

Martial Unity 1331

Chapter 1331: Saiful Abyss

Rui sighed.

What he did perhaps wasn't the wisest, but he hadn't been able to muster up the willpower to stop himself from acting. He glared at the Martial Apprentice in his left hand.

'Got his hands on a little bit of power and thought he could do anything he wanted. It's because of monsters like you that ordinary people are fully justified in being terrified of us.' Rui narrowed his eyes as he flicked the man's skull softly.

CRACK!

A deep indentation appeared on his skull, killing him instantly. Rui made sure to hold back immensely in order to prevent the skin from breaking, leaving no blood behind that could be used to gain a better understanding of what happened. He would have to bury the Martial Apprentice somewhere far away.

He sighed as he thought back to the words that the woman had told him.

You do not find them, they find you.

If that was the case, he just hoped that they would find him worth contacting. He didn't think he would be able to find them, based on her words and the intelligence of the Derimont Bazaar that he had been provided.

He quickly spread through not just the Ferendul nation, but also through the legal ports of entry through all the other nations that stood in his way in the Saiful region.

He was pleased to see that not every nation was in as bad a condition as the Republic of Ferendul, but he had not been able to make any headway on how to contact the Derimont Bazaar when he asked around.

Ultimately, he came to the conclusion that it was a futile exercise. Not a single person knew anything, and even if they did, he got the sense that they wouldn't talk even if he tortured them, which he would never do in the first place.

It took him a while since he had decided to go through the official port of entry, but eventually, he managed to reach the center of the Saiful Region; the Saiful Abyss.

A no man's land that no country dared to try and conquer and colonize. None of them wanted to declare war against the most powerful organization of ordinary men and women.

He breathed deeply as he got his first proper look at the Saiful Abyss, narrowing his eyes.

He was being watched.

He could feel it, though he wasn't able to spot anybody.

It was dark.

Abnormally dark.

And yet the endless sea of trash, debris, and empty infrastructure was as clear as day. A dense forest packed with disposed garbage and abandoned huts and buildings. It was filled to the brim with crowded waste.

It gave the beholder an impression of endless worthlessness.

This overflowing ocean of wasted garbage and wasted space was the home of the Derimont Bazaar? The market that was created by the Beggar's Sect as an avenue to approach them?

An ordinary person would scorn with disdain and contempt at the mountain of waste that lay before them and yet...

Rui's eyes widened with shock as he beheld the Saiful Abyss.

'Why...' He stared, stunned. 'Why are my senses being hampered?'

This sensation reminded him of the Shionel Dungeon. It wasn't nearly as extreme as the Shionel Dungeon, yet even with its reduced intensity, Rui could never possibly forget this sensation in his entire life.

Both Tempestuous Feel and Seismic Mapping were heavily crippled, giving him extremely blurred and disrupted readings. He even recognized the very specific sensations when he focused in particular directions.

'These are the same esoteric substances that I dug out of the Shionel Dungeon!'

Having spent a year and a half in the Shionel Dungeon, Rui had come to be able to identify the 'flavors' of disruptions of the various esoteric substances of the Shionel Dungeon.

He sensed vast amounts of their presence in the bedrock of the Saiful Abyss. Yet they were just below the surface, this was not a natural occurrence.

A shocking realization dawned on him.

'You're telling me that the Beggar's Sect accumulated half a floor's worth of esoteric substances from the Shionel Dungeon for the sole reason of creating a zone of sensory disruption in the Saiful Abyss?'

Furthermore, it had been integrated such that it would disrupt senses on large scales, not short ranges. Thus Martial Artists trying to engage in espionage over large ranges would be extremely hampered while everybody would still be able to sense over shorter ranges, allowing them to function normally.

It was a zone that the Beggar's Sect created to be the antithesis of both esoteric sensor technology and Martial Artists. A zone where the ordinary man functioned better than either of them.

He instantly knew that the Beggar's Sect had probably been one of his biggest customers when he sold supplies of esoteric ore deposits from the Shionel Dungeon. Of course, given that he didn't see their name ever, they were certainly discreet enough to use shell corporations and other fronts while purchasing large quantities from him.

He essentially made this happen.

'...It doesn't matter. It happened so long ago that it is irrelevant. Thankfully, not even such extravagant measures are enough to stop me.' His eyes narrowed as he extended his Riemannian Echo into the distance.

He had created this technique for precisely these circumstances, though he never expected he would come back to these circumstances ever again.

He focused his senses specifically across the surface of the Saiful Abyss, allowing him to extend his senses further across that particular sliced section as opposed to all directions.

His eyes narrowed

There were surprisingly many scouts that were extremely well hidden and even camouflaged within the ruins and the heaps of garbage. They carefully watched the edge of the Saiful Abyss with monoculars, whispering into remote communication devices continuously while fiddling with a bunch of other devices.

He could even sense the ones ahead of him and closest to him staring straight at him unperturbed as they continued their tasks.

They were most likely the Beggar's Sect's patrol scouts to keep an eye on all activity at the edge of Saiful Abyss and were probably under the impression that he was unaware of them.

His senses further extended into the Saiful Abyss as he took note of everything he saw. The deeper into the Saiful Abyss's surface his senses went, the more people he could sense. Just as he reached the limit of his senses focused along the surface of Saiful Abyss, the population density spiked heavily.

He smiled.

He had found the Derimont Bazaar.

Chapter 1332: True Depth

It was just barely at the edge of his Riemannian Echo, but he was able to sense the edge of what looked like it should have been the Derimont Bazaar. It was obscured from plain view behind the heaps of abandoned buildings and garbage, yet it was as clear as day to him.

'I probably shouldn't run. That might alarm people.' He had sensed plenty of Martial Artists in the time that he had scanned the place with his senses. That was the reason he was rather cautious about doing anything that could be interpreted as an attack or a raid.

He calmly began walking in the direction of the Derimont Bazaar, despite the amount of time it would take given the distance into the Saiful Abyss it was in. There were plenty of plants, moles, and scouts across the entire Saiful Abyss. He was sure that together, they could provide the Derimont Bazaar with the information needed to have a real-time view of everything happening in the Derimont Bazaar.

It was quite a remarkable place, he understood why the Beggar's Sect used this place as an open avenue for outsiders to contact; it was a place over which they had complete control.

And yet, it was only an hour later when he grew closer to the Derimont Bazaar that he came to truly understand why this place was chosen. He froze on the spot as his senses managed to come across something stunning.

If not for Riemannian Echo, he would have never come across this most likely.

'There is more.' Rui noted with an incredulous tone. 'There is more...beneath the surface.'

His senses managed to detect multiple wide underground cavities beneath the Derimont Bazaar!

His shock only grew the more he explored this new discovery with his Riemannian Echo. Massive spaces that weren't that much smaller than the bazaar atop the surface, were stacked on top of each other like layers of an onion, each hosting millions of people in a bazaar that was connected to the bazaar atop the surface through tunnels.

They were completely hidden away beneath the surface. One could spend their entire life there and never know!

He quickly understood what the existence of these hidden underground bazaars. 'The bazaar on the surface is most likely nothing more than a superficial cover to hide the true bazaars and markets in underground towns below the surface of the Saiful Abyss.'

The deeper his senses went, the more layers of the Derimont Bazaar, each with its own underground markets saturating the wide cavities beneath the ground.

Rui was completely staggered. The fact that the Beggar's Sect went to these extents to obscure their presence in the Derimont Sect was truly astounding to Rui. It showed a dedication to remaining hidden, the likes of which he probably had never seen before, even from himself.

'To think they dug those up just so finding them is basically impossible.' Rui heaved a deep sigh, shaking his head. His task had just been significantly complicated. He actually didn't even know if he would find the Beggar's Sect at this rate.

The words that that woman had told him rang in his mind.

You don't find them, they find you.

It appeared she wasn't exaggerating. Finding a covert intelligence network embedded in the Derimont Bazaar in its multi-layered entirety was probably much harder than finding a needle in a haystack. It was just absurd.

At this rate, he might literally never meet them. He was concealing his identity as a Martial Artist, and most certainly his identity as a Martial Senior. Even if they figured out the former, they surely couldn't

be certain of which Realm he was of. That meant that his importance in their eyes was probably minimized.

'Tsk.' Rui tutted inwardly. 'My earlier plan of maintaining a low profile will backfire if the difficulty of finding them is going to be so high.'

He had initially expected that he would be able to gain a meeting with them even if he did not bear his status as a Martial Senior, but that was starting to become increasingly suspect.

Then again, he couldn't just activate his Martial Heart then and there on the spot. That would be interpreted as a sign of hostility, and entering into a dialogue with the Beggar's Sect would be that much harder.

'...For now, let's just explore this place and give it my best shot.' Rui sighed as he forged forward.

Eventually, he finally arrived at the massive bazaar at the center of the Saiful Abyss. It was as large as the town of Hajin in the Kandrian Empire and comprised a dense market of all kinds of things.

It gave off a single impression.

Chaos.

He quickly entered the bazaar, instantly transitioning from heaps of garbage and abandoned buildings to a dense market in a single step, getting his first up-close look at it. A strange mist had come about in the air, obstructing vision slightly. The deeper he walked into the bazaar, the denser it grew.

It couldn't hamper his Riemannian Echo, but it did give the entire place an eerie edge.

His eyes swum around, taking the entire place. The bazaar appeared to be divided into multiple sections, rings, and segments that each focused on a particular kind of product or commodity. A surprisingly thoughtful arrangement by the Beggar's Sect.

The outer-most ring featured all kinds of products but there was a clear theme; written or printed articles. He saw various storekeepers walking around, lugging all kinds of printed articles from street to street and store to store. Books of all kinds, newspapers, scrolls, parchments, and various other things were on display as storekeepers chaotically and spuriously hawked to the people around them.

Yet nobody cared. They merely ignored them and walked on deeper into the Derimont Sect. Nobody went out of their way to go to a place as dangerous as the Derimont Sect to buy some measly books.

Rui was actually surprised they even bothered to sell books in this kind of place. It made no sense to him at all.

Chapter 1333: Market

'Judging people by their appearances is generally something to be avoided if possible but...' He glanced around at the various people walking in and around the Derimont Bazaar. 'These are not the kind of people to be interested in buying books.'

Most of them carried visible weapons, and all of them carried concealed weapons. Daggers, swords, muskets, and other dangerous weapons accompanied every single normal human. Most of them had rugged and tattered appearances, torn clothes, bruised flesh, and scarred skin.

They were warriors.

Most of them chose to conceal their appearance in some way or the other. Those that didn't simply draw more attention. Regardless, they were not the type to visit a bookstore.

STEP

Rui paused as he felt a strangely soft sensation beneath his foot. His eyes widened as he realized he was stepping on the corpse of a man submerged in the dirt and grime.

SHOVE

"Move the fuck out of the way." A rough female voice behind him snarled as a woman shoved into him, walking past him. "Fucking tourists."

Nobody noticed that there was a dead body there.

No, that wasn't quite right.

They simply didn't care.

Rui studied the ground and the streets carefully, noticing their faint red hue as he narrowed his eyes as a faint stench tickled his nose.

Blood.

So much blood had been spilled on the soil of the Derimont Bazaar that it had actually changed the color of the soil. If that was the case, then no wonder that a single corpse did not even earn the slightest glance from any of the passersby.

Rui was not squeamish with cadavers or blood, but it was a little disturbing to see so many people in a single area be so apathetic. Regardless, there was nothing that could be done about so he quickly moved on, heading deeper into the Derimont Bazaar.

The market shifted more the deeper he went, and the mist continued thickening as he went deeper. It grew more silent and yet more dense as people flocked to stalls, carts, and spreads, looking to purchase the products at sale.

Weapons, alcohol, narcotic drugs, forbidden substances, even hard copies of pornographic material, funnily enough. Rui had already expected to see such things, yet he wasn't even that deep into the Derimont Sect, and the more controversial stuff had already begun.

"Hey there," A woman called out to him in an alleyway with a seductive smile. She had skimpy clothes, smoking a pot. "Interested in spending time with me?"

"No." Rui continued on his way as he continued gathering information on the town.

He had long begun storing every ounce of information all his senses picked up on in the Mind Palace, including Riemannian Echo. He had already grown accustomed to doing so in the Shionel Dungeon when he was working on the three-dimensional map that he had made for Guildmaster Bradt, thus it wasn't anything new.

He would review the entirety of the footage once he returned if he failed. Suddenly, he paused with narrowed eyes as he glanced at an establishment to his right. It was the only intact multi-storeyed multi-block building that he had come across in the Derimont Bazaar thus far.

It drew his attention because Riemannian Echo picked up hundreds of corpses within the establishment. Most of them were neatly packed in body bags and were isolated in the basement in a cooled unit. Their bodies were dissected and he even managed to pick up that their bodies had been emptied of their contents the deeper he looked.

'Organ trafficking.' Rui noted, furrowing his eyebrows.

Not every ailment problem could be solved with healing potions, most couldn't, in fact. The demand for organ donors was just as high, if not higher due to better esoteric medical technology that made the process more perfect.

And demand would always be met with supply, even if it was illegal and prohibited in most places across the continent. It appeared that the Derimont Bazaar catered to any clientele that wanted to procure an organ transplant even at the cost of innocent lives.

He heaved a deep sigh, before heading on forward, looking for signs of the Beggar's Sect. He did not want to stick around the Derimont Bazaar for long, it was an unpleasant location.

Yet he couldn't help but pause when he came across a district that literally had the words Assassin's Guild carved messily into the buildings around the edge of the district. Apparently, the deputy director of the intelligence department of the Floating Sect was not kidding when he said that one could find just about any and everything in the Derimont Bazaar. Not only could assassins be hired for murder, but there was literally a guild inside the Derimont Bazaar.

He could even sense innumerable Martial Apprentices and Squires within the depth of the district. He wasn't even surprised that this district was one of the most crowded districts that he had come across in the Derimont Bazaar. He knew that these services were quite epidemic across the entire world, there was nothing he could do aside from walking deeper.

The mist grew denser.

As did the crowd. Many people accumulated around a particular stall, bustling with energy. He actually needed to push through to see what it was.

Yet Riemannian Echo had already given him a good idea of what it was. A grim expression appeared on his face as his body stiffened.

A man heralding a group of children in shackles smiled as he displayed them.

"Three hundred on the blond cutie-Can I get a three-twenty? Three-twenty? Three-twenty for this little cute boy-Oh and we have a three-twenty-Can I get a three-fifty? Three-fifty anybody? No? Three-twenty going once. Going twice. Going thrice. And sold! To the elder gentleman in the overcoat!"

Rui strengthened his Mind Mask, struggling to contain his volatile fury. It took every ounce of willpower to maintain his composure. He needed to muster every shred of discipline that he had cultivated to hold back.

Chapter 1334: Composure

This had happened before. He was unable to maintain his calm when it came to matters surrounding children. It was a psychological weakness that had, thankfully, yet to be exploited by an enemy. The most optimal course of action was to ignore and go about his business simply.

Yet it was one he struggled to take.

He briefly considered activating his Martial Heart and launching an omnidirectional Transverse Resonance attack, before restraining himself.

He would probably die very quickly if he dared to do that. He would be making a sworn enemy out of every single person in the Derimont Bazaar, and he had no doubt that he would be confronted by multiple Martial Artists, even Martial Seniors, and that would be it. And yet, when he looked at the terrified expressions on all those girls and boys, he felt his restraint slipping.

STEP

He walked away with a grave expression. 'I'm sorry...'

He wasn't strong enough to save them then and there.

However...

'They will pay.' Rui swore as he narrowed his eyes. 'I swear they will. Every last one of them.'

He recorded the appearances of all the sellers and providers and their staff. Killing them later on would have been too impractical and dangerous as a Martial Squire, but that was no longer the case anymore.

He was a Martial Senior, he could butcher them all with casual ease in the briefest of moments so short in time, that time would essentially have been frozen for everyone else.

His expression grew severe as he recalled what he had heard about the Beggar's Sect. That it was a sect that existed of and by the common folk, and naturally as a result, it existed for common folks as well.

'What a joke.'

It was not even funny when they were the ones who allegedly created an abysmal cesspool like the Derimont Bazaar that spread so much suffering.

Or so he felt.

In reality, his rational side knew that the truth was a lot darker. It wasn't that the Derimont Bazaar created this misery.

No.

It merely collected existing misery, and gathered it in a single place. Even if the Derimont Bazaar was disassembled and destroyed, the number of people and children suffering would not be reduced.

The demand for these heinous commodities and services would still be rife in the Saiful region, and scum who wanted to make money would commit unspeakable acts to fulfill that demand. Nothing would change.

A Martial Senior did not have the power to make it change. Hell, he doubted that Martial Masters or even Martial Sages possessed the power to change that. It was a constant in the fabric of human civilization.

If anybody possessed the power it would be...

'Martial Transcendents.' Rui's eyes clouded in thought.

He couldn't even begin to fathom what kind of power that beings an entire Realm above Martial Sages possessed. However, whatever it was, it had most likely reached the level where it could impact all of human civilization by itself to a certain degree.

He would probably need to reach such a stage of power to erase the evils of humanity from the world. Yet the Martial Transcendents that possessed the ability to endeavor on such a path, hadn't.

'Those that care don't have the power, and those that have the power don't care.'

He shook his head, putting the matter aside.

He needed to focus on the things most important to him, and the things that he did have the power to save. Unfortunately, for now, that amounted only to his family. When he grew stronger and entered the upper Realms, he would have the capital to start considering more grandiose ventures.

For now, he needed to focus on finding the Beggar's Sect so he could gain the information he needed to eventually eliminate the threat to his family.

He had yet to spot even a single place that bore the crest of the Beggar's Sect, something that was actually publically known, interestingly enough. But no person or stall bore that crest.

He even spoke to some local information brokers, yet all of them simply stopped speaking to him, going their ways as soon as the name of the Beggar's Sect escaped his mouth. It appeared that the Beggar's Sect had a tight, yet invisible grip on the Derimont Bazaar.

It took him quite a long time, the entire night, yet he eventually concluded that there were no signs of the sect anywhere in the Derimont Bazaar.

Or at least, in the surface bazaar. He was sure that the underground bazaars would provide more information about the Beggar's Sect.

"M-Mister?" A young girl called out to him, drawing his attention.

She looked to be no older than sixteen. An adult in most nations on the Panama Continent, yet nothing more than a child in his eyes.

"What is it? Do you need something?" He asked her with a gentle tone.

"I-If you want, I can serve as a guide for you in the bazaar." She stuttered as she averted his gaze. "It will only cost 3 copper coins per hour."

That was not what he was expecting. He thought she was lost and needed her help, but it turned out to be the reverse.

"Guide eh...?" He glanced around, noticing that nobody else needed one.

"B-Because it clearly is your first time here and so I thought y-you might want some help." She murmured, still not looking him in the eyes.

Rui cracked a smile for the first time since arriving at the Derimont Bazaar. "Do I stick out that much?"

"L-Like a sore thumb...sir." She responded meekly.

"Is that so?" Rui chuckled. "Well, I don't have any copper coins but..."

He pulled a handful of the remaining reserve of gold coins that he had left.

"E-Eh...! That's too much! P-Please put them back!" She urged him with a panicking expression as she glanced around worried with a panicked expression.

'Ah right...' Rui noticed the hungry stares from the people around him. 'They don't know that I can annihilate all of them with the slightest exertion.'

"It's fine," Rui reassured her as he put three gold coins in her palm instead of copper coins. "Take this, and in return tell me how I can get to the true depths of the Derimont Bazaar."

Chapter 1335: Bumped

"E-Eh..." Her expression paled at the mention of the underground bazaar.

"If you cannot get me there, then that's fine as well," Rui told her. "Use that money to get out of this place and go far away."

She stared at him with a befuddled expression. "Is that why you gave me these...?"

Rui nodded as he kept an eye on the crowd around them. If any of them tried something, he would swiftly kill them on the spot. He believed in self-defense, after all.

"You are kind," She murmured with a soft tone as her nervous energy reduced a bit. "Thank you. I... can take you to the true depths of the Derimont Bazaar if that is what you wish. However, y-you should be warned. They aren't fond of outsiders down there."

"Is that so...?" Rui wondered. "Well, I'll make do. I need to meet the Beggar's Sect at all costs."

"Beggar's Sect?" She tilted her head in confusion.

Her reaction told him that not everybody knew that the Beggar's Sect was the one that had created the Derimont Bazaar. Perhaps the information was less well-known than he had initially expected, he did get his information from an actual intelligence agency that was dedicated to gathering information so it wasn't impossible at all.

"Never mind," Rui shook his head. "Just get me to underground bazaars."

"I can do that." She nodded vigorously. "Follow me."

"Where are we going?"

"I know a place."

She held his hand, pulling him forward as she navigated through the crowd, leading him. Contrary to his expectations, she dragged him away from the inner depths of the bazaar and back to the outer districts, taking quite some time to retread all the paths that Rui had already walked.

Rui did his best to ignore all of the things that he had to come across once more, making sure that she didn't catch any hint of his emotions.

THUD

A Martial Apprentice stepped right into his path, slamming right into Rui as he halted him.

"Watch where you're going, punk!" He snarled with an aggressive demeanor. "Who're you trying to mess with?"

Rui glanced at him. "You clearly bumped into me intentionally."

"What did you say?! You must not be from arou-"

THWACK

Rui couldn't be bothered to humor arrogant Martial Apprentices. He swiftly struck at his neck, knocking him out then and there at a speed faster than the human eye could even begin to process.

Rui had already disappeared with the girl in his arms, having sped away before anybody could have possibly attributed the Martial Apprentice falling unconscious to them.

He had been incredibly swift with it, and thankfully there were no Martial Squires in the vicinity that could have noticed the maneuver, even if slightly. A clean strike and getaway, as far as he was concerned.

'Martial Apprentices sure get full of themselves these days.'

He found the prior occurrence rather odd. The Martial Apprentice had clearly bumped into Rui on purpose, literally stepping in the middle of his way out of nowhere. He was trying to pick a fight with Rui, which wasn't particularly uncommon for the thug types, but Rui still found it odd for something like that to unfold.

"Uh m-mister..." She murmured. "Can you put me down?"

Rui nodded, lowering her. "Let's get going. Where is this place? Why have we been leaving the depths of the bazaar and returning to the outskirts?"

"Don't worry, you'll see." She said, growing more confident.

Eventually, they returned to the books section that Rui recalled seeing when he first entered the Derimont Bazaar. They formed the outermost ring of the Derimont Bazaar, being the first to greet anybody who entered.

They were also the emptiest stalls and spreads anywhere in the entire Derimont Bazaar. No one cared to buy books among the masses that entered and exited the Derimont Bazaar. That didn't seem to deter the large network of various hawkers who ran around offering newsletters and other written articles to as many people as they could.

Yet she quickly entered one of the ruined buildings holding a slew of booksellers, pulling Rui along with her as they headed deeper into the building, before coming across a bookseller that had covered the entire place with books on sale.

A man standing by the door glanced at them with piercing eyes. "What do you need?"

"W-We need to go down." She said, standing in front of Rui.

He snorted, waving her off. Yet she persisted, taking out one of the gold coins that Rui gave her and handing it to the man who promptly accepted it with a greedy expression. He opened the door beside him, gesturing them in.

Inside was a small tunnel that declined significantly into the ground.

"Come on, let's go quickly." She insisted, pulling him along as they both went down the tunnel.

Eventually, they had gotten to the bottom of the tunnel, stepping into a massive open space underground. They were instantly greeted with a wave of bustling noise from the chaotic crowds that navigated the first underground bazaar.

"So this is the underground complex..." Rui murmured. "Incredible."

"Where do you want to go?" She asked, now that they had arrived.

"For now, I just want to explore the entire place and see if I can find what I am looking for," Rui replied as his eyes flashed around the entire place with determination.

He planned on scouring the entire place looking for the crest of the Beggar's Sect, and he began doing exactly that. The first underground bazaar turned out to be not all that different from the one atop the surface. The only difference was that the one that he was in right now was a lot classier and catered to upper-class clientele.

He could see hoards of well-dressed individuals each of whom was accompanied by Martial Apprentice bodyguards as they navigated the bazaar. the commodities being sold at the underground were also slightly different, but just as unpalatable to Rui as the bazaar atop the surface of the Saiful Abyss.

Chapter 1336: Bumped Again

The commodities sold in the first-level underground bazaar were fancier, more extravagant, and more expensive than the ones atop the surface, yet Rui found them just as unpalatable as those of the surface.

"Oh, what a wonderful work of art!"

"Haha, it was created by the great artist Heretio. The brilliance of this painting is that it makes use of some rare esoteric substances to ensure that she never dies and it keeps her mind fresh, allowing this painting to capture her suffering forever."

Rui glanced to his right, his attention drawn by the rising murmurs from a gathered crowd. He thought he had grown used to the horrors of this place, but it turned out that he hadn't even seen anything yet.

Even he couldn't help but pause his search as his eyes widened at what he was beholding.

A painting featuring a woman in distress.

Yet instead of a painted figure of a woman, there was a real woman grafted into the painting. An expression of horror and despair had molded on her face, yet it only served to entertain.

"What an incredible authentic capture of emotions. I have never seen another painting this impacting." One man remarked as he twirled his well-groomed mustache.

"And now, we will begin the bidding. The starting price is five thousand gold, can I get a five thousand one hundred?..."

Rui simply stared, dumbfounded at the cartoonishly horrific scene that he was watching unfold before him. For a moment, he reconsidered his previous considerations of launching an attack and killing everybody.

'Stop, you have work to do.' Rui shook his head, exhaling deeply and heading about his way.

Yet as he stepped forward, he experienced a wave of déjà vu.

BUMP

Yet another Martial Apprentice intentionally shoved him, furthermore, this one was accompanied by other Martial Apprentices.

"I heard what you did to my brother, tough guy." The Martial Apprentice growled.

Rui stared at him, confused. "Who...?"

"Word on the streets is that you my brother out on the surface." The man snarled. "Don't even play with me, everyone says they saw you."

'No they didn't.' Rui frowned.

"You think you're tou-"

POW POW POW POW POW!

Rui knocked all of them out, disappearing before anybody could even realize what had happened. This time he made sure that nobody was or had been paying attention to him.

Yet when his mind considered those circumstances, there were many things about what he said that didn't add up.

"Are you okay?" He glanced at the girl in his arms.

She nodded, fiddling with a bracelet on her wrist. "You sure are strong, mister..."

"Let's get going."

The two of them scoured the entire bazaar, and yet Rui was unable to spot anything that resembled the Beggar's Sect even in the underground bazaar. Something that was becoming increasingly frustrating to him.

"Let's go even deeper." Rui shook his head, sighing.

"Ok." She nodded, before guiding him to yet another bookstore, for some reason.

'Are bookstores the only way to travel between bazaars, or is that the only way that she uses?'

Rui didn't know, though he could find out with Riemannian Echo, his biggest advantage was that, unlike everyone else, he could sense everything. That was why it was particularly frustrating for him to search with no yields, not even the slightest clue.

He had been told that the Derimont Bazaar was an avenue that had been created to interact with the Beggar's Sect and purchase or sell information from them.

'They sure are making it extremely difficult to even meet them.' Rui snorted inwardly as the girl secured access to the third and final floor with the same song and dance as before.

As he had predicted, it was even more high-end than the previous two floors. It was also a lot smaller with fewer clientele. On the other hand, he could already tell this was an even wealthier class of people that purchased shopped for even more messed up stuff.

He simply ignored them as he went about his task of looking for any signs of the Beggar's Sect, given that they had reached the final floor, surely he would be able to spot the crest of the Beggar's Sect.

BUMP

Rui heaved a sigh as he underwent a familiar experience yet again. This time, it was a Martial Squire.

"Punk." He growled. "I heard you knocked my friends out. Pick on some your own si-"

THWACK!

The Martial Squire collapsed, unconscious.

This time, Rui didn't even bother trying to flee the scene. It had failed the last two times, for some reason.

'First, a Martial Apprentice bumps into me very intentionally and starts a fight. I knock him out and disappear in a millisecond before people can even notice him falling over. And immediately after a group

of Martial Apprentices not only finds me, but insists that everyone saw me knock him out.' Rui narrowed his eyes, turning to the unconscious Squire. 'Then this clown also somehow finds me despite the fact that I made sure no one saw who knocked him out.'

His alertness peaked as he swiftly analyzed his circumstances. These were not natural sequences of events.

No.

He was being targeted.

First, a Martial Apprentice, then a group of them, and finally a Martial Squire. Did he make an enemy out of someone?

'No, that doesn't make much sense.' Rui shook his head inwardly. 'I may not be a native, but the same could be said for plenty of people in the bazaar. I minded my own business and literally did not interact with pretty much anybody. I would have seen far more similar violence around me if this was all it took.'

His eyes narrowed. 'It could just be my paranoia but. A Martial Apprentice, a group of Martial Apprentices, and then a Martial Squire. Following the pattern, I should expect to see...'

"Hey," A man growled behind him. "I saw what you did there."

Rui turned, before smiling wryly beneath his mask. '...a group of Martial Squires.'

Chapter 1337: Exposed

There were fifteen of them, and surprisingly all of them were high-grade.

"You think you can just beat my buddy up and-"

Time slowed down as Rui activated his Martial Heart for just a millisecond. He activated a breathing technique while carrying the girl, ensuring she wouldn't get hurt. It would have been impossible to fight in such circumstances, but that was only when he was fighting an equal.

POW POW POW POW...!

Martial Squires were so weak that even such a handicap was not much of a handicap at all. He swiftly knocked all of them out within a millisecond, before leaping away to a distant isolated part of the bazaar.

The girl fiddled with her bracelet in shock. "Y-You're so strong...!"

Rui narrowed his eyes as he stared into her eyes with a piercing stare.

Three words escaped his mouth.

"Drop the act."

"E-Eh?" She tilted her head in confusion. "W-What do you mean sir?"

The air chilled by a few degrees.

"Did you think I wouldn't notice?" Rui asked her with a calm, yet steely voice. "I only began being targeted by Martial Artists after you began leading me around. No matter how cleanly I knocked them out, making sure to do so at a moment when no one was watching us, they always found me and always knew what had happened despite the fact that I ensured that there were no eyewitnesses."

He paused for a moment, considering her. "It couldn't have been esoteric surveillance measures, because not only was I specifically wary of exactly that, but the entirety of the Derimont Bazaar is an anti-sensory zone. It couldn't have been a Martial Artist tracking me for the same reasons. And yet they found me despite no surveillance, no tracking, and no eyewitnesses.

He paused for a moment. "...No eye-witnesses except you."

He had initially thought that she was the one being targeted by various Martial Artists. But if that were the case, they would have told him to leave her while he had the chance. There was no point in acting like he bumped into them and picking a fight with him instead.

He glanced at her bracelet, channeling Riemannian Echo deep into it. The technique's greatest strength was its range and its ability to bypass anti-sensory means, however, its shortcoming was detail and depth. It required active mental exertion for Rui to sense deep detail, Rui needed to want to, otherwise, he couldn't sense it, and he also couldn't do it while focusing on the range like he had been this entire time.

"You have an interesting bracelet there," Rui murmured.

"It's the last thing my mother left me before dying." She replied.

Yet she did not stutter despite the pressure Rui exerted on her.

"Yes, I'm sure that story is true." Rui snorted. "Is that why there is a micro-transmitting device at the center of the beads hidden under a layer of anti-sensory esoteric substances?"

She didn't respond.

There was silence for several seconds.

"In all the time that I survived the bazaar, I haven't noticed a single guide. I haven't seen a single hawker offering guides. Guiding is not a thing that people do here." Rui continued. "I highly doubt that it is something you do either. It was an excuse to approach me. You specifically wanted to approach me particularly."

His eyes narrowed. "You were targeting me. Yet you weren't out to rob me in collaboration with these Martial Artists. I gave you a handful of the few gold coins freely in the first place, so it would be redundant and ineffective. Furthermore, approaching me one after the other is also inefficient."

Several more seconds passed.

"I was being tested," Rui remarked. "Each hurdle was marginally stronger than the previous one. Step by step. That is quite unnatural."

She didn't respond to that either.

Several seconds passed.

"Who are you? What do you want? Why did you do all of this?" Rui asked.

Several seconds passed before she finally moved.

A smile bloomed on her face. "Impressive, Senior John. You are the first seeker to have seen through me this cleanly. Your deductive ability has far exceeded our expectations."

Rui narrowed his eyes at the girl.

He had never told her his alias, yet she addressed him by that name. The last time he had used that alias was many days ago when he resided in an inn where he registered under that name.

An inn that was many thousands of kilometers away from the Saiful Region.

"We apologize for these transgressions," She bowed her head slightly. "We did not expect you to learn of them in the first place. We did not mean to harm you. We merely wished to test you. Your Martial prowess and your character."

"...'We'...?" Rui asked.

"Surely you have figured out the answer to that question." She smiled mischievously.

Rui's eyes narrowed. He did, indeed. There were too many clues in her words.

"The Beggar's Sect?" Rui whispered.

She smiled, getting up. "We are interested in why you seek us. I had been instructed that I may grant you an audience if there was merit in your solicitations."

"So this...All of this...was just to test me? To learn more about me?"

"We are not in the habit of indulging in transactions where we do not have the upper hand in information." She remarked. "Follow me."

He simply stared at her figure from behind, before sighing and following her. He had expected to be the one to approach the Beggar's Sect. He had never expected that the Beggar's Sect would take the initiative to do so.

She led him through a series of hidden tunnels, returning back to the bazaar atop, which earned an expression of surprise from him. He had already scoured the entire bazaar atop and had especially paid attention to the centermost part of the bazaar where he had expected them to be hiding.

Yet he was only further surprised when she headed for the outskirts of the bazaar, where the empty book market was. They entered an abandoned building that was densely packed with books that nobody wanted to pack.

A large array of people writing in books were seated across a wide array of tables

"We have arrived." She remarked. "Be careful about what you say out loud. We can't have you spilling secrets due to lack of caution."

"This place is the...?" Rui murmured with surprise.

"Yes," She remarked. "A trivial market at the forefront of everything. The first thing that anybody sees when they reach the Derimont Bazaar. We are out in the open for the entire world to see, which is why nobody sees us."

Rui's eyes widened as he realized the ingenuity of this arrangement. An open base of operations that was entirely out in the open under the simplest of disguises. Everybody who came to the Derimont Bazaar looking for the Beggar's Sect assumed that the clandestine and furtive intelligence agency was located deep within the bazaar, perhaps even in the underground bazaars hidden deeply from the light.

It was precisely because of that every single person dismissed the outermost, forefront, and most exposed market and section of the Derimont Bazaar that was entirely out in the open. Not a single person even remotely considered that such a horrible hiding place could possibly be the base of operations of the secretive Beggar's Sect.

Chapter 1338: Commission

Still, he couldn't help but be surprised that they had managed to pull it off so well. They had mastered the art of hiding in plain sight. This was what it meant to disguise, as opposed to conceal.

However, these measures weren't all they took.

Rui quickly noticed something strange when they entered the building to find rows of people scribbling away on books.

No one exchanged a word with another.

Even the girl that led him in did not actually utter a word. They just seemed to stare at each other in silence.

'No...' Rui narrowed his eyes as he paid attention to their body. 'This is non-verbal communication. They're relying on subtle body movements and twitches to convey what they're saying.'

Had it not been for the fact that he had mastered Fauna Flow, he would not have been able to detect this in the first place. However, he was clearly able to see it thanks to his background in non-verbal communication and his senses.

However, even if he knew, he had no idea what was being communicated.

'I see, rather than developing an extreme dependence on high-grade esoteric communication technology, they use simpler and more humble means to communicate without it being intercepted.' Rui realized.

"How were our sales today?"

"Not bad."

"Do we have anything to drink? I'm quite thirsty."

"There's some punch in the cupboards."

"Did you get good sleep?"

"Not at all, I'm afraid."

Rui simply listened to an incoherent exchange with furrowed eyebrows. 'Coded language on top of non-verbal language.'

Apparently, she had learned what she needed to. She turned towards him, nodding at him simply.
"Follow me."

They went deeper and deeper into the abandoned complex that had now been turned into a mini book bazaar, before taking him into a small room with a table, two chairs, cupboards, and shelves filled with documents. "Have a seat."

She closed the door behind them, and immediately, he felt a powerful familiar field of sensory suppression.

A measure to ensure the privacy of a conversation. Yet Rui found it to be rather dangerous

"Setting up a powerful anti-sensory field is no different from announcing that something important is happening here," Rui remarked. "Martial Artists nearby will easily be able to detect the field hampering their senses, creating a small area that they cannot sense."

"That is why we have activated tens of thousands of similar and even stronger fields across the entirety of the Derimont Bazaar." She remarked impassively. "Making this one insignificant."

"..." Rui was actually left speechless by such extravagant measures to ensure that they didn't draw any attention.

"Let's begin without further ado," She declared. "Let me begin by stating that any disclosure of valuable information of the Beggar's Sect that you have already learned will be interpreted as an act of hostility. Do not think you can get away with doing so. We are everywhere. Every time. We know everything. Betray us, and you will die. Not only will you die, but everyone you care about in the Floating Sect will also die. Fast."

Despite the fact that she was a sixteen-year-old girl sitting before a Martial Senior, she didn't display even the slightest bit of discomfort as she boldly threatened him.

More importantly, she knew that he was from the Floating Sect. He felt like he should be shocked, but he wasn't. They were living up to their hype, so in actuality, the impact of this revelation wasn't even that great.

The deputy director of the intelligence department who reassured him that the Beggar's Sect could not gain access to the Floating Sect had actually entirely underestimated who he was dealing with.

No, it was possible that he himself was a spy for the Beggar's Sect. The very existence of the Beggar's Sect actually shattered Rui's ability to trust normal people.

"...It's hard to believe that you're a sixteen-year-old girl." Rui sighed.

She smiled. "That's because I'm not. I'm old enough to be your grandmother, this appearance is the result of esoteric cosmetic surgery. I am Sian, a senior member of the foreign affairs department of our Saiful branch. Ah, you don't need to introduce yourself, Senior Falken."

Rui cocked his head back in surprise, completely stunned at the multiple revelations that she had dropped on him. "You had me completely fooled."

"It is what I was trained for, after all." She spoke. "Now then, I'm sure you have some questions. You can ask them and get them out of the way."

Rui stared at her for a moment. "Those tests earlier... they were to ascertain my capabilities?"

"Just as a rough minimum." Sian nodded. "We also wanted to verify the intelligence that claimed you broke through to the Senior Realm."

"...I presume you already know why I have reached out to the Beggar's Sect?"

She simply stared at him for a moment, before responding. "We are aware that it has something to do with the chairman of Deacon Industries based in the Shionel Confederation; Deacon Vernes. One of the reasons we chose to approach you was that we wanted to gain clarification on what exactly it is you wanted to purchase from us."

The moment had arrived.

"I want any and all strategic intelligence on the measures, failsafe, and contingencies that Chairman Deacon has taken to protect himself from threats to his life." Rui narrowed his eyes. "I want to know every single challenge I will face, right down to every detail, if I were to mount an assassination or an assault on him."

Rui didn't even bother hiding his intentions. They were too obvious in the first place, there only ever was one reason that anybody would require such kind of information on another person.

She simply stared at him for a few seconds, considering his response. "Intelligence on Chairman Deacon is not easy to obtain. His corporation and intelligence department have adopted the strictest of a need-to-know basis policy, making it difficult to gain all the intelligence you seek through our modus operandi."

Chapter 1339: Price

She paused for a moment, before continuing. "We certainly can supply you with the intelligence you seek, however, it will take quite some time before we are able to arrive at our bare minimum degree of certainty and verify its veracity to the highest degree. Furthermore, the intelligence that you have specifically requested from us not only is very broad but also high in its requirement for depth of detail. We will need additional time in order to collect all of it as per your specifications, and even more time in order to guarantee its authenticity."

Rui simply stared at him. "How long?"

She got up from her chair, before heading plucking some documents from the many shelves of them across the room.

She sat down before him, carelessly opening it right in front of him uncaring for whether he read it or not. And he could see why.

[The sun was red, but the bunny still ensured that there was no grass left. That was why the river washed away the dream and left only biscuits behind before a mountain bounced atop the cushion]

It was incoherent.

'Coded script.' His eyes narrowed. 'No wonder they're so nonchalant about this information.'

She drew his attention when she closed the document, pushing it to the side. "It will most likely take a year or two before we have accrued every ounce of the intelligence you seek while also being able to guarantee its accuracy to the highest degree. If you wish to purchase this information sooner, you will

have to compromise on the amount and the depth of detail, or the degree of authenticity, if you are willing."

That was certainly much longer than Rui had expected. Yet her tone did not make it seem like her answer reflected poorly on the Beggar's Sect.

'It's the opposite.' Rui realized.

Sage-level nations were extremely powerful in every regard, including their intelligence-gathering capabilities and their ability to conceal strategic information. An enormous amount of capital and funds was dedicated to training agents of the highest caliber and developing the best anti-espionage technology that existed. Given that the world knew of the existence of the Beggar's Sect, it could be expected that powerful nations would come up with systems of intelligence safekeeping that were specifically designed to counter the Beggar's Sect's modus operandi.

With that in mind, Rui could understand why not even the Beggar's Sect could just wave their hands and pull that information out of nowhere as they did with himself and the Floating Sect, a Senior-level organization with much more limited resources.

The fact that she still confidently guaranteed that they would be able to provide him with the intelligence he wanted showed that the Beggar's Sect was confident in circumventing all the anti-espionage measures that Chairman Deacon had in his corporation and personal executive staff.

He probably would not find another organization that was not only as incredibly competent and effective as the Beggar's Sect but was also so open to selling information to him. He would be a fool to refuse this deal.

"I don't require the information immediately," Rui replied. "A year or two sounds fine to me. I accept that offer."

Sian smiled at him. "We are glad that you are willing to accept that offer. However, I'm sure I don't need to remind you that this is a transaction, not a donation. The intelligence that you seek to commission from us will require a lot of time and an enormous amount of human resources that took an enormous amount of time and capital to set up in the first place. The price for these services is quite high, even for Martial Seniors."

"Name your price." Rui simply remarked.

"Given that you are a Martial Artist, we won't name a monetary price," She remarked. "Instead, we will commission your Martial Art services by having you engage in various missions or operations that are relevant to your skill set. We will even allow you to choose the kind of operations or missions that you want to engage in. You can focus on targeting more difficult and higher-value operations or focus on easier and lower-value missions, the former will allow you to fulfill your payment to our sect much sooner than the latter."

Rui considered her words.

He had expected that it would come down to this. He had nothing else to offer but his power, which was a lot. The only way he could possibly engage in transactions with a powerful organization like the Beggar's Sect was by paying with his Martial Art.

He wasn't averse to this option.

Instead, he actually welcomed it. As a Martial Senior, he was extremely inexperienced. Spars with Ieyasu, no matter how intense, as well as spars against the guardians every now and then were all he had.

That was far from enough.

He needed real experience in the Senior Realm, and while his general experience as a Martial Artist was most certainly very relevant, the paradigms of the Martial Heart and how it impacted combat was something that he needed to understand and master.

The only way he could do that was through sheer and raw experience. He needed to throw himself into adversity against other Martial Seniors and Senior-level threats and forge himself as a Martial Senior, and missions were the best way of doing that while also earning some money and making the payment for the intelligence that he was going to purchase from the Beggar's Sect.

He knew they were the best way since he had used missions to hone himself when he entered the Apprentice and the Squire Realm.

"How long would it take for me to fulfill my payment to the Beggar's Sect through these means?" Rui asked.

"Several years at bare minimum, could very well be much longer." She replied immediately.

Rui wasn't particularly pleased to hear that. He knew how valuable the services of a Martial Senior, it went to show the sheer value of the services that he was purchasing from the Beggar's Sect.

Thankfully, he was not short of time. He had a little under seven years left before it was game over for his family. He was certain that he would be able to fulfill his payment to the Beggar's Sect before that timeframe ended.

Chapter 1340: Path Forward

"I accept that offer." Rui nodded.

Sian smiled in return. "We are pleased to hear that."

"But I do want to iron out the details of our agreement." Rui insisted. "I want to make sure that there is absolute clarity on precisely what the transaction is."

He did not want to end up in a situation where he inadvertently agreed to conditions that he would never have wanted to, all because he didn't pay attention.

Over the next few hours, the two of them dug deep into the details of their agreement, pouring over every detail, each side making sure that their interests were not disenfranchised.

It wasn't long before the deal was sealed, and the two of them signed an extensive contract detailing every clause that the two of them had come to agree to.

"Pleasure doing business with you, Senior Falken," She smiled at him, shaking his hand. "As long as you fulfill the payment of your commission, I can promise you that you will not find us lacking."

"I look forward to that day," Rui nodded. "Ah, one more thing. How much payment would it take for the Beggar's Sect to not sell any information on me to anybody?"

Rui was particularly concerned with this matter. Although their contract included a confidentiality clause that disallowed the sale of any information pertaining to the contract, they still had plenty of sensitive information on him that could be sold.

Just the fact that they were aware of his Falken alias was too much. If Master Uma ever chose to shop at the Beggar's Sect for information on Squire Falken, then she might end up acquiring information on him.

That was definitely an outcome that he needed to avoid allowing to unfold.

"That will add more time of additional service provision on your part and it will only apply to the information that we have gathered at this moment." She calmly replied. "If you want to prevent the sale of your information, and hamper our business, then you'll have to compensate us accordingly."

She didn't even bother hiding the fact that his information would be sold if someone commissioned it. That was something that could not be denied and not something they cared to deny in the first place.

"I accept that price." Rui nodded.

Another session of contract forming ensued before both sides were satisfied with the second auxiliary agreement.

"Well then," She remarked. "If you do not have any further matters of business with us, then we can conclude this meeting. I believe I have comprehensively explained the system by which you can begin fulfilling your commission payment."

Rui nodded.

Essentially, the Beggar's Sect had a system similar to the Martial Union, where he could pick and choose certain operations and missions to partake in. This system was quite effective and was universally adopted by many organizations in many ways. He would need to go to a particular complex establishment in the book section of the Derimont Bazaar where operations that he could choose to engage in were held.

Unlike the Martial Union, however, these operations were not commissions from other clientele but were operations from and for the Beggar's Sect itself. It gave him insight into what the Beggar's Sect's interests and agendas were, as well as what their needs were, so he wasn't averse to this arrangement.

The Beggar's Sect probably relied on the Martial Art services provided by Martial Artists who purchased information from them to fulfill operations that were too impractical and impossible for ordinary humans. It was a bit of a symbiotic relationship, he came to realize.

That was one of the reasons he wasn't too concerned about the sale of his information, this relationship was very valuable to the Beggar's Sect, they most likely would rather avoid alienating Martial Artists by selling their intelligence to foreign parties.

All in all, Rui was quite content with the arrangements that they had come to, the Beggar's Sect struck him as a no-nonsense highly competent organization that got straight to business.

"From now on, I will be your point of correspondence with our sect," Sian informed him. "I'll be responsible for providing you with updates on your commission, while also being responsible for ensuring that you fulfill your commission payment. I look forward to working with you, Senior Falken."

"As do I."

"You may begin your fulfillment of available operations and missions to undertake immediately if you wish." She remarked. "I can help guide you as you acclimatize to this system. You may let me know if there are any particular kinds of missions that you are interested in."

Rui considered her words for a few seconds. "I wanted to undertake some assassination operations. Particularly, assassination operations on targets that are protected by Martial Seniors."

These kinds of missions were relevant to taking Chairman Deacon down.

She narrowed her eyes. "Those kinds of missions are generally reserved for higher-grade Martial Artists who are able to overcome multiple Martial Seniors to assassinate those targets. I'm afraid we cannot entrust you with those yet."

Rui nodded. He was aware that he wasn't entirely qualified for more difficult Senior-level missions. He still needed to gather more experience and develop his Martial Art even more to become even stronger. It didn't help that his youth meant that his Martial Heart was certainly on the weaker side as well.

Training to grow stronger was just as important as experience. What he wanted was to balance both of them out from here on out. That automatically meant that he couldn't pick missions that would take away too much of his time. It was best to go for missions that he was most compatible with and that he could complete quicker than other Martial Seniors by relying on his many strengths.

He also had to pick a path forward in regard to the three choices he had when it came to developing his Martial Art.

He glanced at Sian. "How much can the Beggar's Sect help me with growing stronger and developing my Martial Art? Can you provide me with learning and growth resources when it comes to Martial Art techniques in specific fields like mental techniques, and assassination techniques? Can you procure information on powerful esoteric substances such as primordial seed?"