

Martial Unity 1381

Chapter 1381: Unite

"But what can we do?" One chairman sighed. "Our organizations are falling apart."

"We can't afford to compete with each other." Another remarked. "No, we can't even afford to operate separately anymore."

That was a strange remark. "What do you mean?"

"I'm saying that we must merge our organizations into one." The man resolutely declared, sending a wave of surprise across the many human leaders. "Rather, we must dissolve our respect assassination organizations and create a single brand new one from scratch. By pooling our remaining resources, inventory, territory, and manpower, we can sustain the assassination supply market. We can own it! We can rule the Shadow Isles together."

This radical idea would have been preposterous to suggest in the past and would have earned him the scorn of everybody in the room.

Yet this time, everybody remained silent in consideration. Their circumstances had deteriorated to such a degree that even such a radical idea seemed rather tame in comparison.

"There are some shortcomings but...it is not without merit." One man remarked.

"The fact of the matter is that there is a massive demand for assassination services in the Derschek Region." The man boldly continued. "The Voidreaper does not change that. However, due to the decrease in the number of Martial Artist assassins, especially Martial Seniors, supply of assassination services has grown scarcer. Which means we can charge significantly more for every commission. Our profit margins will skyrocket. If we merge into a single organization, then we will be able to maintain prices as high as we need them to be without having to compete with each other for prices."

This was true. The fact that the market could very easily switch from purchasing any one of them and purchase from their competitors had always been one of the biggest reasons that each of them had to be careful about their prices.

This was no longer true if there was only one assassination supplier in the Shadow Isles. They could regulate the prices however they liked without any conflicting considerations.

That was why many of them were seriously considering the option. Right now, their greatest priority was damage mitigation. As long as they could mitigate the damage by the Voidreaper, they could slowly work on developing their assassination industry from scratch.

They just needed to make sure that they had a good foundation under them.

All of the human officials continued to discuss the plan as they slowly established a skeletal structure for their new singular organization. By the end of the meeting, all of the leaders of the various assassination organizations had come to a unanimous agreement on the new initiative.

"The three of you are also important to our plans." One of them informed the three remaining Martial Seniors that had chosen to stay back while the others didn't. "You will be the pillars of our new organization. You must become the new pillars of the assassination sector of the Shadow Isles."

The three of them nodded, taking their roles seriously. Inwardly, they gloated at their peers who had departed, allowing them to take such a central role.

The meeting concluded. All of the members left the meeting in a hurry. They had a lot of work to do, after all.

It wasn't easy creating a brand-new organization that was effectively the fusion of many other smaller organizations. A lot of matters and tasks had to be completed and fulfilled before they could succeed at this grand undertaking.

They would also have to flesh out the details across numerous meetings, tackling matters such as division of power and hierarchy, efficient and effective assimilation of the workforces of the various organizations, and most importantly their own positions within the new organization.

In the meantime, word of yet another wave of Martial Seniors emigrating spread across the Shadow Isles. It did not take an intelligence agency to figure out that fact.

This instantly cut away the confidence that many Martial Squires and Apprentices had in the Shadow Isles. Although the Voidreaper had yet to target Squire-level and Apprentice-level assassins, they knew that they would be massacred if he ever did.

And if he did, it would be too late to run away then.

In the following week, many of them, too, left the Shadow Isles, leaving the assassination supply market in a greater predicament than it had ever been since the dawn of the market when the Silent Shadow announced that she was joining the Shadow Isles.

It was an unprecedented event in the region, drawing attention from not just all over the Derschek Region but also beyond.

It was said that King Hermen of the Varion Kingdom in the Derschek Region, one of the greatest customers of the Shadow Isles had actually gone as far as to file a complaint against the Voidreaper to the Panamic Martial Federation for bullying Lower Realm Martial Artists while being a Martial Master.

"Goofy." Rui shook his head, amused. "They don't actually think I'm a Martial Master, do they?"

"No, they're just hoping to inconvenience you in some way." Professor Carl replied. "King Hermen got to power and maintains said power by relying on the Shadow Isles. You are a source of great inconvenience to him."

"I see. Makes sense." Rui nodded. "Will this inconvenience me in some way?"

"No. The Panamic Martial Federation does not intervene lightly." The professor remarked. "More importantly, the pieces of the assassination sector are planning to group up and rise as one. How do you plan to deal with this?"

"They are at their most vulnerable now," Rui replied as he calmly analyzed the information. "Their assassin member count has all plummeted considerably, they are unable to fulfill commissions that they have already accepted. It's going to make them bleed when they refund and compensate unless they want to shatter their credibility and earn the ire of many powers in the Derschek Region. They are just

barely hanging on after the mass exodus. Merging is actually a really good idea, probably the only one that saves them."

"And yet..." Rui narrowed his eyes. "...It will fail. Because I won't allow it to succeed."

Chapter 1382: Race

"The sooner I land a death blow, the likelier that they will be unable to recuperate. If I act after this new united organization is created and settled in, then eradicating the assassination sector will be that much harder." Rui keenly concluded. "What's the timeline for the development of this new organization?"

"About two weeks." Professor Carl. "That is abnormally fast, but they are aware that they don't have much time left before everything completely unravels and falls apart. They're choosing decisiveness over caution, they can't really afford the luxury of the latter at the moment."

"Hm... It's a shame because that's a tad bit insufficient." Rui winced a little. "Manageable though. I'd need to start making preparations immediately. Are they holding a sort of inauguration ceremony?"

"Just a small announcement speech. They're not big on ceremony, you see."

"Well, are the three Martial Seniors who are sticking around going to be there?"

"Well, yes." Professor Carl replied. "Why?"

"That's perfect," Rui smirked. "I need to go, I have preparations to make."

Two weeks was barely enough time to make super-solid predictive models, it was actually a day short. But Rui was sure he could make do with that slight inadequacy.

He needed to get to work immediately.

In all the reports that he had gotten from the Beggar's Sect, none of them talked about any measures taken to protect the three Martial Seniors from the Voidreaper, aside from temporarily prohibiting them from any operations in the Derschek Region.

'Ah, I see, they think I'm working only in the Derschek Region since I only assassinate in the Derschek Region.' Rui mused. 'Well, they're up for a nasty surprise.'

He needed to turn the Shadow Isles into a place that was truly dangerous to the assassins that it held. And he was going to accomplish that by violently killing all three Martial Seniors.

In front of everybody.

He didn't mind if a fight broke out. That was actually desirable. He needed to cause as much damage to as many unsuspecting assassins and others involved in the assassination industry.

He needed to show them.

Show them what would happen if they continued to remain a part of the sector.

Thankfully, he was a Martial Senior. Causing harm was a specialty he excelled at. The full power of a Martial Senior could do untold damage to a region across a fight. Furthermore, this would be collateral damage, thus the Panamic Martial Federation would have no issue either.

The restrictions that Martial Seniors faced were against active, intentional, and unprovoked hostility against Martial Artists of the Lower Realms. It did not aim to hamper Martial Seniors in pursuing their own peers by also prohibiting collateral damage.

Rui's plan was simple.

Assassinate as many as he could, kill the remaining in a fight. He was not too bothered by the outcome either.

Even a partial success would still most likely accomplish the goal. Even a single assassination would be crushing, because it would mean that Rui could assassinate them even in their own domain of power.

Pursuing the other two and causing mass damage was something that would forever crush any sense of trust, reliance, and dependability of the Shadow Isles. It would display just how weak and vulnerable.

However, this was only as long as he could prepare as much as he possibly could in the next fourteen days.

'Ah, I should warn the Beggar's Sect to withdraw its agents from the Shadow Isles for the time being.' Rui mused.

He did not want to inadvertently harm the Beggar's Sect's people, potentially souring his relationship with his new business partner. Thankfully, they could leave the Shadow Isles without revealing their identities since many people were already leaving, making it easy for them to blend in.

The only issue left was if he could only assassinate one was forced to confront the remaining two.

"Manageable..." Rui murmured.

They were not as weak as Senior Jeanno, and there were two of them. On the other hand, his dominance over the man was extremely high. Not only because he started off at a particularly higher level within the Senior Realm than normal Martial Seniors did, but also because the VOID algorithm was too powerful.

As long as he could form one on both of them, he could potentially defeat both of them at the same time.

Killing three Martial Seniors at once while damaging the Shadow Isles was the best way to completely destroy the assassination sector to its very core. It was already in a very precarious situation, and this would be no different from a death blow.

One good part was that it wasn't as though the three Martial Seniors had great teamwork or anything of the sort.

No. They just happened to be the only three who had decided to stay when everybody else was gone. They didn't have great teamwork which increased Rui's chances of successfully defeating both of them.

Furthermore, the fact that they were primarily covert assassins rather than head-on fighters also worked in his favor. This gave him a solid advantage over them since he was very much specialized for fighting more than he was at assassination.

He had his work cut out in front of him. He just needed to go all out and hope nothing went wrong.

Time passed as the executives and officials of the various organizations furiously worked day and night to get things done in time. Two weeks was an extremely rushed schedule, and they knew it.

It was actually impossible to get everything done even with an insane work schedule. However, they could get just about enough done to present a strong and renewed image to regain control of their depleting assassin reserve then, they would have taken the first step towards stabilizing their situation.

It helped that the Crina Foundation provided them with the support and aid they needed with its seemingly bottomless reserves of wealth and resources. Lady Crina earnestly supported them, allowing them to somehow make it past the hurdles they were beset by.

Soon enough, two weeks passed.

Chapter 1383: Speech

The assassination organizations of the Shadow Isles worked furiously in the span of two weeks as they continued to form the foundations of a new organization. Months of work were either crammed into the span of two weeks or were skipped as the basics of an organization came together.

One of their biggest problems was that the remaining assassins in the Shadow Isles had largely lost their faith and trust in the place as a place where they could make the most of their services while looking for the Silent Shadow, while also selling their services within the giant assassination market.

This problem was even more acute than the Voidreaper himself.

There needed to be something tangible that they could do to regain their grasp over the assassin populace, and pooling together the strengths of their collapsing organizations was their only way forward.

Only two weeks later, they had managed to get just enough done to pull themselves together enough for a strong face to show to the Shadow Isles and the Derschek Region.

Thankfully, the fact that they had an intimate understanding of not just their own organizations but also their former rival organizations made it easier for everyone to come together and make a transition that was a lot smoother than the challenges one would have expected from such an undertaking.

Although there was much to be refined, a functional organization was all that they needed at the moment.

A brief inaugural speed from the new organization was soon to be conducted, which was very much unlike an assassin organization, but the Shadow Isles was a place where the regular norms about assassins and never drawing attention were completely upended.

The many assassins on the island decided to attend before deciding whether they too ought to leave the Shadow Isles or not. If things were looking up, it could be worth it to stay.

The day drew closer until it was finally time. A simple podium set up with large banners and flags with the crest of the new assassination organization was established. The many organizations of across the Shadow Isles also changed their various crests to the crest of the new organization, surprising all of the assassins enough to be curious to attend the new announcement.

A large crowd had gathered, comprised of many assassins on the central island of the Shadow Isles, and an elaborate security detail was set up to ensure the safety of the key members that were presenting themselves.

They were surrounded by assassins, after all.

"I would like to begin by thanking all of you for bearing witness to an important moment in the history of the Shadow Isles. Welcome to the inauguration of the Shadow Association!" The speaker confidently spoke, exuding an aura of power.

The name caused many eyebrows to rise. It directly drew from the name Shadow Isles and the fact that it was an association indicated it was a gathering of many working together for common interests.

"As everybody is aware, a calamity has swept the Shadow Isles in the past few months. We have had many of our best Martial Senior assassins fall to an unknown assailant who has managed to set us back significantly. That is why we are here today." The speaker continued. "In order to revitalize the Shadow Isles, the various assassination organizations that once resided over the archipelago have together and pooled our enormous power in its totality to form a single assassination organization that is stronger than the sum of its parts. Stronger than we were when we were fragmented!"

That wasn't technically true, given the decline in the number of assassins, especially Martial Seniors, however, that was not the point.

"No longer will there be a waste of resources in competing with each other. No, these resources will be used to revitalize the assassins of the Shadow Isles. We will strive to ensure that the catastrophes of the past will not shake us as much as they did the first time. However, while these are catastrophes for the assassination industry at large, they are not necessarily curses for each of the various assassins in the Shadow Isles."

The speaker gave the various assassins in the crowd a knowing smile. "In reality, the demand for assassination services has not reduced even in the slightest. The vast consumer market of the Derschek Region still exists. What had changed, however, is the fact that the number of available assassins to fulfill the demand has gone down. That means that those remaining are that much more valued and important than they were ever before. All of you are that much more significant than before!"

That declaration drew the interest of the various assassins who had gathered. It was certainly true, and it gave them a pretty solid reason to stick around rather than pack their bags when things were looking up for them personally, even if not so good for the Shadow Isles as a whole.

While it didn't singlehandedly wipe away all of their concerns, it did make them feel more secure about the decision to stick around.

"In the two waves of emigration, we have seen a steady incline in the average commission fee for an assassination." The man continued. "According to even our most conservative estimates, the number will continue to incline until it is at least triple the value that it is at the moment."

That certainly was pleasant to hear as well. And while it did make progress, it wasn't enough to alleviate all their concerns. At some point, the Shadow Association needed to address the elephant in the room, one way or another.

The officials of the assassination industry were clever enough to recognize that.

"Of course, many of you must be wondering what our solution is to the crisis that has swept the Shadow Isles." The man continued. "Many of you must be concerned with this matter more than anything else. Rest assured, we have a solution at hand. A solution that can satisfy all parties and conflicts of interest."

That drew the interest of all the listeners.

Chapter 1384: King

The official of the Shadow Association claimed that there was a solution that could satisfy all the parties at hand. That was rather hard to believe for most listeners, given that the Voidreaper seemed to bear some sort of grudge against the Shadow Isles.

Yet the speaker appeared confident.

"The hierarchy of assassins in the Shadow Isles is dependent on the strength of the various assassins within the sector. Better assassins make better money, power, influence, and living. They also have

greater prestige." The speaker explained. "You might be wondering why I'm explaining something that is so basic and well-known to all of you who are a part of the Shadow Isles and have been for quite some time."

They undoubtedly were. No one was sure where he was going with this.

"While all of you know this. Someone who isn't a part of the Shadow Isles may very well not know it." The man explained. "Someone like the Voidreaper."

The name mulled in the air like the calm before a storm. No one was sure what was coming.

"An assassin with their skills is an extremely powerful one. There is no doubt to anybody that the Voidreaper is a powerful assassin of perhaps the highest caliber within the Senior realm. There is no doubt about that." The representative of the Shadow Association continued. "Thus, we invite the Voidreaper to join us, and ascend the throne of the Shadow Association as the Assassin King!"

A ripple of shock spread through the audience. None of them expected that the Shadow Association would go down such a route and try and recruit the very assassin that had caused them such a headache, to begin with.

It was almost shameless on their part considering the suffering that the Voidreaper had put them through.

Yet at the same time, it was completely grounded and highly practical.

They were not in a position to fight back against the Voidreaper. They hadn't been in a position to fight the Voidreaper even when the Shadow Isles was in its prime. with dozens of Senior-level assassins.

What were they going to do against him now? They were much smaller and weaker and had only three Martial Seniors left.

Conflict against him was fundamentally a bad idea. Instead, they chose to woo him with incentives and have him join them. That was the idea that the various leaders within the association decided to bet all their chips on.

That was why they offered him a title as extravagant as the Assassin King!

It was a rather strong attempt to kiss his ass as well as they could. None of them actually gave a damn about the Martial Seniors that had fallen anymore. The past was the past.

These individuals were money-driven businessmen. They had come to the Shadow Isles because they smelled the potential for profit in the archipelago. With some help from the Crina Foundation, they managed to set up incredibly profitable organizations that sold assassinations or served as a broker between clientele and assassins.

They hated the Voidreaper for killing their profits, but once the realization that he could bring them even more profits set in, they were more than willing to forget their grudges as long as he joined them.

The Martial Seniors who were part of the security detail had grim and severe expressions on their face. They had been informed ahead of time and had even thrown a bit of a tantrum, but the decision was finalized.

They could either live with it or leave.

Or die.

Ultimately, they chose to stick around. Being the only Martial Senior assassins still remaining meant that they would be forgoing enormous benefits that came from being in demand if they chose to leave.

None of them wanted to leave just when it was the best time in the market to be a Martial Senior. The only downside was the Voidreaper hunting them, but even that would go as long as this plan went through, which is why they tolerated it.

"The position of Assassin King comes with many benefits and positives." The representative of the Shadow Association spoke with great confidence. "There are far too many to go into this speech but rest assured it comes with unrivaled status, privileges, benefits, wealth, authority, and opportunities. As the most powerful Senior-level assassin in the Derschek Region we invite the Voidreaper to join the Shadow Association and take on the mantle of Assassin King, a title given only to the strongest assassin in the Shadow Isles!"

Many become keenly aware in regards to what the representative is doing at the moment.

He was speaking directly to the Voidreaper. There was no contact between the Shadow Isles and the Voidreaper, thus they didn't have a way of reaching out to him. This was essentially a public address directly to the Voidreaper rather than the audience.

They were hoping that he was willing to put aside his continuous targeting of the assassination industry and ascend the throne to take over it that they had created just to please him.

To the many assassins, this actually had a solid plan of working. For if they were in the Voidreaper's stead, they would have accepted the offer in a heartbeat. There was no question to it.

"The Crina Foundation has also supported this initiative as one of our greatest partners and allies, and has agreed to prioritize the Assassin King's interest in the search for the Silent Shadow." The representative continued. "Not only will the Assassin King reign over the Shadow Association but also over his peers."

The man gestured to the three Martial Seniors behind him. Just as he was about to continue, he heard a sound.

A noise that interrupted his flow.

A noise that came from behind him.

THUD

A wave of shock flashed over the audience before him as he turned around to see what all the commotion was about. His eyes widened in shock as he beheld the corpse of a Martial Senior, collapsed some distance behind him.

The many Martial Artists in the audience could sense it.

He was dead.

No one knew how.

But everyone knew who.

All hell broke loose as the Voidreaper struck again.

Chapter 1385: Finale

Rui was amused.

No really.

He was truly amused.

He had to admit that the offer to make him Assassin King was probably the best move that they could have made. He had wondered exactly what the plan of the Shadow Association was.

Apparently, the Shadow Association had taken the most extreme and absurd of precautions to hide their intentions for this one speech not even the Beggar's Sect had managed to get him a copy of the speech ahead of time the way that they normally did.

This was the first time that he himself had heard of this. After having a good hearty laugh in response, he could see the merits of the plan and why it was a good idea on their part.

Unfortunately for them, he didn't give a damn about wealth. He didn't feel much even when he became equal to a billionaire on Earth in terms of assets. He simply didn't care about money.

He didn't care much about any of the other things that would come with being an Assassin King.

That was why, while it wasn't a bad plan, it simply was ineffective against Rui. They lacked a real understanding of what their tormentor was like, which is why they didn't know he didn't care.

Of course, in their defense, it was unexpected that he would be completely unmoved by any of these benefits. In their experience, the only assassins who didn't care were the loyal types who had already dedicated themselves to serving a master.

The Voidreaper hadn't struck them as being associated with any powerful force. Thus they had hoped that he would be moved by their offer.

But he wasn't.

And, he had just found a good opportunity to demonstrate that he hadn't.

He took aim as the man continued rattling on about the benefits of the Assassin King before inhaling deeply and activating his Martial Heart. He was so far away from the speech podium that he had decided to take a shot from another island entirely.

He activated Pathfinder as the ODA System booted up within his Mind Palace. he carefully expanded his senses as far as he could piling in all the relevant data into the ODA System before calculating the trajectory of the projectiles as an output.

THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM!

The three sound pulses of different speeds and frequencies flew toward his target at incredible velocities, crossing the distance between himself and his target in a matter of seconds.

His victim experienced Death's Sympathy for the first time.

It was also his last time, coincidentally.

The man's eyes hollowed out as the life within them dissipated. His corpse went limp before falling forward, crashing into the ground.

THUD

It was so shocking that it even disrupted the speech. The representative of the Shadow Association looked horrified when he realized what had happened. The brilliant plan that he and his colleagues had cooked up excitedly had crashed and burned in the worst conceivable way possible.

Yet it was too late.

Rui had already launched himself into action, shooting from the location that he had perched himself in, heading straight towards the inauguration ceremony in a flash.

In just a dozen seconds, he had already arrived, crashing into the disrupted ceremony.

BOOM!!!

The entire island rumbled from his landing. The sheer raw power of a Martial Senior came into full display had a gigantic hemispherical crater emerged at his crash sight, spanning dozens of meters in diameter, completely annihilating the bedrock at the site of the crash.

The loss of property and life was immense. Yet Rui didn't care about the deaths of people who spent their lives profiting from mass murder.

In fact, he was grateful.

'If not for the fact that all of you are quite scummy, I would not be able to commit the atrocities that I am about to.' He mused as his eyes shot towards the two Martial Seniors.

They burned with murderous rage. Their Martial Hearts had already erupted in full power.

They didn't even care anymore.

In fact, they were glad that things had been forced to unfold this way. Bowing down to the Voidreaper after the humiliation they suffered was painful, but they didn't have too much of a choice.

Now, they got to fight back and didn't have much of a choice either since the path of peaceful resolution had already been ruined.

That was they emptied their minds of all thought.

They beheld their tormentor for the first time. A masked Martial Senior with a Martial Heart dimmer than their own.

"YOU DARE APPEAR IN FRONT OF US!" They roared as their Martial heart blazed with energy.

A maelstrom of power and bloodlust erupted from the three of them.

It washed over everything.

The Shadow Isles seemed to quiver as the full might of the Senior Realm bloomed.

Countless humans across the Shadow had already fainted.

Martial Apprentices shook, struggling to maintain their wits. Martial Squires gritted their teeth as they escaped, fearful for their lives.

None of them wanted to experience the wrath of the Senior Realm!

And yet, that was a possibility that was outside their control.

"ARGH!" The two remaining Senior assassins of the Shadow Realms leaped at Rui simultaneously at incredible speeds. The sheer velocity that they had launched themselves into incinerated the air with friction.

One lunged at him with twin sabers, the other rushed forward with knuckle fists.

And yet;

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH

Rui gently shifted and curved, avoiding their every attack with the simplest of efforts.

As if he knew when and where they were to be.

His mind rushed into action behind his calm eyes, predicting their every move with surgical accuracy and countering with the best possible maneuver at hand.

A grace unlike anything that the two assassins had seen in the Senior Realm accompanied his every movement.

Yet, he wasn't content with merely defense and evasion.

BAM!

His fist crashed into one of them, flinging him away, while he evaded the sabers of the other, before pirouetting through the weaving blades of his opponent and clasping the man's shoulders.

BOOM!

A powerful throw flattened him to the ground leaving him without an opponent for a moment.

"Come." Rui calmly took his stance once more.

The two assassins gritted their teeth as they realized the caliber of a combatant that they were dealing with.

Chapter 1386: Outcome

The battle momentarily paused.

For a moment, nobody moved.

The two assassins got a good look at the Voidreaper for the first time. It was actually quite bizarre, for he was not as they envisioned him.

They envisioned a grizzled veteran assassin, someone who had been around for many decades or so.

And yet, the man before them was definitely on the younger side. All this time, they had been fearing a man who was most certainly not a veteran assassin. That just made them feel worse. To think that they had been bullied so hard by someone who was clearly their junior based on his body and Martial Heart.

And yet, they didn't dare underestimate him because of that. Had he not killed their peer right in front of them?

Furthermore...

'He's strong.' Senior Mayneth narrowed his eyes as took a stance with his twin sabers. 'I don't understand. But somehow he is casually outdoing us despite having a younger Martial Body and Martial Heart. It's not like we're out of our prime or anything like that either.'

'He dealt without attacks with less than a third the effort and power.' Senior Friken shaped his hands into knuckle fists.

Although they would have liked more time to take this slowly, Rui did not spare them more than a moment.

BAM BAM BAM!

He lashed out forward exchanging a flurry of blows with the striking-oriented Martial Senior, cleanly bypassing the man's defenses while evading the saber wielder.

"Rgh!" Senior Friken grimaced as Rui's attacks curved past the chinks in his defense, landing on his vital spots. His own attacks cleanly missed Rui even as he simultaneously evaded the saber wielder.

WHOOSH!

Senior Friken avoided a blow from Rui, swerving to the right.

And yet...

BAM!

A kick had already arrived at his new location, flinging him away.

WHOOSH!

Rui leaped back as he evaded a series of swings from the saber wielder. Although weapons were not as deadly in Martial Artist battles as they were in human battles, he still did not want the blade to pierce his skin given that it could very well be poisoned.

The best way to handle weapons was to bypass their optimal range. Weapons usually offered a lot of lethality, but they generally made the wielder more inflexible in combat.

Blades generally had only a meter or two of optimal combat range. Furthermore, they had more openings than unarmed humans did.

WHOOSH!

Rui narrowly evaded a double swing, spinning to the side as he managed to bypass the sword.

BOOM!

He launched a powerful blow onto the man's ribs, launching him away as the very ground around them shook from the impact.

Senior Friken appeared behind Rui simultaneously, looking to catch him off-guard as he launched his most powerful attack.

"DIE!" An immensely powerful double-fist thrust shot forward, aiming for a vital pressure point on Rui's back. Each step he took shook the ground around them violently as his attack brimmed with power.

And yet...

WHOOSH!

The man's eyes widened as his attack crashed into an empty image.

A feint.

BOOM!

Rui's fist crashed into his unguarded solar plexus, landing a crippling blow that left him reeling.

Yet he wasn't done.

BAM BAM BAM!!

Rui continued to pummel with blow after blow as they unerringly ignored his guard crashing into his vitals one after the other. Attacks that should have been weaker than they were felt heavy and powerful as Rui managed to make the most out of them, producing impacts that felt heavy because of the accurate timing and placement.

BOOM!

A powerful kick crashed into the man's skull cleanly. A wave of dizziness flooded his consciousness as he staggered. Yet just before Rui could even land a finishing blow;

WHOOSH!

He somersaulted backward, evading incredibly swift swings from the saber wielder, landing behind him.

CLASP!

His body coiled around the man's as he cleanly got into a chokehold that crushed against the man's carotid arteries. Senior Mayneth immediately tried cutting Rui with his sabers, and yet...

BZZZT!

A small current ran through his body, inducing a paralytic effect that hampered his output. Rui's legs pulled against the man's arms, refusing to allow him to complete a swing. He sent a shock into his own body in a particular manner, activating Hypertrophic Surge.

"...!" Senior Mayneth's eyes started bleeding based on the sheer pressure that Rui was exerting on his neck. He could not breathe, nor was his head receiving any blood. He struggled with all his might, yet Rui had had him completely immobilized.

In circumstances where the arm couldn't swing, sabers were entirely useless. That was why Rui had waited until he could create circumstances where the weapon was ineffective. They had gone from assets to liabilities.

Rui didn't let go, not even when he saw Senior Friken coming in for an attack.

"LET GO!" The man bellowed as he launched a flurry of attacks on Rui's immobile figure.

Yet Rui simply tolerated them, incurring damage. He wanted to finish the job with Senior Mayneth, coiling even harder than before, so much so that the man couldn't even let out even the slightest sound.

It was only after Rui felt his heart stopping that he let the man go, tossing his corpse aside.

"Ouch..." Rui murmured as his body was covered all over with ugly bruises and deep cuts that had begun healing. "You sure did a number on me. But..."

His eyes glinted with amusement as he glanced at Senior Friken. "You couldn't take me out."

He activated Weaving Blood, instantly healing all of his wounds.

Senior Friken gritted his teeth. He had bombarded Rui with his attacks one after the other, inflicting a lot of damage, but it had instantly been undone. Furthermore, he didn't even have any support from his teammate this time.

There was only one option left.

He turned around and began sprinting away at top speed. Rui inhaled deeply as he activated the Void Pathfinder technique, taking aim before releasing three sound waves back to back with Transverse Resonance.

Death's Sympathy unfolded, flying straight towards its target.

THUD

The man collapsed to the ground, dead.

Chapter 1387: Presenceless

For the first time in many years, there were no Martial Seniors on the Shadow Isles. They had all been assassinated one after the other, while the rest had chosen to leave the Shadow Isles forever.

Rui heaved a sigh as he glanced around them. The sheer damage that they had spread throughout the battle had been immense, it would take the Shadow Isles a long time to recover from this if it ever did.

Now that he had finally accomplished his goal, he only felt relief.

'Well, I still have some stuff to do.' Rui mused as he activated his Mind Mask. He created the most powerful mask he could, exuding an abysmal amount of power within the Senior Realm as he radiated as much bloodlust as he could.

"AAAAAH!"

"Monster! It's a monster!"

Hordes of people immediately began leaving the island one after the other. Martial Apprentices dove into the ocean, Martial Squires sky-walked away as they mass-abandoned the Shadow Isles. None of them wanted to stick around a place that was so chaotic and dangerous.

It wasn't too long before the Shadow Isles were devoid of Martial Artists entirely.

Rui stood in place, glancing around. 'Now what?'

He wasn't sure what to do now that he had fulfilled his goals to try and pass the Silent Shadow's implicit test.

Perhaps he should just wait around to see if she stops by.

"Meh. I don't have time to waste." Rui shook his head as rose to the sky, reactivating his Martial Heart. A Senior-level aura spread across the island as the glowing redlines streaked across his body from his heart. A surge of power empowered every cell in his body.

"If she isn't here, then I don't want to waste my time." Rui mused. "I'll just confirm it and then leave."

He inhaled strongly, causing a brief vacuum of air that deprived the Shadow Isles momentarily, before using his most powerful long-range attack; Transverse Resonance.

This time, he even went as far as to try to reach the sixth tier, which meant releasing an attack that was six times as powerful as his normal Sonic Bullets. It was particularly difficult and even time-consuming, not something that he could use in the middle of combat.

His mind not only had to calculate the trajectory to the island with the pathfinder technique but also accurately stack six sound pulses on top of one another in perfect harmony to achieve constructive superposition and resonance.

'If you're not here, then don't mind if I sink this entire island,' Rui murmured as he gazed down at the central island of the Shadow Isles.

THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM!

Six powerful Senior-level attacks flashed downward, quickly overlapping into the most powerful attack that Rui had ever conjured up, heading straight toward the center of the island.

As long as he did enough damage to the core of the island, he was sure to destroy it as a result. Truly eliminating everything that stood in the way of not being accepted as a disciple. Worthy of an assassin.

WHOOSH!

Rui's eyes widened as his attack suddenly disappeared before it hit the island, not leaving so much as a scratch on its target.

"Alright, you've made your point. Sheesh." The voice of an elderly woman from behind him remarked.

Chills went up his spine as his senses intensified and scanned his surroundings.

He was shocked by what he sensed.

No, he was shocked by what he couldn't sense.

He couldn't sense anything. He turned his head slowly, glancing behind him.

"They say you should never meet your idols." Skia Crina remarked. "Perhaps you should have adhered to that wisdom."

He stared at her.

He could see her, yet none of his senses could pick up on her. Not even Reimannian Echo could detect her existence, yet he was still somehow able to see her.

It was as though she didn't exist.

And yet, she clearly did, he could clearly see that.

'No...She's allowing me to see that.' Rui narrowed his eyes.

"Then again..." She murmured as she sized Rui up. "I'm no idol of yours. For you are no assassin."

"I knew it," Rui murmured. "Area Crina... Reina Cara."

"I enjoy teasing people, you see." She smirked mischievously. "It's not even that hard to figure out. And yet... not once has a single person confronted me despite many having noticed. They all allowed themselves to get lost in everything Area Crina offered them, never once realizing that they would never reach me that way."

"You're revealing yourself to everybody if you're going to dispel a Senior-level attack and then sky-walk out of nowhere, you know?" Rui muttered, not knowing how to respond.

It felt surreal.

"Ah, don't worry about that." She glanced down. "I knocked everybody in the Shadow Isles unconscious before your attack reached the island."

Rui's eyes widened with shock as he glanced down at the Shadow Isles, expanding his senses across the island. Every single remaining person was conscious. These were non-Martial Artists who hadn't managed to get off the island as easily as the Martial Artists did.

They had all been knocked unconscious without exception.

'She knocked all of them out before my attack landed before dispelling my attack?'

That was absurd. Rui stared at her in disbelief.

"Besides... that's just a precaution, only you can see me ." She remarked. "Only you are allowed to."

Rui simply stared at her.

She not only did not possess any aura, she didn't even possess any material presence. She may as well have been a ghost. A ghost that only he could see. She could kill him any time and he would never see it coming.

It was a terror that was different from what he experienced with Master Uma.

"Let's change places shall we?" She patted Rui's arm.

Suddenly, they had returned back to the land, inside a building. He wasn't even surprised, even Master Deivon did such things, it appeared that Martial Masters was a different breed entirely.

She sat down at a table baring her alias, before gesturing at a seat on the other side. "Have a seat."

Chapter 1388: Commence

Rui wasn't sure what to make of his circumstances. He hadn't expected his first meeting with the Silent Shadow to go this way.

He expected a dark hooded figure with a brooding air about her and a severe tone. After all, all the intelligence from the Beggar's Sect indicated that she had been a madwoman who was hellbent on solving all her problems by killing.

Yet she seemed remarkably... not insane.

"I have to say, I appreciate the effort." She smirked. "Thanks to you I've had the most interesting three months. You've brightened my days, I thought I would die of boredom in those stuffy boardroom meetings about the fake progress on finding the Silent Shadow that I would cook up to appease those idiots."

"You're welcome, I guess," Rui replied cautiously.

Being in the presence of a Martial Master put much more pressure on him than when he was a Martial Squire, ironically enough. This was because he instinctively understood a greater portion of their true power.

One who had reached the clouds understood the depths of the sky better than one who had never gotten off the ground. Despite having broken into the Senior Realm and even started off much stronger than most of his peers, he understood how vastly she dwarfed him.

"What's the matter? Scared of a retired old grandmother?" She remarked sarcastically. "Young men these days aren't much, it seems."

Rui simply stared at her.

"It's a shame you're not as immature as others your age." She remarked. "Then again..."

Her eyes turned towards him with a glint of interest. "There are no Martial Seniors your age."

Rui narrowed his eyes.

Had she figured out his identity?

"Martial Masters can learn much about a person with a single glance. More than you would think." She remarked. "It would behoove you to keep that in mind."

He knew. He had learned that lesson the hard way.

"Now then, enough chitchat." She leaned forward, planting her elbows on the table. "You wish to learn from me, yes?"

Rui nodded. "That is why I came here. I wish to become more capable in the art of killing."

She stared at him for a moment.

Rui found himself lost in the unfathomable depths that seemed to lay within her eyes.

"There are two kinds of people who come to me." She remarked. "Assassins...and people who seek to kill."

She stared at Rui. "You are no assassin. Though you have done a better job at faking being a true assassin than actual assassins actually are. However, you are not an assassin."

Rui didn't disagree.

He was a warrior. Pursuing his Martial Path, pursuing Project Water, the ambition of being able to adapt to everything. Assassinations were, at most, a constituent if he was being generous.

"Which means you wish to kill." She continued. "Tell me. Who do you wish to kill? And more importantly...why?"

Rui narrowed his eyes as she broached a sensitive topic. "I wish to kill he who threatens to end my family."

"I'm glad you decided not to lie." She replied. "However, in pursuit of me, you have already sharpened your ability to kill."

Rui knew that that was true. He had become a much more capable killer on his own without requiring aid from anybody else.

However, there were limits to that. He had managed to make the most out of existing techniques, by fusing different principles and trying to target low-hanging fruits.

However, it would still help if he gained a powerful foundation from someone like the Silent Shadow.

"I have powerful enemies," Rui replied. "I can use some help."

"Hm," She considered his words. "Alright, I accept you as a pupil."

Just like that, he had accomplished what he came for. After six months of training, and another three months of rapid back-to-back assassinations, he had finally reached his goal.

And it happened just like that.

It happened so quickly, that he almost couldn't process it.

"Well..." Rui murmured. "Thanks."

"I have some rules." She replied. "No telling the Beggar's Sect that I am the Silent Shadow. You won't believe the absurd lengths I had to go through to evade being discovered by the Beggar's Sect. Honestly, those ruffians are far too annoying!"

She grumbled even as she casually revealed that she knew he had been in collaboration with them.

"I can't have you ruining years of building up this alias and disguise." She sighed.

"I accept that condition," Rui replied.

"You also cannot reveal that you were accepted as my pupil." She said. "If people find out, then everybody will try to pull the same stunt. It will be annoying to distinguish genuine assassins from people who are trying to copy you."

"Understood, I'll keep that in mind as well." Rui nodded. "Anything else?"

"No, you can do whatever you want as long as you keep these two things in mind. Of course, I will also help ensure that you do, it will directly hurt me if you don't, after all. Hmmm... I don't think I'm forgetting anything else, am I?"

Master Reina narrowed her eyes as she grew absorbed in thought.

'She seems like a bit of an airhead.' Rui mused.

It was not what he expected or imagined from the legendary Silent Shadow.

"Hm, that's about it. I think." She murmured. "I hope. Anyways, let's get started."

"With the training?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"No. With the sex." She sarcastically replied, furrowing her eyebrows. "Of course, it's the training. I have a new pupil and I need to whip you into shape so that you're worthy of being my pupil!"

"...Right. But where are we going to train?"

"Right here, of course." She replied as she stood up. "Why do you think I took over multiple districts and made it mine and mine alone? So that I would have a giant place all for myself. Follow me."

She walked briskly as Rui followed her with a skeptical expression. He could destroy the entirety of Area Crina with a single attack, he didn't see how he could train in here.

Chapter 1389: Theory

Rui wasn't sure what to make of his first meeting with Master Reina Cara. She had shattered his impression of the legendary Silent Shadow one that nearly everybody had formed about her.

Still, she was the real deal. Knocking out everybody in the Shadow Isles manually just before the attack struck as an additional precaution to make sure that nobody saw her was an absurd feat that Rui had trouble wrapping his mind around.

It was worth partaking in anything she had to offer for him as an assassin.

He followed her for quite a while within the vast infrastructure of the Area Crina organization before she finally reached an empty room.

In its center lay a hatch on the ground which she promptly opened with a breathing technique.

Rui's eyes widened as his senses peered into an enormous cavity underground that the hatch led down to. However, he hadn't been able to sense the cavity underground with his regular senses at all.

It wasn't that it was being jammed with anti-sensory esoteric substances, he would have been able to sense the jamming, his senses had previously sensed pure bedrock until she opened the hatch and a giant underground gravity was revealed.

"Incredible, isn't it?" She smirked.

"But how...?" Rui murmured.

"It's actually lined with an esoteric substance that, to the senses, 'acts' like bedrock." She explained.

"Anyone below a certain level who tries to sense the cavity will sense pure bedrock. It's being disguised

rather than concealed. You won't believe how difficult it was to create this cavity without anyone noticing, but it's the perfect place."

Rui's eyes narrowed as he grew immersed in thought. That was an incredible way of hiding something that big. He had a degree that covered esoteric material science thus he had heard of substances that warped one's perception of reality, however, this was his first time actually coming across them.

He followed her down the hole, sky-walking until they hit the ground.

"Tada." The elderly woman gestured with her arms. "What do you think?"

The underground cavity turned out to be a remarkably wide open space equipped with all kinds of esoteric machines as far as the eye could see. It was like a super training chamber.

"Quite incredible that you managed to get this done without the Beggar's Sect finding out." Rui nodded.

"Heh." She smirked with a hint of pride.

"So where do we begin?" Rui asked. "What kind of technique are you going to teach me?"

"Impatient, aren't you?" She tutted. "Before we begin with the training. I have several questions I have for you."

"Ask away."

"You already know the truth about the Master Realm, do you?" She asked with a knowing glance.

"No," Rui shook his head.

"Really?" She furrowed her eyebrows, confused.

"Yes."

"Hm, that's strange."

"Why would that be strange?" Rui sighed. "You're the first Martial Master I've met since breaking through to the Senior Realm."

She simply stared at him with her unfathomable eyes, peering into the depths of his. "Quite incredible."

"Will you inform about the breakthrough to the Master Realm?"

She stared at him for a few moments, before shaking her head. "No, I've decided against it for now. There are many things that I need to pass on to you while you're here, I can't have you being absorbed in such an important matter, I'll leave that burden for someone else."

"Right." Rui sighed. "What do you wish to pass on to me?"

"A proper foundation, you see." She remarked. "You have already developed a powerful assassination technique. However, that does not mean you are a solid assassin. You're closer to a one-trick pony who has yet to come across someone truly stronger than you. There's a lot more to the art of killing than having a powerful technique."

Rui furrowed his eyebrows. He knew that she wasn't wrong. Death's Sympathy hardly covered all bases as an assassin. He had a lot of gaping wide holes compared to assassins.

"Spending a week tailing your target from a distance while having musicians play songs with all kinds of notes near them to test the responses of their bodies to the sound..." She paused, glancing at him. "Do you really think you'll get to do that each time you want to kill a target? Particularly powerful, well-protected, and obscured targets? Hah, if only life were so convenient."

She paused for a moment. "Most powerful individuals wear clandestine protective gear based on esoteric technology that can protect them continuously. Martial Artists don't do that, of course, since

they generally don't need to, except in niche cases like yours. That was why you were able to get away with killing them continuously. Not only did none of them suspect that you were killing them with a truly esoteric Squire-level technique, but none of them had access to such protective gear even if they did come to know. It's quite rare and expensive to procure."

Rui narrowed his eyes. "That's news to me."

"That's because you haven't even gotten around to trying to kill someone powerful." She replied. "The point I'm trying to make is that you crafted the technique for these circumstances, and they work fine in these circumstances. But once circumstances change, your technique becomes less effective and practical. For one, you shouldn't underestimate the senses of Martial Seniors who are close to the peak of the Senior Realm, I would be surprised if you could get away with them what you did with the Shadow Isles."

She paused for a moment before continuing. "Assassination is not exclusively a field of Martial Art, it's a field of operations that involves much more than Martial Art. If you want to kill whoever you want to kill, you should develop the foundation of what it takes. Given how quickly you developed a powerful technique to kill the Martial Seniors of the Shadow Isles, you are adaptable enough to build upon that foundation to take out whoever you want, so that should be enough."

Rui nodded. "Alright then, where do we start?"

"Theory comes before practice. There are things that you need to know before we can begin."

Chapter 1390: Classification

Apparently, Master Reina took her duties of teaching him seriously. She put on a pair of spectacles, changing into a more formal attire while taking Rui to a classroom set-up.

"Now then," She remarked, pushing up her spectacles. "Let us begin. Please begin noting."

"I'll be fine."

"Very well, but I will not be pleased if you are unable to follow." She told him with an officious tone.

Rui sighed. "Do you really need to do all this?"

"What are you saying? I take my duties as a teacher very seriously!" She insisted, pushing up her spectacles.

"Right."

"Now then... What is assassination?" She asked, writing the word 'assassination' on the board.

"The field of killing."

"Very good." She nodded, drawing an arrow before writing down his response. "Now what is an assassination?"

"Any intended elimination of a target," Rui replied.

"Also correct." She nodded, writing that down. "Now... What is the difference between murder and an assassination?"

Rui considered the question for a moment. "Murder is unlawful killing, while assassination can be murder or not. There is a large intersection. Assassinations are generally murders that are authorized or commissioned, while murders alone are willful of the murderer's own intentions."

Following that logic, his killing of Chairman Deacon would fall under murder rather than assassination. He was not commissioned or authorized by any power, and he was doing it for his own person.

"You are not an assassin." She said, almost reading his thoughts. "Not by definition, anyway. You are still a worthier assassin than others in philosophy, but even the Martial Seniors of the Shadow Isles were your targets for your own personal gain. At most, you also fulfilled some debt to the Beggar's Sect I imagine."

She stared straight into Rui's eyes. "You are not an assassin. You are a murderer."

The words struck at Rui for some reason. It wasn't that he wasn't aware of the definition and how he technically fell under it, it was just something that that never really hit him or clicked the way it did when she bluntly told him.

It was almost as if he had subconsciously disassociated himself with murderers, but in reality, he was a textbook example of a murderer. Perhaps that was the reason she had started out with such a silly dive into the basics of the concepts surrounding killing. Perhaps she had sensed that he was subconsciously not facing the truth as it was.

Being around the Shadow Isles and constantly hearing about assassins and assassinations may have made it easier for him to avoid the association.

"Martial Artists kill." Rui shrugged. "It's the way of the world, especially the Martial World. Anyone who delves into this world knows the risks and still goes in, that's no different from consenting to the possibility of death as far as I am concerned."

"It's interesting you interpreted that as an accusation." Master Reina smiled. "Regardless, it is good to be cognizant of the truth."

Rui narrowed his eyes.

"Don't look at me like that. It's part of your training. Self-awareness is important to Martial Artists, I can promise you that. Also, it's a shame you didn't break down in guilt. That's always fun to watch." She smirked before returning to the whiteboard. "Now that we've gotten that out of the way, let us begin with an actual dive into the technicalities of assassinations. Assassinations can be divided into many categories based on certain parameters such as directness, range, and explicitness. A good assassin is capable of engaging in all of the categories since there will be times when you're forced to rely on only one of them..."

Rui listened as she continued adding more detail to the classification of assassinations, turning it from simple categories into more elaborate divisions.

Directness, range, and explicitness turned out to be among the most prominent parameters of classification.

Directness was a measure of how direct the cause of death of the victim of the assassin was. Did the assassin directly drive a knife into the victim's heart, causing them to die? Or did they cause a certain chain of actions that eventually led to the death of the victim?

Things such as poisoning food were one step removed from killing the victim. Manipulating circumstances or people to unfold in such a way that it led to the death of the victim was also several steps more elaborate than simply driving a knife into the victim's heart.

"Do such assassinations even happen enough to warrant creating a separate category?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"Of course." Master Reina nodded. "Many assassins rely on indirect assassinations. Whether it be poisoning one of the ingredients that would eventually be cooked to find its way into the victim's food. Or triggering calamity that would kill the victim. Or causing circumstances that would cause someone else to do the dirty work. There are advantages to relying on such indirect manners of assassination. Why don't you tell us what advantages such manners of assassinations have, for the sake of the class?"

Rui glanced around at the empty classroom, turning back to her. "Such forms of assassination can be much harder to prevent than direct assassinations. It is much more difficult to detect such an assassination because the assassin is so removed from the cause of death. Compared to simply guarding the target from a stabber, it is much more difficult to vet all the guards, to check all the food, to scout all the paths to ensure that there is nothing that can kill them."

She nodded, pleased. "And what are the disadvantages of such a form of assassination?"

Rui paused for a moment, before replying. "Just as its harder to prevent such an assassination, it's also harder to successfully pull off such an assassination. Because the assassin is further removed from the actual cause of death, there is a greater margin of error. It is possible that a victim may just decide to not eat food that happened to be poisoned, or not go down a path where a carefully planned set of events were meant to kill them. It surrenders initiative to fate, and various events and variables can cause the entire plan to go off-rails."