

Martial Unity 1481

Chapter 1481: High Grade

What they sensed shook them.

All of the human extractors: dead.

All of the Martial Apprentices: dead.

All of the Martial Squires had sustained injuries from merely the side effects of the collision.

Just like that, a titanic crater spanning a city had been formed.

At the epicenter stood a masked Martial Senior, kneeling on the ground with one knee. His fist was buried in the ground, right at the neck of a female corpse.

Right where her head should have been.

Without an active Martial Heart accelerating the metabolism of the osteoblast cells leading to a temporary hardening of bone while the Martial Heart was active, she could never have survived a powerful charged Senior-level blow to the skull.

That was not what shocked the Martial Artists into silence.

It was the fact that this Martial Senior had somehow approached the entire extraction squad without anyone ever noticing!

Not only did he approach the squad without a soul gaining so much even the tiniest hint of his existence, he somehow also got to the center. He got to the center and then wiped out the humans, the Martial Apprentices, and their chief sensor with a single attack.

The three Martial Seniors assigned to the security detail were stunned in silence for a fraction of a millisecond.

For just about a fraction of a millisecond, they simply stared with aghast expressions and dropped jaws.

Senior Genshin was the first to break out of his momentary shock.

Blood-curdling rage emerged from the depths of his heart.

His jaws gritted, generating flames from the sheer friction between his teeth.

His eyes reddened as his pupils sharpened in an inhuman manner.

"You..." His voice quivered with boundless fury. "You..."

His mouth opened, unleashing bellow that shook the very skies. "YOU DARE?!"

His Martial Heart blazed into action, and streaks of bright red flashed across his entire body, emerging from his heart.

His expression grew rabid as his feeble rationality was unable to contain his feral bloodlust.

The masked man glanced towards him. Yet he didn't look into the Senior Genshin's eyes.

It was the claws that had drawn his attention.

"Sharp," Rui murmured, glancing at the man's claws that were closer to sickles than nails.

The Martial Heart increased not just his sensory range, but also his accuracy and precision of his senses, allowing him to sense microscopically. Objects that were previously stationary appeared to be quivering ever so slightly to his senses.

Blades that were sharp appeared to be dull to his senses.

Yet when he inspected Senior Genshin's claws with his senses, it possessed a razor sharpness the likes of which he hadn't seen since becoming a Martial Senior. It was extraordinarily sharp, to the point of making standard-issue sharpness look like a blunt club.

Rui knew that if he let those claws hit him, it would be game over. Not even Nemean Blossom would be able to protect him with such sharpness amplified by the gargantuan raw power that the man clearly possessed.

The other two Martial Seniors had also activated their Martial Hearts, leaping at Rui. But alas, Rui was far too pragmatic.

WHOOSH!

He simply disappeared into thin air.

The three Martial Seniors widened their eyes, stunned.

It was almost as though he faded out of existence itself. Unlike before, they were fully focusing on him, and only him this time. The sum entirety of their conscious minds and senses were fixated on him.

Yet they were unable to so much as fathom his disappearance.

"Where is he...?" Senior Genshin's voice had been reduced to bestial snarls, quivering with rage.

"..." The two Martial Seniors regarded the high-grade Martial Senior with fear.

"WHERE IS HE?!" The man bellowed.

RUMBLE

The very land beneath shook with his fury.

"I can't sense him, sir," One of the Martial Seniors replied, mustering up some courage.

"USELESS!" Senior Genshin bellowed, swiping his claws in the man's direction.

SPLAT SPLAT SPLAT SPLAT SPLAT!

"...Eh?" The Martial Senior glanced down at the five deep gashes that had emerged on his chest out of nowhere.

Claws were limited to close range.

But apparently, nobody had informed Senior Genshin about that.

"FIND HIM!" The man bellowed.

"Sir..." The remaining Martial Senior swallowed nervously as she tried her best to not follow in her bleeding peer's steps. "It's already..."

It was already too late.

The words choked in her throat, but it was the truth. How were they supposed to track him at range when they couldn't detect his arrival and departure at close-range?

The fact that Senior Nereau, who possessed two grade-ten sensory techniques, was unable to sense the attack and warn people or make any kind of reaction should have been enough to demonstrate that this was not something that was within their tracking capabilities.

Thankfully, even the irrational human beast understood that they were helpless.

His teeth gritted as boundless fury and rage overtook him.

"Rgh!" He stomped his foot with frustration.

Yet his powerful Martial Heart was still active.

BOOOM!

It made the simple gesture yield an impact that shook the entire forest, sending ripples across the entire land and yielding an enormous crater that rivaled the one created by Rui.

"Yikes," Rui murmured as he gazed at the man from a distant mountain. "So this is the power of a high-grade Martial Senior."

This was the first time he had come across a high-grade Martial Senior, and even he had to admit that they were extraordinary.

In terms of combat parameters, Senior Genshin eclipsed and dwarfed him in every physical parameter. The offensive lethality of his attacks made Rui feel like a normal human. Not only did he possess an extraordinary amount of raw power, but he focused it through those ridiculous claws of his, on top of that, he could project those lethal attacks at range and make them manifest on his opponent.

His Martial Heart raged like an inferno, making Rui's look like a homely bonfire. Any sense of superiority that Rui may have had from his vastly superior rate of growth and progress disappeared.

The slightest mistake against that man, and he would die instantly.

Chapter 1482: Report

"...So to summarize. An attacker approached the extraction force, and killed Senior Nereau, wiping out all of the extractors and Martial Apprentices, before disappearing, and you weren't so much as able to catch him?"

Senior Zenshin's expression darkened. "...Yes, Master Haishi."

He was currently bowing his head, his expression crumpled with shame and frustration.

Before him was a screen that transmitted a remarkably high-quality feed, featuring the person he was speaking with. It was a level of communication technology that was extremely rare, given the sheer distance between the Kandrian Empire and the Gereign Region.

"I personally recommended you as a leader to Lord Carnil," Master Haishi's delicate expressions sharpened.

Senior Zenshin's expression crumpled even further.

"Your failure has affected me as well," She remarked. "However, there is nothing that can be done for the time being. I shall eventually arrive at the Gereign Region personally."

These words evoked a bit of surprise.

"Are you doubting my fitness?" Her eyes sharpened.

"I don't mean to question you, Master," Senior Zenshin hurriedly clarified. "However, the Hypnomaster..."

"He won't ever know that a Martial Master has arrived at his domain... After all, my stealth is perfect," She calmly declared. "It is said that the legendary Silent Shadow nearly succeeded in assassinating him. That means such measures are not ineffective against him."

"If you say so, then it must be true," Senior Zenshin bowed his head even further. "How long will it take to arrive?"

"Several matters need to be resolved before I head to the Gereign Region," She informed him. "Do not tarnish my reputation any further."

"...Yes Master," Senior Zenshin remarked.

"Cancel all harvesting operations until then," She replied. "Whoever this attacker is, if he could do it once, he can do it again. If you were unable to sense or repel him when you had Nereau on surveillance, then that means that he is mostly a high-grade Senior assassin, or potentially a peak-grade assassin. Though there are some issues with that conclusion as well."

"If he were a peak-grade assassin, then he would have no problems killing you and the other two," She calmly replied. "Yet he simply escaped. Either his objective was specifically Senior Nereau, which would mean his agenda is entirely unrelated to the Carnil Mafia, or he was unable to kill you. It is rather inconceivable that it could be anything else."

This made a lot of sense to Senior Zenshin. Killing the three Martial Seniors would definitely have been high on the agenda had he been able to, as long as it was the case that he was targeting their drug operation as a whole instead of Senior Nereau specifically.

"If that is the case...It would mean that this attacker is unable to fight off a high-grade Martial Senior and two mid-grade Martial Seniors," Senior Zenshin remarked. "Is it not overkill for a Martial Master like yourself to personally reside over this case?"

"Normally, you'd be correct," She remarked. "However, this operation is too important. Lord Carnil is displeased that it has been successfully sabotaged to such an extent. I will personally oversee it, and ensure that nothing else gets in the way."

"I see...it appears that I have disappointed Lord Carnil," Senior Zenshin heaved a deep sigh. "If that is the case, wouldn't a complete ceasing of all operations be a waste of time and resources?"

"You have already proved yourself incapable of protecting a large operation from the assassin even when you had Senior Nereau," Master Haishi narrowed her eyes.

"I was not referring to large operations featuring an extraction team accompanied by a security detail," Senior Zenshin continued. "I was talking about individual operations with only us Martial Seniors. If the assassin chose to withdraw then and there, then it would mean that he is unable to handle opponents of my caliber that easily. Thus we can still gather some yield even while we are waiting for your arrival."

"...I'll allow it. However, only within a certain depth into the forest. I won't allow for operations beyond a certain extent, it's too dangerous. The forest is filled with many dangers that can threaten even Martial Seniors," She remarked. "Keep an out for the assassin, and maximize the gains you make. We need as much of a narcotics supply as possible."

"Yes, Master," He bowed his head.

The conversation soon came to an end. Senior Zenshin gritted his teeth and clenched his fist. "It's all because of that bastard..."

He had worked hard for the past fifty years serving the Carnil mafia as one of the highest outer executives. It wasn't easy to get into the Inner Circle of the Carnil Mafia. It took both a lot of power and reliability as a Martial Artist to make it that far.

The Carnil Mafia had been expanding due to the brewing cold civil war in the Kandrian Empire. That gave a lot of opportunities to move up the ranks to an Outer Executive like himself.

However, now that was iffy, at best.

He knew from the way Master Haishi addressed him that he had suffered a major setback. Many years and decades of work had been put into question because of gigantic failure. He had many competitors who were just as driven and powerful aiming for the same goal who undoubtedly were looking a lot more alluring than himself.

All because of one fiasco.

A deep anger and hatred boiled up from deep within his heart. "I'll kill him."

He didn't know who the attacker was, but he knew he had to bring his head back, otherwise he would never be able to wash away this stain on his reputation. He immediately began planning about how he was going to take out this attacker.

He hoped it wasn't due to a personal grudge against Senior Nereau. He needed the man to return. He needed the man to attack him.

Only then would he have a chance to kill him. He knew that he wouldn't be able to find and kill him any other way.

Chapter 1483: Strategic Considerations

Rui heaved a sigh as he skimmed through a report that the Beggar's Sect had prepared for him. The report featured the result of his successful sabotage of the harvesting operation.

Apparently, he had pissed off the Carnil Mafia. That wasn't the objective, but it was an inevitable outcome. The Beggar's Sect reported that the Gereign base of operations had ceased all large-scale operations.

'Makes sense,' Rui mused.

There was no point in continuing large-scale operations when there were enemies who had demonstrated the proven ability to bypass all surveillance measures. It wasn't possible to build passive defenses against a Martial Senior, either.

Not for a moving squad in the middle of a forest. There were plenty of ways that solid stationary structures could be granted passive defenses at extremely high levels. There was a power that came with the sheer size and scale of infrastructure.

It was one reason Rui wanted to ensure that they didn't successfully build a base in the Great Forest of Hyponarak. They would be able to completely secure such a building even from Senior-level attacks.

The reason for this was that defensive civil engineering in this world was leaps and bounds beyond that of Earth. Despite being constructed out of Squire-level substances, a building could be engineered with special esoteric substances that could allow it to survive by spreading and diluting the power of a Senior-level attack across every square inch of the structure.

Once diluted enough, even Senior-level attacks could be reduced to the Squire Realm, which could then be withstood by the Squire-level materials.

This was why it was possible to construct large complexes and buildings that could withstand attacks from Martial Seniors, yet it was much harder to construct weapons and armors that could do the same. The much smaller space meant that the extensive engineering that allowed for structures to withstand attacks could not easily be applied to armor and weapons.

That was why the large scale operations had been scrapped by the Carnil Mafia. It was also why Rui couldn't just run around annihilating the infrastructure developed by the Carnil Mafia.

'Still, only forces from the Kandrian Empire can afford to spend so much on defensive measures for their infrastructure.' Rui snorted. 'Most nations can't dream about building anything that can withstand the onslaught of a Martial Senior.'

Perhaps it was because he was accustomed to dealing with forces where Martial Seniors were at their peak, but he had to remind himself that this was not the case when it came to the Kandrian Empire.

The Kandrian Empire was a continental powerhouse that had more than a thousand Martial Seniors. It only made sense that such a powerful nation possessed measures to defend against even the immense power of the Senior Realm.

'Forget about attacking their base.' Rui shook his head. 'That's suicide. I won't make it back alive if I dare try something like that.'

He knew his limits. There were still nine Martial Seniors left in the Gereign base of the Carnil Mafia, three of whom were high-grade. If the remaining two were as strong as Senior Zenshin, then attacking the base was something that would undoubtedly cause to his death.

As proud as he was of the Greater Phantomind Void, he knew that it was far from a universal get-out-of-trouble card. For one, it didn't improve his speed or his defenses, thus if a Martial Senior launched a powerful omnidirectional attack, then it would hurt him nonetheless.

In fact, it would hurt him even more since he was likely to react slower due to the Greater Phantomind Void technique, causing him to mess up Flux Earther, a technique that was highly dependent on accurate timing.

'I'll have to attack them while they're engaging in these individual harvesting operations.' Rui narrowed his eyes as he scoured the reports.

The Carnil Mafia was apparently in the process of sending reinforcements to the Gereign base. Rui was impressed that they managed to get their hands on such intelligence so quickly, but it was a shame that they hadn't yet been able to gather who was going to be sent to reinforce the Gereign base's operations.

Regardless, until then, the Martial Seniors were personally going to be heading into the forest to harvest and gather esoteric narcotic drugs. That was the perfect time for Rui to attack them.

Rui glanced at a profile page about Senior Zenshin on the table of his personal quarters. He recalled the man's unstable rage over Rui's attack. Rui was certain that the man was undoubtedly looking for revenge.

'You'll get your turn...' Rui narrowed his eyes.

He was saying the high-grade Martial Seniors for last. It was better to pick off the weaklings one by one so and warm his way up so that he didn't bite off more than he could chew.

'One issue is that I can't form complete predictive models on them beforehand like I did in the Shadow Isles.' Rui sighed.

Usually, when he had a target to take down and he was able to prepare in advance, he would build predictive models well ahead of time. This allowed him to operate at his peak power right from the very get-go. He had done this many times during his time as a Martial Artist.

However, the Martial Seniors of the Gereign base of the Carnil Mafia did not leave their base unless they needed to. Furthermore, the only time they used their Martial Art was when they were in the forest for an operation, which also happened to be the only window where he could attack them due to them being separated and not protected by their base.

He couldn't afford to waste such valuable time on building predictive models, this window was solely for assault since it was a scarce opportunity that he wouldn't be able to get again.

If the reinforcements arrived and they resumed their large-scale operations, he would not be able to pick them off one by one since they would be operating as a large group again.

Chapter 1484: Path to Victory

'In short, I can only attack them when they're in the middle of operations because this is the only time when attacking them isn't suicide. I can't form complete predictive models on them since the only time they use their Martial Art is also the only time where I can't engage in observation since I'll be too busy attacking one of them.' Rui sighed.

The circumstances were far from ideal.

Back in the Shadow Isles, he could peacefully observe them, tail them, and even watch them use their Martial Art when assassinating so that he could form solid predictive models on them.

This was not the case here. He would have to go in much more blind. He didn't know what reinforcements the Carnil Mafia was sending, but it was best to assume that they were sending relevant high-grade Martial Seniors.

Most likely, highly specialized sensory Martial Seniors equipped with powerful anti-stealth esoteric technological measures. Perhaps Senior-level organizations and forces were helpless before his Greater Phantomind Void, but the same could not be said for the Kandrian Underworld.

Rui had no doubt that they would be going all out with sending reinforcements that were fully equipped to deal with even peak-grade Senior-level assassins.

'I need to get the job done before they arrive.' Rui narrowed his eyes as his mind processed and analyzed his circumstances. 'If I can kill all the Martial Seniors before they arrive, then I can easily annihilate the base with my full power without having to worry about Martial Seniors retaliating and killing.'

The ultimate objective was completely destroying all of the investment and establishment of the Carnil Mafia in the Gereign Region.

Anything less and it would not be enough to stop them.

The reason for this was that the drug supply from the Great Forest of Hypnonarak was an important part of the Kandrian Underworld's political strategy in the Kandrian Throne War. This meant that because it was important to them, they would not easily give up on its success.

'If I only kill the Martial Seniors and call it a day, the Carnil Mafia will simply deploy twice as many and resume the operations. And this time they'll be armed to the teeth with all kinds of resources specifically meant to stop assassins like myself.'

Rui knew from Master Reina's teaching that misdirection was decently common amongst Martial Artist assassins. If it was that common, then obviously, anti-assassination measures would include counters to misdirection.

'Flora is immune to misdirection since it doesn't have an awareness for misdirection to even work on.' Rui knew that there were very concrete mechanisms through which misdirection could be stopped.

The Carnil Mafia would undoubtedly arm their reinforcements with such measures, making his job much harder than it currently was.

That was why he needed to destroy their base before the reinforcements arrived. If he could burn down the entirety of the foundation that the Carnil Mafia developed, then it was much likelier to permanently stop them.

The amount of wealth that the Carnil mafia had invested in the Gereign base was probably in the hundreds of millions in terms of Shionel Gold. This didn't include the intangible costs that came with the spent time, political capital, and Martial capital spent into clashing with the other rival forces in the Gereign Region.

If he destroyed all of that, then they would have to expend all that wealth and capital all over again. Most likely, rebuilding it would take several years and several times more wealth than they did the first time.

That was a high cost, that alone might force them to pause and reconsider.

Furthermore, even if they did decide it was worth it to rebuild everything from scratch, the fact of the matter was that it would still take years' worth of time. That would not only halt their plans of normalizing drugs in the Kandrian Empire, it would regress it. Such things did not remain stagnant, they either went up or down, but never remained stationary.

That meant that not only would they have to spend several years rebuilding, but they would have to spend several more years compensating for the regressed demand for drugs due to its absence!

'They can't afford such a delay to their plans.' Rui mused. 'It would be better to scrap a failed plan than to cling onto it desperately long after it has failed to accomplish its objective.'

This was the true essence of Rui's strategy.

It was to annihilate their foundation in the Gereign Region and make their entire drug strategy in the Kandrian Throne War too costly to be worth pursuing.

'This will be more than enough to fulfill the remaining commission payment to the Beggar's Sect,' Rui narrowed his eyes. 'In fact, they'll owe me by the time I'm done.'

Had it been any other Martial Senior, they would not have so much as dared to fight the Carnil Mafia. As one of the six pillars of the Kandrian Underworld, the Carnil Mafia was a titanic force that had Sage-level war potential with the services of Sage Aggragor.

It was unthinkable for a Martial Senior to fight them. No Martial Senior could even possibly survive, let alone succeed.

Unless that Martial Senior was Rui.

Having calmly processed large amounts of data supplied by the Beggar's Sect, he accurately deduced the political and economic constraints of the Carnil Mafia's operations. He further processed and analyzed the local geo-political factors, leveraging them by creating circumstances where they would work against the Carnil Mafia. He plotted out a detailed strategy and course of action where he would eliminate all the impediments to his goal of annihilating the Carnil Mafia.

Just like that, an impossible challenge that would result in the death of any other Martial Senior had already been scaled by Rui.

He saw victory where others merely saw the darkness of absolute loss.

Now it was time to execute his vision.

'They're not going to know what hit them by the time I'm done.' He narrowed his eyes.

Chapter 1485: Ambushed

Deep within the Great Forest of Hypnonarak, a Martial Artist stood atop a mountain scouring the vast expansive forest with his senses. Her Martial attire bore the crest of the Carnil mafia, the cloth glowing with the light of her Martial Heart.

A curved sheathed blade hung at her side.

"Hmmm..." She pulled out a rough map of the forest, eying several marked locations before directing her attention back to her surroundings. 'It should be somewhere here...The Ecstasy Plum Fruit.'

The Carnil mafia had ceased all large-scale extraction operations of narcotic drugs and instead had merely deigned to deploy Martial Seniors on individual small-scale operations. Since it was none other than Martial Seniors that were being deployed, they had been assigned with special objectives.

The Ecstasy Plum Fruit.

A special fruit that grew only in the Great Forest of Hypnonarak. It was known for its extraordinarily high narcotic potency. It was said that one drop from the Ecstasy Plum Fruit could put one thousand men in a dreamy trance indefinitely.

Not even Martial Squires could resist the powerful effects of the fruit entirely. Only Martial Seniors were qualified to hunt for this fruit. Its market value was more than a million times greater than the ordinary narcotic plant extracts that were harvested from the forest.

This was the Carnil Mafia's way of compensating for the temporarily halted large-scale operations.

And it also happened to be Rui's only opportunity to destroy the Carnil Mafia's operations.

One moment, Senior Ferna was merely keeping scouting the local area, and the very next, a sharp pain flashed through her body as a titanic impact crashed into her passive defenses.

BOOM!!!

The sheer weight of the impact crumbled the mountain peak.

"Urgh!" Senior Ferna grimaced with pain as she quickly got back up from the heavy impact despite the pain.

She was alive.

Yet she couldn't afford to waste a single moment on celebrating.

CLASP!

A monstrous pressure washed across the area as she gripped the hilt her sword, unsheathing it in one fine motion.

'One Thousand Strokes of the Wailing Blade.' Her body flashed into motion, executing countless sword swings at a speed and pace that exceeded even her reactions. A thousand maneuvers, baked into her blood, had reached a level of muscle memory where it far surpassed her conscious cognition.

...CRACK!

Instantly, her environment split into countless ribbons for several hundreds of meters.

Trees, boulders, bedrock.

Everything was reduced to sheets.

Except, of course, for her assailant. He was unharmed. On one hand, she was displeased that he was able to withstand her technique so well.

On the other hand, his stealth had come undone as a result.

Exactly as she had hoped.

"Die!" Her hand lashed out once more speeding out as her blade blurred into action. 'True Mourning Convergence Cleave!'

A technique where the sword swing generated an intense two-dimensional wave of sound while using a breathing technique to generate powerful currents on either side of the sound wave tugging the target in the opposite direction of the wave.

It was no different from a target being pulled into an incoming swing blade, increasing the piercing pressure of the blade.

A technique that was said to be unsurvivable if successfully employed.

The key word being 'successfully'.

"Rgh!" She froze, her eyes widening as her technique halted.

A single thought flashed through her head.

'Why can't I breathe?'

BOOM!!

Her hampered breathing had distracted her for a moment too long.

Her assailant was not kind enough to let it pass. A powerful Flowing Canon empowered with the full might of Outer Convergence, Reverberating Lance, Gale Force Breathing, and Adamant Reforging crashed into her abdomen.

CRACK!

Her lower rib succumbed to the force, cracking as he flung her away with tremendous force.

She gritted her teeth, coughing blood as she did her best to regain her respiratory capacity. Yet, she was unable to. Strangely, she didn't feel any physical impediment. She was familiar with poisons, and had yet to feel the familiar sensations that were associated with it.

This was different. It was as though her mind refused to allow her to breathe. Or rather, it was as though her mind believed she could not breathe. Perhaps had she more time, she would have been able to break out of it, but alas, reality was not so kind, and neither was her assailant.

THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM!

Heavy bullets of sound flashed towards her at extraordinary speeds, forcing her attention away.

Although she was hampered, she was not rendered obsolete.

SWING SWING SWING!

She cut down the swift and powerful bullets of sound with her blade, gasping for air while she desperately protected herself from the powerful attacks. She gritted her teeth as she plotted a way to escape. Victory was definitely out of her hands, but it was possible that she could survive if she fought right.

'I didn't struggle for a hundred years in the Senior Realm only to die at the hands of this bastard.' She gritted her teeth.

She recognized the mask and the Martial Art attire from when he assaulted Senior Nereau and the extraction team, annihilating them in one blow. He had disappeared, as if fading away from existence.

"You're dead!" She shouted at him in a fit of rage. "You're a dead man. The Carnil Mafia will tear you apart to shreds."

He didn't reply. He merely blasted her with long-range attacks from afar, refusing to get close within her swinging range.

The pressure began mounting.

Faster attacks.

Heavier impacts.

Something needed to give.

And something did.

She gritted her teeth.

A single whisper escaped her mouth. "Chanting Sword Style: Three Hundred and Sixty Hymns of the Dying Blade."

Her assailant paused, halting his offense before leaping back at top speed, racing away as fast he could.

BOOOM!!!

A tremendous explosion emerged from Senior Fern, reducing everything it touched to dust. It expanded at speeds that far surpassed sound, swallowing up the upper half of the mountain.

RUMBLE

When the dust settled, the mountain had been reduced in half.

Chapter 1486: Ambush II

Rui had to admit, he had found her Martial Art interesting when he read up on the intelligence on Senior Fern that the Beggar's Sect had provided him.

The Chanting Sword Style was an offensive Martial Art that relied on the blade to produce a sharp piercing sound that struck the target with sharp focused pressure. By relying on a breathing technique, she altered the density of air in the trajectory of her blade in such a way it generated a two-dimensional sound wave.

It was a Martial Art that could generate long-range attacks despite requiring a sword. A fascinating concept that he had only seen once before.

Yet also nothing he couldn't overcome.

He was unable to assassinate her with ease because the Carnil Mafia had gone as far as to supply all Martial Seniors with potions that could allow them to keep their Martial Heart active for extensive period of time, allowing them to maintain Senior-level defenses at all times.

Thus he could not crush them, merely inflict damage with an initial ambush. After that, it was pure head-on combat. The battle had proceeded more or less exactly how he expected. Breathing Crucifix massively reduced her offensive lethality, neutering a grade-eleven Martial Senior, one who was only two grades away from being high-grade.

Although it was a shame he was unable to maintain the Greater Phantomind Void while being physically suppressed with lethal attacks due to the fact that needing to heavily defend his life altered his non-verbal communication, he had already been resigned to this fact.

Kane's Void Step also suffered from a similar problem, if he was hit with an attack, then the misdirection was completely undone. They had almost gotten caught by Deacon Industries much earlier in the Shionel Dungeon due to this when Kane had gotten hit with a powerful shockwave.

However, it didn't matter all that much to the outcome of the attack since he would need to put it aside when using the VOID algorithm in the first place. Breathing Crucifix along with the elementary predictive model he had already created was more than enough to grant him dominance.

There were only two things that caught him off-guard.

The first was her technique naming sense, and more importantly, saying the name of the technique out loud while using it.

He had rarely come across such a tendency and he was glad that most Martial Artists had the common sense to not utter out the name of their technique when using it, but it still made him cringe when he heard it.

Not to mention the metaphorical abstract extravagant names.

In fact, he might have chosen to mock her for it had he not felt an extreme sense of danger from the technique.

That was the second thing that caught him off-guard.

"Chanting Sword Style," She whispered. "Three Hundred and Sixty Hymns of the Dying Blade."

Chills crawled across his skin as shivers went down his spine. Primordial Instinct rang alarms in his head about a perilous danger emerging from her. He swiftly ceased his attacks, leaping away at top speed.

BOOM!!!

An explosion that consumed half a mountain erupted from her.

'No...This is...' Rui's eyes widened as he gleaned the true nature of the attack.

It was not an explosion, it was three hundred and sixty of her blade swings, generating two-dimensional waves expanding outwards in every direction.

It formed a sphere, for there were three hundred and sixty angles in a circle.

"Rgh!" Rui activated Nemean Blossom as the slices overtook, cutting away into his flesh. Yet thanks to the distance, they had already been diluted significantly, leaving only flesh damage on his body.

"Damn..." Rui cursed. "What the hell was that?"

Considering the power exceeded what he had seen from high-grade Martial Seniors like Senior Ceeran and Senior Zenshin, it had to be some kind of extraordinary grade-ten technique.

He immediately expanded his senses, searching for his target.

Yet his eyes could only widen as he came across her bleeding corpse. Her skin and flesh were ravaged, leaving an unrecognizable corpse behind.

"I see... It was a forbidden technique," Rui heaved a sigh.

Forbidden techniques were techniques that had been outlawed by the Martial Union due to being extremely self-destructive and dangerous to the user and causing permanent damage or death to the user. Such techniques were greatly restricted in their spread to ensure that as few Martial Artists as possible mastered them and thus as few succumbed to them as possible.

His Metabody System could be considered a forbidden technique if he used all the metabodies at once, gaining extraordinary power in exchange for his life.

However, if she generated power at the cost of her constitution, then it made sense that she was able to generate such a devastatingly powerful attack. Had he been caught in that at close range, he would have been in a critical condition.

She had sensed her imminent loss and had decided to try and take him with her. But alas, she had underestimated him.

"One down, eight more to go," Rui heaved a sigh, drinking a healing and rejuvenation potion as he switched directions, rushing off in another direction in the forest to his next target.

He didn't have time. The Carnil Mafia was not going to lag much behind when it came to the drug supply from the Hypnonarak forest. He gave himself a week at most. He needed to kill all the Martial Seniors of the Gereign base of operations and then reduce the base to ashes before reinforcements arrived.

'It's a shame her clothes were destroyed in that final suicide attack,' Rui tutted, narrowing his eyes. 'I need the Carnil Mafia's crest if I want my plan to work.'

Rui had come up with a strategy to ensure that he successfully eradicated the Carnil mafia's base of operations, but also ensured that the mafia would direct its attention away from him elsewhere by the time he was done.

He swiftly headed over to his next target, another Martial Senior in the Great Forest of Hypnonarak.

Chapter 1487: Ambush III

Senior Gemu did not enjoy the current mission entrusted to him by the Carnil Mafia

He was not a hunter. He was a bodyguard, so why the hell should he waste time hunting for the Ecstasy Plum Fruit in the Great Forest of Hynonarak?

It was a waste of his Iron Flesh Style. He had submerged himself seven days and nights at the bottom of the molten iron river as a Martial Senior, imbuing his flesh with Celestial Iron, giving him extraordinary passive defensive prowess.

He ought to be protecting, either someone else or himself.

That's why he was grateful.

Grateful to his assailant for attacking him.

The attack came out of nowhere.

One moment he was treading across the forest, depressed.

And the very next?

BOOM!!

An extraordinarily heavy attack crashed into his gut out of nowhere. It was heavy. It had been charged with momentum and had completely caught him off-guard. Furthermore, it had come so swiftly that he had been unable to react to it.

In fact, he only sensed it after the impact reverberated across his body.

Yet, he was unmoved. The attack had not shifted him even a millimeter. It hadn't even shifted his center of gravity.

It was no different from a child striking a statue.

He was unmoved.

At least, he was physically unmoved.

Yet, the same could not be said about his emotional state.

"Hahaha!" He guffawed. "You have come! Mysterious assailant who seeks to oppose the Carnil Mafia!"

"I had a feeling this would happen," Rui sighed as he glanced at his knuckle even as Greater Phantomind Void was active.

They were bruised. Even the grade-eight Adamant Reforging was no different from paper before the Celestial Iron conditioning that he had undergone in his body.

"Come! Mysterious Assailant who seeks to oppose the Carnil Mafia!" He spat a mouthful as he took a sumo stance. "Show me your power and dispel the curtain of invisibility that obscures your presence!"

...

"Such measures may have worked against Nereau, but you cannot overcome me with stealth!" He proudly declared as he grinned widely.

Rui heaved a sigh. He was right. Stealth was useful for ambushes to exploit weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

But his opponent was a Martial Artist who didn't have such weaknesses. Thus stealth was merely a waste of energy.

Rui deactivated Phantomind Void, appearing before him.

"Oooohh!" The man smiled, delighted. "Now that you have graciously revealed yourself. I challenge you! Overcome my defenses!"

THUD!

His leg struck the ground as he adopted a Sumo stance. His Martial Heart had already activated, generating seismic activity.

RUMBLE!

"I wager that your strikes cannot make me feel even the slightest pinch of pain!"

A sadistic smile appeared on Rui's face beneath his mask.

He surged forward with powerful momentum as his fist flew forward.

The second Flowing Canon had been launched.

"Hahaha!" The man laughed as the attack came. "Such measly power canno-AARRGRHRHRGSGHH!"

For the first time in five decades, Senior Gemu felt excruciating pain beyond anything he had ever felt. The sheer power of the strike was so high that he felt as though it ignited his entire body on fire.

He felt as though his flesh was being crushed.

He felt his bones cracking under the sheer power of the strike.

"Buueeergh." He puked from the sheer pain of the strike. "I-I see. Perhaps you're a capable one after all."

BOOOM!

"AAAAAAAARGH!" The heavy man cried as a powerful blow crashed into his head, almost making him faint from pain.

BAM BAM BAM!

Rui began bullying the man as he blasted his head with blow after blow. Although it certainly was fun to see the arrogant defensive Martial Artist suffer excruciating pain from the Phantom Pain hypnosis technique, it wasn't doing anything.

The Phantom Pain technique was the best sabotage to active defenses, but it was limited in its use against purely passive defenses like those of his opponent.

He could not take him down by knocking him out in this fashion. If he tried, he would only break his fist before made any progress at all.

His offense was helpless before someone who wasn't even a high-grade Martial Senior.

'Tsk, I need to strengthen my foundations.' Rui tutted, narrowing his eyes.

While he certainly had the Metabody System, they existed to adapt to his opponent, not to empower his foundation. He needed to fundamentally strengthen his core, he had been too focused on expanding his versatility.

Instead, he had a different goal entirely.

His foundation was definitely excellent for a Martial Senior as young as him, but it was not enough if he wanted to contend with other Martial Seniors.

The only issue was that it clashed with wanting to prioritize the development of the Martial Mind.

'They can coexist.' Rui blasted his defensive opponent even as he thought about his shortcomings.

The only reason he could afford to be so careless was because his opponent was an idiot. According to the Beggar's Sect, he hadn't mastered even a single offensive technique. Meaning he could only rely on raw power if he wanted to hurt Rui.

It was no different from the difference between a Martial Apprentice and a human. Techniques were engines that made efficient and effective use of power and potential.

"Hahaha!" Senior Gemu guffawed even as his eyes watered with tears due to the pain. "You can hurt me, but you cannot kill me."

TAP!

Rui knocked on the man's skull with his knuckle.

It was softer than any of his previous strikes.

Yet the man's eyes rolled backward lifelessly as his body collapsed forward.

"Death sends its Sympathy," Rui snorted as he reached down to the corpse, stripping it of its clothes.
"I'm going to take your attire as compensation for my bloodied knuckles."

All the banging and striking at the man's head had not been in vain. Rui had purposely been targeting his head with various different attacks on purpose.

It was all so that he could find the right resonant frequencies through repeated trial and error.

Once he did, it was simply a matter of crushing his brain with Sympathetic Death Lance.

Chapter 1488: Chase

Rui made sure to strip the outer robe that contained the crest of the Carnil Mafia. That was what he needed. In order to completely curb the Carnil Mafia's operation in the Great Forest of Hyponarak, he needed to destroy their foundation and thus make the price of continuing their operations extremely high.

There were multiple means by which he could go about accomplishing this. One of the ways was increasing the amount of political pressure they sustained from foreign parties with a vested interest in the Great Forest of Hyponarak. Resisting this took a lot of Martial power, resources, and wealth.

'Especially if it's from a force with power that rivals the Kandrian Empire and has no reason to cower against the Carnil Mafia," Rui narrowed his eyes.

Specifically, if a Martial Senior from the Carnil Mafia attacked the operations of one of the other three powerhouses from East Panama, that would be something that wouldn't work out very well in the Carnil Mafia's favor.

The Republic of Gorteau, The Sekigahara Confederate, and The Britannian Empire. Rui was aware that each of those three nations also had their own black markets within their nations centered around the supply and demand of the narcotic plants from the Great Forest of Hypnonarak.

Normally, the four forces avoided conflicts with each other in this region, the reason for this was because the Great Forest of Hypnonarak was too large. The availability of the narcotics supply far exceeded how much of it was being harvested. There really was no need for them, or any other forces to engage in any real conflicts over the resources because there were surplus resources.

There was an entire nation of resources, after all.

However, Rui knew that didn't mean there was no friction at all. The fact of the matter was that the four powerhouses of East Panama were rivals. It didn't take more than a single spark to light a fire.

He simply needed to give them both an alluring opportunity and a reason to hamper the Carnil Mafia.

Reasons such as getting revenge for an attack on their operation by a member of the Carnil Mafia.

Rui donned Senior Gemu's robe bearing the crest of the Carnil Mafia. 'This should be enough to light a fire. Now I need to get going before my window runs out.'

He had chosen this day and time to attack the Carnil Mafia because he knew that the forces of the Republic of Gorteau were conducting operations in the Great Forest of Hypnonarak. Thus he would be able to take the clothes of a member of the Carnil Mafia and fake being a member of the mafia.

He glanced at the dead Senior Gemu. This was why he had chosen him as a target. Out of all the Martial Seniors in the Gereign base, he was the only one Rui could kill without making a mess of their attire and rendering it unusable.

Thus far, everything had gone according to his plan.

"Alright, about half an hour that way," Rui glanced to his right as he immediately set off. He had carefully calculated the timeline for the things that he needed to execute, and he was definitely cutting it a little close.

However, he would still make it in time. He quickly began traveling at a high speed through the forest navigating through the trees.

It wasn't too long before he happened on several groups of extraction teams harvesting narcotic plants. Unlike the Kandrian Empire, the Underworld of the Republic of Gorteau did not follow a singular group form of organizing. They deployed many smaller units within a much broader area that was surveilled much more broadly than the operations of the Carnil Mafia.

However, it didn't change what he needed to.

WHOOSH!

He launched himself at a Martial Senior patrolling the general area, ensuring nothing threatening would reach the extraction units.

No one so much as gazed at his rapidly approaching figure.

No one could. In this one regard, Greater Phantomind Void simply could not be overcome.

BOOM!!

A powerful attack crashed into the skulls of an unsuspecting Martial Senior patrol. Rui had chosen a valuable Martial Senior but one that wasn't durable enough to withstand his assault.

CRACK!

The outcome was inevitable. The Martial Senior died before they realized what had happened, furthermore, Rui made sure that the resulting impact would be directed towards the extraction units, killing most of them.

The Martial Seniors of the patrol guard were shocked.

"What just happened?!"

"Something hit us!"

The risky part was just about to start. Rui immediately dashed away from the place with technique active while the Martial Seniors scrambled about.

However, once he had put a bit of distance between him and them, he immediately turned off his stealth, drawing the attention of the Martial Seniors.

"Hey, I sense somebody that way!" One roared, activating her Martial Heart.

"Chase after him! The Congressman will kill us if we let him get away!"

Rui grinned, this was exactly what he wanted. He needed them to get the crest of the Carnil Mafia on his robes, but he couldn't give it to them too easily. They needed to chase him for it. They needed to push themselves to the limit for it.

Otherwise, it would come too easily. If it came too easily, it would be suspected to be a red herring.

He could have easily gotten rid of them with Greater Phantomind Void, but that would be counterproductive. Instead, he would make it seem as though his technique had a time limit so that he couldn't use it continuously, and that it also had a cooling time period.

People would be more inclined to believe that such a technique has such limits than that it doesn't

"Get him!"

BOOM!

An attack from a Martial Senior uprooted an entire hill. Rui carefully ensured that he didn't put too much distance between them that they would give up chasing him, but he didn't want to get bombarded with attacks and inadvertently get caught either.

Chapter 1489: Red Herring

"Damn it! Almost got him!" One Gorteau Martial Senior cursed.

"We're gaining him, make sure we don't lose track!"

The chase had gone on for nearly ten minutes. Rui had made sure that there were plenty of close calls where they almost lost track of him. He could definitely feel that their desperation was real.

'Good, now time for the hardest part.'

STEP!

Rui pretended to trip over something, crashing extensively due to the high speeds they were all traveling at.

"Get him!"

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

Rui activated Greater Phantomind Void and his Neo Godspeed technique, evading the powerful attacks, leaving behind a torn piece of the robe he stole from the corpse.

A piece that featured only a portion of the Carnil crest, not even the entire cloth.

"Where did he go?!"

"He disappeared..." Another gritted. "Find out which group was responsible for this. They're really underestimating us if they think they can get away with this!"

"Search the area! We can't give up so easily."

They immediately scoured the area with their powerful senses.

"That's right, you gotta search for it, otherwise finding it isn't going to be mean anything," Rui murmured, standing atop a tree with the Greater Phantomind Void active.

"Hey look..." One of the murmured, narrowing his eyes. "I almost missed it but is that...?"

"Hm?" Another came over, digging up a partially buried cloth. "That looks like a part of the robes that he was wearing. Nice catch but... It's not going to help us."

"I think you might be wrong about that sir," The man's eyes widened as he spotted the portion of the Carnil Crest that was on the other side of the torn of piece of Senior Gemu's robes.

"That emblem..." The man gritted. "That's the emblem of the Carnil Mafia. It's those Kandrian bastards!"

Word spread like fire.

"How dare they attack us?!"

"Are they underestimating us?"

"We should attack them and show them what it means to mess with us."

'Yes!' Rui cheered them on. 'That's a great idea.'

"Wait, don't act rashly," One elder Martial Artist cajoled them. "Firstly, good job finding this. We have failed in apprehending the assailant, but we were fortunate enough to find a piece of evidence that points us in the right direction. We will present this to the boss. We will have at least something to show."

Rui smirked. This was the failsafe that he had in mind. He had gone through a lot of preparation to ensure that they didn't suspect it being fake, however, there was always a possibility there would be a sharp-minded one who would suspect this being an elaborate ploy.

However, even if there were such a person, Rui's plan had already accounted for even such circumstances.

'Their failure is of a much greater concern to them than something as dubious as whether the crest is a red herring,' Rui smiled. 'Even if they were smart enough to conceive that this evidence was a red herring, they would still present it to their superiors as proof of the origin of the assailant to at least soften the blow of their failure.'

After all, it would be the Underworld that deals with political conflicts with other groups, not them. Rui's plan was not only elaborate in its deception but also accounted for those who might be smart enough to see through it and manipulate them using their own sense of self-preservation.

'My work here is done.' Rui mused. 'I can leave the rest to the Beggar's Sect.'

They were smart enough to know what could be done, and would certainly act to ensure that the Carnil Mafia would be framed even if Rui's measures weren't enough for some reason.

He didn't know what measures the Underworld of the Republic of Gorteau would take. However, he suspected that this wouldn't in and of itself result in a huge conflict. The underworlds, black markets, mafias, and other forces in darkness were extremely powerful.

While Martial Seniors were certainly not indispensable, they were forces of the Lower Realms. At most, this was no different from one person throwing a single jab at another.

It might result in an all-out fight, but in most cases, it would require a lot more aggression to devolve into a brawl.

Rui knew that had they been Martial Masters, it would have been an absolute declaration of war.

Had they been Martial Squires, it would have been insignificant and trivial. The death of a single Martial Squire was like a pinch or a flick to forces as powerful as these two.

Martial Seniors were somewhere in between.

Thus Rui was unable to predict exactly what would happen, however, he knew that it would make life harder for the Carnil Mafia in the Gereign Region, which would certainly deter them from investing too much in it.

"Time to resume my hunt," Rui heaved a sigh as the remaining five Carnil Martial Seniors at the Gereign base were still left on his list of targets.

Three of whom were high grades. The remaining two were on the verge of high grade. This time, he knew that he wouldn't be able to ambush them and kill them while they were vulnerable since they had already decided to get enough potions to keep the Martial Heart active at all times during the operations.

He was going to have to defeat and kill all three of them. He wasn't entirely sure how well he would fair against them, but he did possess confidence in himself, especially ever since he developed the Hypnomatrix and the three powerful hypnosis techniques that allowed him to inflict potent hypnosis with lesser effort, partially due to his powerful mind.

That along with the rest of his Martial Art was not something that could be overcome easily, even for high-grade Martial Seniors.

A small grin cracked at the edge of his face as he returned. He actually looked forward to testing his power against the upper echelons of the Senior Realm.

Chapter 1490: Crossed

Senior Faputa gazed over the dead body of Senior Gemu with wide eyes.

"...Not a single scratch, but he's dead."

She could hardly believe it, however, the defensive expert seemed to have been killed very smoothly in a manner that bypassed his defenses and killed him in an instant.

'Poison...?' She narrowed her eyes. 'No...'

There were no signs of poison used on him. Every Martial Artist who delved into the Underworld became more familiar with unorthodox Martial Art, especially fields like poison that were used even outside of Martial Art.

From what she could tell, he hadn't been poisoned.

He had just inexplicably... died.

That alone wasn't the only oddity to be spotted.

'Where is his exterior robe?' She frowned.

It didn't make sense that that alone went missing. Furthermore, she found it quite likely that it alone had been torn off while other articles had been intact.

She had been sent by the Carnil Mafia for two missions, two find and extract a plum ecstasy fruit, and to find Senior Gemu who had been deployed in this particular direction within the forest.

Unfortunately, this was part of the trap that Rui had laid.

BOOM!

"Rgh!" She grimaced as a powerful crashed into her head, almost leaving her dizzy. Yet she swiftly raced away at a blinding speed, quickly recovering the effects of the blow.

She hadn't sensed even the slightest threat when the mysterious force had struck her. It was clearly someone with an incredible amount of stealth.

"Tsk," She gritted her teeth as she brought her hands together, activating a breathing technique before releasing a powerful omnidirectional shockwave to catch the invisible assailant.

POW!

Her eyes narrowed as Rui appeared out of thin air at a distance, blocking the attack. "Now you're dead."

WHOOSH!

Rui's eyes widened as she flashed towards him at a blinding speed and agility, her hands surged forward, reducing to blurs even to Rui's senses.

POW POW POW!

He defended her vitals as she launched a maelstrom of short and swift blows that were nearly impossible to evade at that range. On top of that, simply leaping away and opening the distance wouldn't work when she was faster than him, he would never be able to outpace her.

"I was you who killed Gemu and Fern, hm?" She asked with an icy tone as she plowed him with blows.
"What about Nereau, was that you too?"

POW POW POW!!!

"You're going to die a painful death." She declared.

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM!!

A barrage of rapid-fire attacks washed over Rui.

"The Carnil Mafia does not forgive."

POW POW POW!!

"It does not forget."

BANG BANG BANG!!

"Not until it has consumed those that cross it."

Her eyes intensified as her blows surged forward with incredible speed.

Countless sonic booms rippled across the skies.

Her dainty palms ignited the atmosphere with the sheer friction she generated as a result of her speed.

Her hands ceased being hands.

The aura of flames they generated resembled those of meteorites.

That was the origin of her Meteorite Monsoon technique. Swift short blows that exceeded the speed of even meteorites!

POW POW POW POW POW!

"My speed is beyond your capability," She declared. "I will wear you down, bit by bit. But I will not kill you. I'm sure Senior Zenshin would love to tear you alive."

Suddenly, the air changed.

She could feel it.

Was it something in her surroundings?

No...

Her eyes widened as four words escaped Rui's mouth.

"You talk too much."

Suddenly, she felt a shiver crawl down her spine.

Chills crawled up her skin.

He needed to die, that much she knew.

"Hryah!" She snarled as she increased her efforts.

WHOOSH!

Yet she could only widen as her attack crashed into an empty image. Before she could even process what happened, a titanic impact crashed into her gut.

BOOM!!

An enormous shockwave emerged from the impact, flattening a town's worth of area across the forest.

She coughed blood as the impact launched her dozens of kilometers into the air.

Rui smiled. "Watch out for the hornets."

ZZZZT!

Her eyes widened as countless Senior-level cloud hornets emerged from the clouds, threatening to tear her to shreds. She immediately dove, rushing to the ground in a matter of seconds, as she evaded the bees.

Yet she knew she was far from safe.

WHOOSH!

She narrowly evaded a blow from Rui, with incredible speed and agility. As a speed-oriented Martial Artist, she was confident in her ability to evade.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!

She weaved away from his strikes, growing more confident by the second. He had just managed to get a luck hit on her. There was no way that he could keep up with her speed.

WHOOSH!

She smoothly evaded the blow, swerving to the side.

Only to find that Rui's attack had arrived at that location before she did.

BAM!

She stepped away, gritting her teeth as Rui followed.

WHOOSH!

She spun away from a strike, crouching back to land a high kick.

Yet even that had been seen through.

BAM!

His kick crashed into her head, smacking her away while he casually evaded the kick. He swiftly followed suit.

She gritted her teeth as she understood the state of the battle. She couldn't beat him, she didn't know why. But somehow he was casually outpacing her speed despite being much slower than her.

His attacks were much slower, yet they arrived earlier.

His evasions were much slower, yet they began much earlier.

It was as though he could see the future. It was as though he could move through time.

"Running away, I don't think so," Rui calmly informed her.

"Stop me if you can!" She barked as she turned around racing away.

Yet her she could only widen her eyes as she immediately crashed after taking the first step!

"Huh...?" She glanced at her legs with shock.

She somehow lost control of her speed.

Almost as if her brain couldn't keep up with her body.

"Such a shame..." Rui murmured. "I was hoping to finish this with the VOID algorithm alone. But I ended up using Temporal Disharmony."

He glanced at her. "Oh well."

BOOM!!!

He used Hypertrophic Surge to generate such power that the kick twisted her head three hundred and sixty degrees, rotating it a full round.

"Four down. Four to go," Rui calmly tallied the score.