect had gathered and processing all of it.

The intelligence was remarkably detailed and expansive, it contained everything Rui could possibly need to know in order to take them down.

After analyzing all the logistical, security, Martial, and strategic information available, there were several conclusions he drew.

'I definitely can't attack them outside of the Great Forest of Hyponarak.' Rui mused.

He was not strong enough to take on that many Martial Seniors at once, especially when they consisted of three high-grade Martial Seniors. He could rely on the Greater Phantomind Void technique, but it was too risky with Senior Nereau.

Thus, as long as she was around, he needed to attack them in the forest when their awareness was burdened by the forest. In such circumstances, the Great Phantomind Void was undoubtedly a killer.

Ideally, he would love to kill Senior Nereau right off the bat and then get back to easily sniping them off one by one, but that wasn't going to be easy. However, letting her live was probably going to make things even more difficult.

"Hmmm..." Rui considered the matter closely. 'If I kill her, it's unlikely she will be replaced by an equally capable sensor. These techniques are extremely difficult to master, and of those who do master them, an extremely tiny proportion choose to work in the Underworld. All I need to do is get rid of her, and then they're screwed.'

He didn't think they would be able to avoid his assassinations without an incredibly powerful sensory Martial Artist to protect them. He was just too powerful and had developed techniques that were too powerful.

'I'll make one attempt at getting rid of Senior Nereau first if that doesn't work out, then I'll just focus on killing the rest of the Martial Seniors despite her.' Rui concluded. 'It would be great if she dies first, but even if she doesn't she alone cannot stop me.'

Detecting his presence in the Great Forest of Hyponarak while he was using his Greater Phantomind Void was a feat that not even two grade-ten sensory techniques could accomplish. Thankfully, with

information on their battle formations and security protocols, he was sure that he could weasel a way through their defenses and get rid of her.

"Tell Fern I'm done and will get started soon," Rui informed the assistant assigned to help him. "It shouldn't take too long."

Chapter 1478: Zenshin

"Zenshin..." A woman remarked, approaching a burly man deep within a training facility. "What are you doing?"

"Nereau..." The man growled. "How many times have I told you to not disturb me while I'm training?"

"If you train twenty-four hours a day, then it is impossible to speak to you without disturbing you," She snorted. Stop doing that, or stop being a leader, if you want to be undisturbed."

The man didn't respond immediately. Instead, he continued sharpening his nails against a particularly strange ore, sharpening and hardening them the more he went at it.

"What do you want?"

"We got an order from Master Haishi," Senior Nereau remarked. "She is ordering us to double our output over the next week."

Senior Genshin paused his training. "...What?"

"They're going to be rapidly stepping up supply to spread the product more in the Mantian Region of the empire," She sighed. "She wants us to hasten our freelancer hiring so that we can expand the scale of our operations rapidly instead of waiting for HQ to send us the labor we need."

"...Hmph. Relay that to the manager. I don't handle managerial duties. The only thing we are here is to do is to lead and ensure that the operations proceed according to Lord Carnil's desires, and protect them from those that seek to sabotage us." The man snorted as he went back to sharpening his nails.

"That's not even the main message. They want to establish a base inside the Great Forest of Hypnonarak and grow narcotic plants as crops within this shielded facility," She heaved an even deeper sigh. "Master Haishi said that Don Carnil himself has decided to invest and go all out in this venture."

Not even Senior Zenshin could remain unmoved when greeted with such an ambitious plan.

"...Ambitious, as expected of him," Senior Zenshin muttered with a hint of admiration.

"Hah," She snorted. "You are the one that's going to shoulder the burden of this absurd plan. Even putting aside the countless practical hurdles and impediments that will need to be overcome, the sheer amount of funds such an ambitious project will warrant, the biggest problem is the Hypnomaster."

She clenched her fist. "We can deal with any Martial Senior, but that being... We cannot deal with him. This is his forest, one that he created. I don't think we should provoke him."

"If we are threatened with a Martial Master, then Lord Carnil will send Martial Masters. Simple as that," Senior Zenshin gruffly declared. "Most likely Master Haishi herself will take action since she is monitoring our progress."

"You know it's not that simple," Senior Nereau gritted her teeth. "I don't question Master Haishi's formidable prowess, however, the Hypnomaster is not someone to be trifled with."

Senior Zenshin paused, glancing at her with a dangerous glint in his eyes. "Are you implying that she can't win?"

"I'm implying that she shouldn't try to," Senior Nereau narrowed her eyes. "I don't know who is stronger, however, even if she is stronger, this is the Hypnomaster's domain, and the mental consumption of the forest works in his favor. We already supply dozens of tons of narcotic substances annually, isn't that enough?"

"It's not enough," Senior Zenshin growled. "It's not enough because Lord Carnil says it's not enough. That's all you need to know. You're not a strategist or a leader. You're a Martial Artist, you don't need to think, you need to fight."

"Are you saying Martial Seniors don't need to think?" She raised an eyebrow. "If that is your philosophy, then it is no wonder you've remained a high-grade Martial Senior for centuries."

Senior Zenshin paused his conditioning training once more.

She had struck a nerve.

It was not a secret that despite training non-stop for centuries, Senior Zenshin was still some ways away from the Master Realm. As a Martial Artist who had reached the upper ends of the Lower realms, he strongly and gravely desired to reach the vaunted Upper Realms.

Every Martial Senior knew that Martial Masters were cut from a different cloth. It wasn't just that they were stronger, it was as though they had attained a higher state of life. It was as though they had attained a touch of godhood.

It was as though they were fundamentally different beings from Martial Seniors.

While Martial Seniors simply wielded more raw power than Martial Squires, Martial Masters wielded the same power. They wielded the exact same physical power in seemingly mystical ways that resulted in magical outcomes.

Of course, it wasn't genuinely supernatural. He had long been informed of the truth of the Master Realm and the path forward towards it.

However, the path forward to the Master Realm was more difficult than he had ever experienced.

Using the power of thought to astronomically empower and elevate one's combat? What kind of nonsense was that?

How could thinking harder make one stronger in the middle of combat?!

He didn't understand.

He didn't understand how thought and mind could be such a powerful force. It made no sense to him. If thought were such a powerful force, then wouldn't all those combat researchers also be very strong? Didn't they spend most of their time thinking about the science of combat?

He didn't understand.

He knew that he wasn't alone either.

Most Martial Seniors felt this way. Most of them received basic education so that they wouldn't make utter fools of themselves, many of them did not even receive a proper education. They trained their damndest from a young age to get into the Martial Academy and were set on the path of Martial Art.

That was why when the few of them reached the Senior Realm and were confronted with the Martial Mind, they were dumbfounded. It had taken Senior Zenshin more than a decade before he could even begin taking a step, and then several more decades to make even the first hint of progress.

"Don't go there," Senior Zenshin growled as bloodlust oozed from his demeanor. "Not if you want to die."

"Hmph, you bestial oaf," She snorted. "Last thing I came here to tell you. It's time for the operation, let's go."

Chapter 1479: Not Easy

Rui almost wondered whether he should let the Carnil Mafia establish a base in the Great Forest of Hyponarak.

'That will definitely piss Master Zeamer off,' Rui mused.

He had come to gain a good understanding of the Martial Master's personality and temperament over the past two years. He was extremely down-to-earth, often underground even, when it came to people who had earned his affection, but he could be ruthless when it came to people he didn't.

He was also strangely possessive and very territorial. Although the elder man never said it out loud, Rui had come to realize that normal humans were hardly more than insects to him.

Unless they were women.

However, Rui discovered a disturbing apathy and detachment to people who didn't earn his affection.

He was the type who was more than willing to slaughter the entire human race if it meant impressing a woman he was targeting.

In his conversations with Master Zeamer, he came to discover that he viewed the narcotics industry surrounding the forest the same way that a human might consider an ant colony or bees being attracted to certain smells in their garden; something that wasn't too worthy of note until it became annoying.

Rui knew if they tried deforesting a region of the forest to grow and harvest narcotic plants, it would definitely annoy Master Zeamer. He would put an end to that before it even started, it would be a brutal blood bath.

That was why he considered letting them relocate and allowing Master Zeamer to erase them. However, there was only one problem.

'It won't count as my payment if I'm not the one doing it.' Rui sighed.

That was the only reason this was a bad plan. Otherwise, it was perfect, he got to kick back and even watch a Martial Master flex.

'Then again, this plan wouldn't give me a way to test myself.' Rui sighed.

He had been curious about his power level for some time now. Fighting against Ieyasu didn't tell him anything since he was just as much of an aberrant as Rui. On top of that, they had both been heavily restricted in their fight.

Rui looked forward to clashing with the various Martial Seniors of the Carnil Mafia, he would finally have a good idea of how strong he was. He was even hoping that he would get to have real fights rather than just engage with them as an assassin.

Of course, he didn't intend to seek that out. He needed to kill them in order to fulfill his commission payment, and that naturally meant relying on assassinations. He could only hope that the battle would unfold such that he could have a real fight.

Thankfully, the intelligence indicated that that might very well be the case. The reason for that was that according to the security protocols of the Carnil operations, all members were to wear protective gear and armor, including Martial Seniors, to minimize casualties and injuries while in the Great Forest of Hynnonarak.

"Even the Martial Seniors?" Rui raised an eyebrow. "Also these armors..."

They were not ordinary armors, they not only were made out of special Squire-grade substances, but they were equipped with energy-consuming esoteric substances that could protect even the uncovered parts of the body to a certain extent.

It was a sophisticated esoteric artifact made from powerful technology that Rui would see in very few places aside from the Kandrian Empire. According to the illustration provided by the Beggar's Sect, it partially resembled a high-tech spacesuit while partially looking like medieval armor.

'Only in the Kandrian Empire...' Rui shook his head with an amused smile, recalling the warning that the Silent Shadow had given him.

His Death's Sympathy technique required an exposed target, which was simply not going to happen with targets above a certain level of wealth and power. However, while he knew that, he didn't think that he would run into circumstances where even Martial Seniors in the field would be equipped with such fancy protective measures.

'Part of it is to filter out all the narcotic compounds released into the air by the forest.' He skimmed through the data stored in his Mind Palace.

The forest had a strong narcotic influence on those who entered it. This was part of the risks and detriments of entering it. Only did rich and technologically endowed forces like the Carnil Mafia have the means to equip their teams with such extravagant protective measures on such a scale.

This was another sign of the wealth of not just the Kandrian Empire, but also how lucrative the drug trafficking ring of the Carnil Mafia was.

However, the thing that Rui was most concerned about this was the fact that it could shield against his Death's Sympathy. In fact, by principle, any layer between him and his target with a gap between them could shield against his Death's Sympathy, since it would be detected the moment it crashed against the layer, alerting the Martial Seniors.

'Tsk, Master Reina was right. There are too many circumstances that can impede my Death's Sympathy. It's only a killer if my target doesn't take too many measures to protect themselves.'

Death's Sympathy was actually a Squire-level attack. The reason for that was to minimize the energy density of the attack in order to prevent it from being detectable. Because it collided with things that weren't the target, any significant layer of matter in between him and the target was able to negate the strengths of the technique.

'So essentially, I won't be able to snipe them off one by one even if I get rid of the sensory Martial Senior. I guess these circumstances truly won't be as smooth as the circumstances of the Shadow Isles.' Rui narrowed his eyes. 'Tsk it's a shame but...'

A small smile emerged on his face. 'I guess we'll have to do this the hard way.'

There wasn't too much time before their next large-scale operation, so Rui wanted to make sure he knew exactly what his gameplan was before that time arrived.

Chapter 1480: Extraction

In a complex of facilities and warehouses, a large group of people put on a set of armor suits one by one. Most of them were human, while the remaining proportion was comprised of Martial Artists.

A highly organized set of protocols was meticulously followed before it was finally time to be deployed into the Great Forest of Hyponarak. One of the lesser-known facts about Don Carnil was that he came into power at a remarkably young age thanks to his extremely high competence in management, administration, and bureaucracy. Having graduated from the Kandrian Institute of Management as a sage scholar, a feat unprecedented at his age, he applied his expertise to revolutionize the black market and create the most powerful mafia in the substances/products market.

It was thanks to him that the black market for substances and material products went from being a chaotic and unscrupulous affair executed by thugs to a highly efficient and effective force that possessed a state of affairs with as much sophistication and organization as even the most well-honed multinational companies.

It was the reason that he was accepted as the Sixth Don of the Kandrian Underworld.

His philosophy was reflected in the fact that the drug trafficking operation set up in the Gereign Region operated like a well-honed machine rather than a broken-down vehicle under the influence of his administrative measures.

"Time of dispatch: 900," Senior Nereau announced while an assistant recorded the detail. "Let's get going."

Hundreds of individuals began moving as they exited the dispatch facility before heading towards the forest in the distance. The entire squad moved in relative uniformity. Martial Apprentices were present at the outermost points, with Martial Squires in a line around the middle layer and a scant few Martial Seniors around the human extractors, who immediately began skillfully and swiftly extracting every ounce of narcotic raw extracts that they could.

In order for such extravagant security and protocol measures to be worth it, the resulting harvest needed to be lucrative enough. The group would spend extensive amounts of time in the forest and would also go much deeper than a group this size would otherwise dare to go.

That was how the team was going to justify such expenditure. Most forces did not go beyond a certain distance into the forest. The reason for that was that the risks exponentially increased the further they went and the larger their group was. The profits were proportionally greater, however, most forces were not interested in risking their lives to that extent.

The Carnil extraction squad was different.

They went much deeper into the forest and extracted harvests that were orders of magnitude more potent and pure than the scraps that could be found on the furthest edges of the forest. This resulted in revenues that were exponentially greater than those of forces of similar sizes.

It paid for not just all the expenses of the Carnil establishment in the Gereign Region but generated massive profits for being a highly premium product.

The Martial Artists of the extraction squad remained on high alert as their senses monitored their surroundings. Their suits were able to ensure that they didn't ingest any narcotic compounds that saturated the air, however, it could not stop the mental consumption-ability of the Great Forest of Hynnonarak.

It hampered their minds and thus their senses to a certain extent, it was why someone like Senior Nereau had been sent in the first place, only her senses were powerful enough to still be highly effective despite the suppression of the forest. Had she been a Martial Squire during the time of the Shionel Dungeon raid, she would have been a trump card in navigating the dungeon. She remained on high alert as her senses covered not only the extraction team but also the surrounding area. In order to see incoming threats, going beyond just the space that the team occupied was necessary. Only then could she sense and warn the security detail.

She was situated at the center of the extraction team, unlike the other Martial Seniors. In these circumstances, her senses were far more valuable than her combat prowess. She hadn't objected to this role due to the safety that it brought her.

It was also an important role that could propel her up the ranks of the Carnil Mafia as long as he did well. It was one of the reasons that she had begun working on mastering and developing even more sensory techniques in the past few years so that her sensory prowess would increase even more.

Doing this would increase her utility and importance in these lucrative operations. As for her combat prowess, did such a thing even matter anymore?

She talked down to Senior Genshin about not having a mindset fit for the Master Realm, but in reality, she herself had made no progress with the Martial Mind since learning the truth about it forty years ago. She didn't have the drive to subject herself to the torture of endless experimentation, trial and error, improvisation, and innovation over many years needed to make progress with the Martial Mind.

It had taken her everything just to reach the Senior Realm, she was content with leveraging that to gain wealth and status in the Kandrian Underworld.

What was the point of being strong when she had several Martial Seniors protecting her and the extractors from any external threats? She would rather be valuable and important in such circumstances.

'I'll break into the upper echelons of the Carnil Mafia with my contributions to these operations,' She clenched her fist.

Yet, she wouldn't be able to do that.

After all, she was about to die.

BOOM!!

An enormous explosion emerged from a powerful collision out of seemingly nowhere.

One moment, there was peace.

The next moment, it had been torn away.

The Martial Artists, as disciplined as they were, took a moment to recover from the shock. An enormous cloud of dust reaching the skies had enveloped the entire place, but that was not enough to impede their senses.

And what they sensed shook them.