

Martial Unity 1701

Chapter 1701: Point of Failure

"...Interesting," Rui mused. "They actually agreed...? I wasn't expecting that."

He turned to Master Reina. "What do you think is the probability that they're sincere in revealing their identity?"

"...Fifty-fifty," Master Reina remarked with thought. "It depends. They could be either paranoid or duplicitous; it is difficult to discern which without meeting them."

"Agreed," Rui nodded. "Regardless, assuming they do indeed intend to reveal their identities, then I just need to survive all the assassins and let the Voidreaper kill me."

Master Gurren and Master Reina exchanged a puzzled glance.

"So you do intend to kill yourself?" Master Reina pouted. "That sounds boring."

"I intend to pretend to succumb to the hands of the Voidreaper," Rui chuckled. "I'm going to need someone to play the part of the Voidreaper convincingly enough."

He glanced at Master Reina with a pointed look.

"Me?" She was flummoxed.

"You've already got your body morphing technique, so I know you can do it," Rui smirked. "On the day of the assassination, you're going to have to be the Voidreaper. You will pretend to kill me and take my pretend corpse to the people who want me dead, and when they reveal themselves, I will have won," Rui smirked. "It's the perfect plan; they won't know what hit them."

A grin arose on her face as she realized the entertainment value of the plan that Rui had proposed. "Hehe...that does sound fun, I can't deny."

"Good," Rui nodded. "Then that's the plan so far. In case they try something funny, I want some insurance. We'll have to carry a tracker in my pretend cadaver so that Master Gurren can intervene."

"Hmph, arrogant as always, arrogant brat," he snorted. "I never agreed to partake in this machination of yours."

"I'll teach you a technique that allows you to estimate the distance of all celestial objects you see in the sky," Rui replied.

"Done,"

Rui smirked. "Good."

Rui was no expert in astronomy, but the Parallax Method was an ancient way of estimating distance. It was also extremely simple and elementary. He didn't mind sharing it with Master Gurren for this favor.

"Still, I don't understand," Master Gurren narrowed his eyes. "Why not inform the Martial Union of this? Isn't that the most common sense plan? Once you inform the Martial Union, they'll definitely provide you with a security detail of Seniors, maybe even Masters, to protect you from any assassination attempt until years worth of investigation leads them to the source and they eliminate it."

"That's precisely why I'm avoiding them," Rui replied. "They're overbearing. They solve every problem with Martial force because that is the only way Martial Artists know how to solve problems. Either fear of their power or power itself. In order to protect me from proven unknown threats of assassination, they will pressure me into sacrificing any and all privacy and freedom for the sake of protection. I will be stalked by Martial Seniors or Masters. It's bad enough to deal with it at the Orphanage, but I tolerate it because it's for my family's sake. However, I absolutely refuse to make sacrifices of freedom and privacy for the sake of protection outside of that."

This was one thing Rui was consistently adamant about his entire life. It was the same circumstance as it had been more than a decade ago when Chairman Deacon discovered the true identity of the Voider, and the Martial Union offered protection for his family in exchange for his absolute loyalty. He had refused to sacrifice his liberty back then, and he refused to sacrifice his liberty today.

"On top of that, if the Martial Union finds out, I will lose blackmail material," Rui replied. "The best part about having proof that a certain individual or individuals are plotting to kill me is exposing them to the Martial Union. That is the core of my threat. I can bend them to my will by threatening to expose their plot to kill me to the Martial Union or the Kandrian Bureau of Investigation. The statute of limitations for crimes against Martial Artists is much longer, so I'll be able to squeeze them for decades."

Rui grinned sadistically.

He had absolutely no qualms about extorting and blackmailing people who plotted to kill him. He was not a saint. He was not Raul.

"We'll have to execute this cleanly," Rui remarked. "We can't afford to make mistakes."

He turned to Master Reina. "I will be the one to go through the briefing session that they will organize for the various assassins. I'm strongest when I collect data on my opponents. I will study all of them thoroughly during the briefing and use that to my advantage during the assassinations. However, you will be taking the place of the Voidreaper instead of me during the assassinations. I will only do so during the briefing. This means that you will have to match my Voidreaper persona and body language."

Master Reina snorted. "That's trivial. I have mastered persona mimicry. I shall ensure that none of them come away wiser."

Rui nodded. "Also, can you guarantee that nobody will notice your Master status?"

"Yes," Master Reina nodded. "That's trivial enough; it takes a particularly powerful high-grade Martial Master with a slant towards sensory to sense me."

"Hm," Rui nodded. "That means I should keep you away from the Truthseeker or Master Zentra and people like that. That's fine."

"Alright, then the plan is set," Rui replied. "I got to the briefing to gather as much intelligence as possible. On the day of the assassination, Master Reina takes place as the Voider, and I will allow the assassinations to happen. I overcome them all and then pretend to succumb to the Voider, and Master

Reina will procure my body and head to the designated area to learn the identity of my death-wishers and extort and blackmail them with it, and then everyone lives happily ever after."

"Yes, but the biggest point of failure in this operation is you," She remarked with concern. "The assassins they're going to be hiring are not second-rate; they're all at the peak of the Senior Realm. On top of that, you're going to be fighting them back to back."

Chapter 1702: Concerns

Her concerns were very valid and sound.

There were extremely few Martial Seniors at the very highest echelons of the Senior Realm who could overcome the things that Rui would be subjecting himself to.

"My rationale is sound," Rui replied calmly. "I am strong. Far, far stronger than I was when I was training under you five years ago."

"I can see that," Master Reina remarked. "Your progress is truly astounding. I'm just cautioning you not to let it impede your judgment."

"I understand. I am doing my best to ensure that it isn't and hasn't while in regards to this decision," Rui replied with a composed tone. "My primary goal is to survive; my secondary goal is to eliminate the threat to me; I can do that by suppressing them with blackmail or even killing them then and there if I can get away with it. Thus, my goal is to exit this ordeal with the threat eliminated and no loss of quality of life where I have to be constantly protected by the Martial Union surrendering my agency."

He wasn't lying, but that wasn't the whole truth.

The truth was that he wanted to be attempted to be assassinated. He had accrued a lot of power recently. He had even gone to accrue a new dimension of his Martial Art.

The last time this had happened was when he trained under Master Zeamer, soon after that, he got to fully test the limits of his power in all-out combat against the powerful Seniors of the Carnil Mafia.

Prior to that, he had added another dimension of adaptive evolution to his Martial Art with the Metabody System, and he had gotten to rigorously test that out in the Virdhabhasa Contest.

This time, he would be testing his power out against assassins who were hired to kill him. It was not fake nor false, nor did he have to go searching for conflict and pick fights forcefully. The fight was coming to him.

He needed to find out just how powerful his Flowing Void Style had become.

Master Reina heaved a troubled sigh, shaking her head. "You're such a troublemaker."

"Hey, I'm not the one who hired assassins. I'm a victim here," He grinned mischievously.

"Hah, it's the other way around," Master Gurren snorted. "How shameless, pretending to be prey when you're actually an ambush predator. You're truly an arrogant brat, after all."

Rui shrugged, uncaring for their accusations. "As long as you fulfill your parts in this plan, I can accept anything you say."

He turned to Master Reina. "Aren't you happy to be partaking in the Kandrian Throne War?"

"How do you know this is related to the Kandrian Throne War?" Master Reina raised an eyebrow.

"Everything is," Rui replied, scoffing. "Especially in the Kandrian Empire. I guarantee you, regardless of whether it's the Kandrian government, any of the seven royals competing for the throne, a powerful corporation, or the Underworld, the motivations behind this assassination are related to the Kandrian Throne War."

The probability that the motivation to take him out was unrelated to the throne war was unthinkable. He had already concluded that the culprit was in the Kandrian Empire. That was what made him confident that it was related to the Kandrian Throne War. His impact on the Kandrian Empire was

beneficial to all of its residents. He was such a golden goose that nobody in the Kandrian Empire had a reason to kill him if not for the fact that there was a throne war.

"Tsk, pesky throne war," Rui tutted. "If only Emperor Rael never fell ill. After listening to the seven royals vying for the throne, it made me realize how valuable he was for maintaining harmony without too much of a cost."

Rui didn't know what the endgame of the throne war was. He had done his best to steer it away from the worst of candidates, but alas, even for him, making lemonade out of this lemon was proving to be almost impossible.

He shook his head, putting away such thoughts.

He had more important matters to focus on in the short term.

The assassinations. He needed to survive. He needed to overcome. He needed to employ every ounce of power he had mustered in the seven years he had spent in the Senior Realm. He had grown tremendously stronger since then, and he couldn't wait to test his new limits.

The two Masters narrowed their eyes as they felt a wave of battle lust from Rui.

He was itching for it.

He grinned, turning to Master Reina. "When is the arranged briefing?"

"It's supposed to be in two weeks," Master Reina replied. "They seem to be proceeding with the greatest of care and caution without giving away even the slightest detail. The Voidreaper will be expected to be in the Kandrian Empire and they will disclose the location of the briefing on the same day as the briefing itself."

"That reveals a lot of fear of being discovered," Rui narrowed his eyes. "It gives me more clues as to who it could be, but not enough to be conclusive about my suspicions. Regardless, I'll be fine. Thankfully, I have a Master-level mask that can impede their senses."

He still had the Master-level mask that Master Deivon had given him a long time ago, and he certainly intended to use it to ensure that any Martial Master present during the briefing would not instantly discover his identity.

"I also need to put up a good little costume befitting that of the Voidreaper," Rui smirked, turning to Master Reina.

"Oh, I have a lifetime of experience with that. I'm sure we can put up something extremely convincing that will really convince people that you are the Voidreaper. After all, you truly are the Voidreaper."

Both sides began preparations for the eventual meet-off and showdown.

In just a matter of two weeks, the briefing meeting had arrived and it was time for Rui to take on his identity as the Voidreaper.

Chapter 1703: Confrontation

Rui walked down the crowded path in a rural district of a bustling town. His attire was...strange, to say the least. He wore things he never had before. A dark Martial Art attire, with a cape-like dark robe over it.

A hood extended over his head, covering his mask-adorned head. He looked like he was trying to cosplay as darkness itself. It was very embarrassing, but Master Reina insisted that it was just right.

Today, he was not Rui Quarrier.

Today, he was the one who had come to kill Rui Quarrier.

Today, he was the Voidreaper.

The assassin that hunted other assassins.

He set himself into that mindset as he took on more silent and darker body language. Yet no power, not even the slightest ounce of threat, could be felt like him. Amongst Martial Artists, that was perhaps a sign of weakness, but amongst assassins, it was the reverse.

It was a sign of power.

Assassins were not showmen; they did not flex their power or lethality in broad daylight to inform everyone around them of their threat.

They did not draw attention.

Despite his get-up, not a single person in the bustling flea market so much as turned a head towards him.

He was invisible.

He had activated Greater Phantomind Void to throw any and everybody off his trail.

Eventually, he stopped, having arrived at a certain inconspicuous shed.

Most would never deign to pay it attention.

That was precisely why his contractors had chosen this as a place to conduct the briefing.

When he extended his senses inside, he found that Riemannian Echo was still reluctantly able to sense through it. Their security measures were not the absolute best that he had ever seen, although they were still extremely good.

That gave him even more clues as to who he was dealing with. He quickly made a few adjustments to the evaluations of the probabilities of the identities of his employer.

CLACK

He opened the little rattling door, crouching his way to fit in through the narrow door as he entered the little shed, taking a row of stairs down, arriving at a more pristine area.

A door was the only way forward.

Yet, it was guarded.

"Name and verification," A masked Martial Master coldly demanded from him.

A single thought flashed through Rui's mind at that moment.

'My deductions were accurate. It is somebody native to the Kandrian Empire. There would be no need to mask a Martial Master if they were not native. The fact that this is even being conducted in such a location is also evidence.'

Rui simply stared at the Master for a second, before reaching in to his robes, pulling out a little token, handing it to the Master. "Voidreaper."

His voice was distorted.

A little trick Master Reina taught him.

The Master's eyes drifted to meet his as he sized Rui up for several seconds.

He didn't seem to be taken aback that he was unable to sense the Voidreaper's appearance.

"You may enter," The Master nodded after verifying the token.

This was a token that had been provided to Area Crina, which Master Reina had returned to bring back to Rui so that he could provide it as proof of identity.

Inside was a large, well-ventilated, and well-lit room filled with luxurious and ostentatious couches and furniture.

It was not something one would expect to see in the flea market that occupied the entire district.

Yet that didn't draw his attention nearly as much as the various figures seated across the couches.

A lean Martial Artist with a curved blade sheathed at his side.

A man whose face was covered with an extravagant gas mask.

A woman with a voluptuous body with scarce clothing that left little to the imagination.

A burly gargantuan man whose hands were larger than Rui's torso.

A woman with green skin that did not even hide its poisonous nature.

Several more, each with their own eccentric traits.

These were the ones who were chosen to kill him.

All of them reacted with alarm when he dispelled Greater Phantomind Void, appearing out of nowhere in their senses as he entered the room, quietly taking a seat on the couch.

Yet he wasn't unaware of the powerful stares boring holes into his body.

They weren't pleased.

After all, Rui had made a silent declaration, conveying a message that they were all too familiar with.

I could kill you whenever, wherever, however.

It was a blow to their pride.

"You must be the notorious Voidreaper, eh?" One of the more chatty assassins stared at him with a poisonous smile.

His words were equally veiled, hiding the spite beneath.

"I've heard things like you're really strong. And that..." His eyes narrowed.

The air grew electric.

"...And that you kill assassins like us for a living."

The others exhibited various reactions; some didn't do so much as twitch, while some watched on with interest.

The man with the gas mask stared holes into Rui while the scantily-clothed woman featured a seductive smile, licking her lips.

SHIIING

Rui opened his eyes at the noise of a blade being unsheathed, turning to the lean man who was slowly drawing his blade.

"I'm sure the others will agree," his voice was sharp.

"Assassination is already such a dangerous and risky business," His tone grew dangerous.

"Almost all of us are doomed to die miserable deaths long before we reach the end of our lifespans."

The atmosphere grew taut.

"It's already so hard being an assassin..." He remarked. "We can't have a bastard like you running around making it even harder, can we?"

The atmosphere grew perilous.

"Any last words?"

Rui's eyes shifted to meet his.

Four words escaped his mouth.

"Come at your peril."

A grin appeared on the man's voice.

"Heh, so he speaks, well, for his last words, those weren't too ba-"

CLACK

The door opened as a well-attired businesswoman accompanied by four high-grade Martial Seniors walked in, accompanied by a staff of assistants.

All of them were masked.

"Welcome to Kandria, assassins of the Underworld," She calmly replied. "I am speaking to you on behalf of your employers; you may address me as M. I will be briefing you on the specifications of our commission, after which you can decide whether you wish to sign the contract or not."

Chapter 1704: Constraints

She turned to the lean man with a drawn blade. "Sir Thunder Viper, please abstain from engaging in any disruptive manner towards your colleagues while you are on our premises. You may indulge them after you have exited the premises, lest we remove you with force non-compliance."

The Thunder Viper stared at her for a second, turning back to the Voidreaper, snorting before sheathing his blade and taking his seat.

"Without further ado, let me begin the briefing session."

A board featuring a screen instead of a surface was brought over, featuring an image.

It was that of Rui Quarrier.

Rui narrowed his eyes as M cut to the chase, featuring the target of the operation.

"As you have been informed, the target of the information is one Rui Quarrier, a grade-thirteen, as last verified, Martial Senior of the Kandrian Empire. The objective, of course, is to assassinate him and supply us with the body," She explained. "This much you have all been informed about. Today, I will go into the constraints and requirements we have for the assassination."

The screen changed, demonstrating immense data on Rui's travel and time habits, including how much time he spent in each location during the day.

It was incredibly creepy to Rui, but he wasn't surprised. Stalking one's assassination targets was completely normal in the industry. One needed to gain every ounce of information to ensure that the assassination went perfectly.

In fact, it was what he was doing right now, at the moment. Even as she spoke, he wasn't paying too much attention to her.

She was not going to be the one trying to kill him.

It was the assassins around him.

He paid attention to all their movements, every twitch, and every shift. Their reactions to every word, the things that preceded each movement. He hadn't yet begun creating predictive models; he could do that later. He first just wanted to gather as much data as he could.

"First, the assassination needs to be covert, ideally," M began. "We wish for you to kill him, having drawn as little attention as possible. This involves minimizing the energy output of the fight as little as possible. Please ensure that it does not cross a certain threshold so that it will draw the immediate attention of the Martial Union."

'Figured,' Rui narrowed his eyes. 'Their game is to ensure that there is little to no way in which the Martial Union will intervene before they successfully kill me and take my body away.'

"This would generally mean ending the assassination quickly and swiftly, although there are exceptions..." M glanced at the Maneater.

She was known to spend time with her targets if she found herself enjoying her assassination, killing them slowly rather than swiftly.

"Truly a shame..." A seductive feminine voice escaped her mouth as she eyed the image of Rui on the board. "I dislike rushing the cute ones to death. There's no harm in giving them the time of their life before they die, is there?"

Her expression grew more intense.

The men in the room stirred as she inadvertently began employing her Martial Art.

'I see...' Rui felt blood rushing to his groin. 'That's a powerful Martial Art. I'll have to be careful about this one.'

Her Martial Art bypassed other Martial Art fundamentally. At least, it bypassed those of heterosexual men and homosexual women. She was useless against anybody else, but within those two groups, she could completely bypass resistance itself.

It was lethal.

In fact, Rui wasn't sure that it was strictly limited to the Senior Realm.

'I know Master Zeamer is a Master, but...' A strange expression appeared on his face beneath his mask. 'Would he really survive if she tried assassinating him?'

He desperately wanted to believe that the Hypnomaster, by virtue of being a particularly formidable Master, would easily be able to handle her seduction-assassination, but he unfortunately couldn't be himself to muster confidence in Master Zeamer.

The man's sex drive was his Martial drive.

Could someone like that possibly resist her at all?

He didn't know.

Yet, he did know that he didn't intend to succumb to her. While he would be lying, as a man, if he said he wouldn't mind a taste of what she had to offer under more amiable and consensual circumstances, he was not going to toss his life for it.

"Madame," M addressed the seductress. "Please abstain from employing your Martial Art. You are affecting this briefing."

No one had missed the changes in the male assistants and assassins.

"Ah...my apologies," She giggled, restraining herself.

Rui inwardly heaved a sigh as he felt relief immediately. Outwardly, he hadn't so much as twitched, maintaining his shadowy mystique and implicit peril. Yet he was quite wary of the seductress.

While the other assassins were all high-grade and threatening more directly, he was much more concerned about a woman who could affect his mind and remove his will to resist. That was far scarier than even the most wicked of blades.

"As I was saying," M continued. "The first constraint of the assassination is that it must be as furtive and quick as possible. The second is that you must provide us with the body and get rid of any evidence of the assassination swiftly after its success."

She turned to the screen as it shifted to a map of the Kandrian Empire, zooming in on the spot outside of the Great Jrava Mountain Range.

"This is the most optimal spot for the assassination and also the third constraint," She explained. "We require you conduct the assassination here and ensure that it ends here. Under no circumstances must the operation shift locations. It will be considered a failure."

"That's simple enough," the Thundering Viper snorted. "We just need to kill him then and there, right?"

"Indeed," M nodded. "That's the third constraint."

"Trivial," he glanced at the picture of Rui. "Especially with all of us working to assassinate him, he won't stand a chance."

Chapter 1705: Last Turn

"In regards to that..." M began. "That brings us to the fourth constraint; the anti-synergy between all of you."

The Thunder Viper narrowed his eyes as he understood what she meant.

He turned to the Maneater and the Suffocator with wary eyes. "I definitely cannot operate near them, that much I can tell you."

He glanced around at each of them with sharp eyes. Each of them had elements that conflicted with his manner of going about things.

A smile flashed atop his face. "A gauntlet, if I remember correctly."

"That's right," M nodded. "We will have a series of assassins in place, ready to take the place of the one that failed. Of course, if there are those of you who think they can work with each other without getting in each other's way, then that is acceptable, too. Aside from the twins, are there any pairs who would be able to work without impeding each other significantly?"

Nobody raised their hands. Although this was the first time that some of them had met each other face-to-face, they knew that their styles would definitely compete with and impede each other.

"...In that case, a series it is," M announced. "We have informed you of the payment structure, but I shall take a moment to go over it again."

The screen on the board changed, featuring a flowchart.

"Each of you will be paid your standard premium commission for simply partaking in the assassination," She informed them. "The one to land the final blow will receive two to the power of whatever their numeric turn is. Thus, if the person going first succeeds in the assassination, they will get twice as much, but if the person going second succeeds, then they get four times as much. The person going thrice would get eight times as much for killing him, and so on and so forth."

This was why so many of them had decided to accept the commission. The price for actually succeeding was incredibly high.

Whoever was employing these assassins to kill Rui was simply giving away gold as it grew on trees.

It also incentivized them to participate even if they didn't get to first due to the additional gold they would get if they succeeded where the ones prior failed.

"I'm going first," The Thunder Viper declared.

His words earned the ire of those around him.

"I'm afraid not," The Maneater's seductive tone grew cold.

"If anyone is going first," A deep voice emerged from within the Suffocator's mask. "It's me."

"We will draw lots for the disputed numbers," M informed them.

Suddenly, Rui raised his hand, drawing everybody's attention. "I'll be going last."

His words took the entire room by surprise.

The probability that the target would be able to get to the last was minimal. It would take an extraordinary Martial Senior to accomplish such a feat.

"Hah," The Thunder Viper snorted. "Did you come here just to get a freebie and avoid working?"

"...If nobody disputes his claim, then it will go to him," M calmly remarked.

A brief silence overtook the entire room.

"Let us proceed with the drawing of lots," M remarked as a box with a hole came about. "Let us begin from the left. Please come in and reach for a chit. Show it to nobody else except me."

That was less desirable for Rui, knowing the order of his assassins was definitely desirable, but alas, he didn't have any valid claim to ask for them. Doing so would simply draw more attention to him. On top of that, he didn't have any justification for it, so it would make him suspicious.

One by one, they drew their number. Most did not exhibit any reaction; the Thunder Viper tutted, and the Maneater smiled seductively.

"Ensure that you do not enter the fray at anything other than your turn," M stated. "If you do, then you shall be denied your pay even if you succeed in killing him. That will be a term in the contract."

None of the assassins voiced any complaints against this.

"Let us get back to the target itself," M said after they had each drawn their turn. "Rui Quarrier. I would suspect most of you know nothing about him."

"I heard he was the new youngest Martial Senior in history," Thunder Viper snorted, raising an eyebrow. "Hehehe, he should have waited. It was stupid to break through that young. He's drawn more attention than he can handle, and he's going to die for it."

The Voidreaper was silent, but inwardly, Rui snorted contemptuously at his words.

"He is indeed the youngest Martial Senior in history," M remarked. "His age of breakthrough thoroughly confirmed by multiple parties, including the Beggar's Sect, the Martial Union, and the Ministry of Martial Art to be twenty-three."

"So young...I bet he tastes wonderful," The Maneater giggled.

"His age of breakthrough is not relevant to the difficulty of the operation," M remarked. "An information package will be provided to each of you featuring everything there is to know about his strengths and weaknesses. You may read through them while I go over the important points."

She turned back to the board as the screens changed to one featuring all of Rui's combat feats and Martial Art intelligence while books filled with intelligence on him.

"There is much to be said in regards to Rui Quarrier as a Martial Artist," M remarked. "However, according to Martial Master sources, there are two things that truly need to be paid attention to."

The screen changed, featuring a brain symbol beside the words 'adaptive evolution.'

"His Martial Path and his capacity for thought are the most important things," M remarked. "In regards to the latter, there are many reasons and testaments. For one, it is confirmed that he learned how to speak fluently by the age of one and how to read by the age of three, demonstrating an astonishingly prodigious rate of growth. In the mental evaluation in the Martial Academy, he scored above two hundred on an IQ test, the highest score in the history of the Martial Union..."

Chapter 1706: Departure

Rui sat there, trying not to let his ego get stoked as she started glazing him.

"...It has been confirmed by Martial Masters that his capacity for thought is so high that he had developed a nascent Martial Mind prototype at the age of fourteen when he broke through to the Apprentice Realm," she remarked.

This revelation sent a visible wave of shock across almost all the Martial Seniors.

As fellow high-grade Martial Seniors who had been in the Senior Realm for decades and centuries, they each understood how arduous the task of making any progress with the Martial Mind was.

"What...?" The Thunder Viper whispered. "That's absurd!"

Not even the Maneater or the Suffocator could maintain their composure at those words as they stared at the masked woman with shock.

"All of what I have uttered is verified and vetted information," M remarked. "He is a prodigy the likes of which this world has never seen. He may be the most thought-gifted Martial Artist in the history of Martial Art. His potential is considered to be immeasurable. His contributions to Martial Art exceed that of even accomplished Martial Masters. A force that will change Martial Art forever..."

M paused for a moment. "...That is Rui Quarrier. And it is the most important thing to note about him. Do not underestimate him due to his youth and thus weaker Martial Body and Heart. What he lacks in body, he makes up for, and then some with thought. You will be facing a monster of mind who will fight with a degree of strategic and tactical saturation that you likely have never faced before."

"Is that why you have taken such extravagant measures to take him down?" Thunder Viper raised an eyebrow. "Even if he is a grade-thirteen Martial Senior this young, this is overkill."

He gestured to all the assassins that had been gathered in the room.

"We cannot afford any mistakes," M remarked. "To ensure that nothing can possibly go wrong, we have taken every possible precaution, no matter how excessive."

She turned back to the screen. "Now, the other pertinent matter to address. Adaptive evolution. That is his stated Martial Path. Based on our rigorous research, it is a philosophy of combat that, as the name suggests, involves change in his combat that is antithetical to his opponent in any and every way."

"Adaptive evolution..." The Suffocator's voice sounded intrigued.

"However, there are certain caveats," M remarked. "It has been identified that he requires information or time to evolve adaptively. In this case, we endeavor to give him neither. That is why we encourage you to ensure that you do not prolong the assassination. The longer it goes, the lower the probability that you will succeed."

The assassins nodded. None of them wanted to face a target that grew stronger with time and allow him the time he needed to survive their assassination attempts.

"I wonder if he can adaptively evolve to me," The Maneater remarked.

Rui didn't respond, of course.

"The details of his known techniques are contained in the information packages that we have provided you," M remarked. "You may go through them in your own time."

She touched up a bit more on the feats that he had accomplished. She was singing praises of his contribution to the Serevian Dungeon War and his accomplishments in the Shionel Dungeon.

"...That is who you're up against. That... is Rui Quarrier," She concluded.

"Heh," A smile saturated with bloodlust emerged on the Thunder Viper's face.

The air crumpled under the sheer maleficent bloodlust of the high-grade assassin. "I can't wait to kill him."

"As mentioned, those reports and analyses we provided you contain everything you need."

"Hah," The Thunder Viper tossed it away. "I believe what I see. I will gather everything I need to know myself."

M didn't respond to that. "That brings us an end to the briefing. Now, if there are no objections, we shall sign the contract. Each of your contracts has been personalized to the personal demands that you've made prior to coming to the Kandrian Empire."

A stack of sheets was handed to Rui, who promptly skimmed through all the terms and conditions.

Frankly, there was only one clause he gave a damn about.

[Pursuant to clause six, in the event of a successful assassination as expounded in clause one by Party B notwithstanding the condition of the cadaver, Party A hereby undertakes that it will divulge its true identity in person, with documented proof and evidence of the truth of said identity prior to the handover of the corpse as specified in clause one.]

This was what he cared about. The identity of the one behind these assassinations. Half of the reasons for all of his deductions, plans, and machination thus far were for the sake of the ones who sought to kill him.

'I can't wait,' Rui mused.

Yet he may not have had to.

This was not the extent of his machinations.

"With that, this briefing comes to an end," M remarked. "The assassination is precisely in two weeks. Please follow the pre-

operation protocols that we agreed upon prior to the assassination. Any failure to comply with them will result in an immediate voiding of the commission as specified in the contract. We cannot afford any mistakes."

Immediately, like clockwork, the staff team immediately began packing as the various instruments folded into portable carry-alongs. In just a minute, the entire place was cleaned up of any evidence that they were there.

"Farewell," M lightly remarked before the entire team disappeared.

'A stealth Martial Master...' Rui narrowed his eyes. 'I bet nowhere near as good as Master Reina, though. Still, more than enough to evade my senses.'

Yet a smile emerged on his face. '...Enough to evade my senses in the present, at least. But the past...'

"They didn't even bother telling us to leave," Thunder Viper snorted, getting up. "I guess they just wanted to leave without leaving any trace more than anything. Paranoid bunch, aren't they?"

"I suppose that means we can remain here until the assassination," the Maneater smiled. "An unnecessary arrangement."

Yet despite that, none of them remained to stay, getting up to leave.

Chapter 1707: Scribed Past

"You actually going remain here, Voidreaper?" The Thunder Viper asked as he noticed Rui remaining seated while the others had already taken their lead.

"..."

Rui didn't bother responding to him as he continued reading through the information package that they had each been provided.

"...You're an annoying bastard to the very end," The Thunder Viper narrowed his eyes before leaving.

Rui remained there.

Ten minutes passed.

Twenty.

Half an hour.

Eventually, an hour passed.

CLACK

Rui tossed the information package on the table, turning to the door.

'That should be enough.'

He left the building and entered the flea market, activating Greater Phantomind Void as he weaved through the various crowds entirely unnoticed.

He found a deserted set of buildings occupied by some homeless people and some junkies. Ignoring them, he sat down, focusing.

'Let's see what the Angel of Laplace can show me,' Rui closed his eyes as he activated the technique.

An almost unnoticeable domain expanded from Rui, covering the entire flea market and beyond.

It was not a powerful domain.

No.

Its energy output was actually not even Squire-level, let alone Senior-level.

Its value came from how it applied energy.

A minute amount of energy spread throughout heaven and earth as Rui measured every single vector by how it resisted the infinitesimal force he applied on each and every single one of them.

In this manner, he was able to measure each and every single one of them.

In his Mind Palace, the Angel of Laplace stood before him.

'No...'

He was looking at a reflection of himself in the ocean of information that began flooding his Mind Palace.

'I am the Angel of Laplace.'

RUMBLE!

The weight of the technique crashed against him abruptly.

"Rrrrrghh!" He gritted his teeth as he struggled to process every single vector that he had measured.

It threatened to crush his mind.

Yet he weathered it.

He endured.

An unfathomable amount of time passed.

Yet, eventually, the fog that separated the past from the future began fading.

This was hardly the first time he had gone through this.

Yet each time was a magical experience.

It was profound.

His eyes widened as the world around him began rewinding. The sun in the sky froze before rewinding its path.

People stopped before walking backward.

Gravity seemed to reverse as things fallen on the ground rose up, accelerating before returning from whence they came.

Yet he wasn't concerned about the mundane past.

He was looking for a very specific past.

Some distance away from the venue where the briefing had occurred. He saw several Martial Masters surrounding a small crowd of people walking backward from outside of the flea market in the center of the town they were in.

He recognized the masked M.

A grin appeared on his face.

"Found you."

Misdirection did not work through time. It was limited to the present.

He could bypass it in the future.

And bypass he did.

He had scried the past.

He knew what direction they had gone.

He quickly shifted, leaving the flea market as he followed the path that they had taken.

The hard part about this method was that he would need to execute the Angel of Laplace until he found them.

Yet that was a price worth paying.

"Rrrrgh," He gritted his teeth as he executed the technique once more.

An hour passed as he breathed heavily, pushing his mind to the absolute limit. He executed the technique a little quicker than last time, having optimized his thought process.

The Master-escorted group passed through the metropolitan town and richer districts in the center of the town.

Just before his vision ended, he spotted where they had entered.

[DiVilliers Enterprise]

His eyes widened as he shut off the technique.

"DiVilliers...?" He narrowed his eyes.

Charles DiVilliers was a powerhouse tycoon in the Martial manufacturing and services industry. His clientele was limited to Martial Artists and aspiring Martial Artists. His products were so powerful and impactful that the Ministry of Martial Art and the Kandrian Empire both signed him as exclusive partners.

The Royal Emperor had specifically passed a bill that made it impossible for him to sell his products and services to any market internationally, limiting his international reach.

That was what had pushed him to the Underworld.

Through the Atagliana Mafia, he was able to smuggle his products and services outside of the Kandrian Empire without being caught and sell them to international clients.

Through the Schambiei Mafia, he was able to receive illegal payments without ever being caught.

Ever since Rui learned that Rajak was the Underworld Prince, he knew that Charles DiVilier was part of the Underworld Faction.

It made sense.

'Is he targeting me, or is Rajak?' Rui narrowed his eyes. 'What is the extent of his involvement, and are there any other parties involved?'

He didn't know.

Yet he didn't dare to go anywhere near DiVilliers Enterprise.

The man undoubtedly had Martial Masters and other powerful esoteric isolation systems that would interfere with the Angel of Laplace.

Yet this information alone was enough.

He now knew who was targeting him in part, though he didn't know everything.

Unfortunately, this could not be used as evidence for Rui to tie their hands by threatening to reveal it to the Martial Union.

Even if he did convey his visions, there was no proof that they were an accurate representation of the past. He did not want to reveal Angel of Laplace to the world just yet, either.

Yet he had certainly unlocked a part of the mystery of those who wanted him dead.

It made sense that Rajak would want him dead if he had come to learn that Prince Raijun was approaching the Squire Realm at breakneck speed.

The other six would know that once Prince Raijun became a Squire and gained much greater support from the Martial Union, it was game over. That was incentive enough to get rid of Rui.

'That little bastard thinks he can get rid of me that easily, eh?' Rui smiled.

Cold amusement flashed across his face.

'Just you wait...'

His eyes narrowed.

"You will regret making me your enemy."

Chapter 1708: Delicate Inferences

"Charles DiVilliers...The Underworld Prince..." Master Reina considered his words thoughtfully.

"I can confirm that he is one of my conspiring death-wishers," Rui replied.

"One of?" Master Reina raised an eyebrow. "How do you know there are more?"

"...I am eighty-nine percent certain that the little briefing was not arranged by Rajak or the Underworld," Rui replied, narrowing his eyes. "It's not their modus operandi. No...this is the work of someone who is not nearly as accustomed to covert and furtive operations of the kind that is being attempted. The Underworld would have sacrificed the luxury in favor of practicality. They would have briefed us in the middle of a trash valley if it meant lesser probability of being tracked."

"That's true," Master Reina nodded thoughtfully.

Rui narrowed his eyes defiantly. There was still something that didn't add up. The more he thought about it, the more he felt like this was not an initiative from the Underworld so much as an initiative that came from elsewhere and made use of the Underworld's services.

'Yes, that better describes what's happening,' Rui realized. 'The Underworld wouldn't need to use Charles DiVilliers' place as a getaway if it truly was intent on killing me with everything it had. Their own capacity to hide the Kandrian Empire far exceeds that of Charles DiVilliers. The resources that were employed were more reminiscent of someone powerful who is working with their hands tied.'

That suggested a force that had a lot of power at their disposal but was not under their absolute control, such that they could use it to get rid of Rui without the Martial Union noticing.

'...The Royals...' Rui's eyes widened as he arrived at his final deduction. 'The modus operandi I have witnessed from my death-wishers ever since being informed about them perfectly fits that of a group of individuals with immense power at their disposal, which they cannot employ against me because of a lack of absolute control over it and because of a conflict of interests with my death.'

Only the royals fit that description. Aside from Raul, none of the royals had gained true loyalty from their faction. The royals lacked control over their faction the most than any of the other three options.

The Underworld, a powerful corporation, and the Kandrian government would have handled this very differently, especially in their manner of getaway. These three had much greater control over their power and resources than the royals did, and while they all feared the Martial Union too much to use their own Martial resources, which would lead to them being identified and caught, there would be more refinement in their modus operandi even in their hiring of international assassins."

"A corporation would not have demonstrated the nuanced understanding of the operation that I witnessed in the briefing," Rui narrowed his eyes. "These are organizations who are accustomed to outsourcing services to the experts and leave the matter entirely to them with the constraints and objectives specified. They would have simply asked for my covert death and body and let the assassins figure it out. Yet they have proactively partaken in the planning of the assassination."

That reduced the probability of the true culprit being a corporation.

"The Kandrian government would never rely on DiVilliers Enterprises. There is too strong a conflict of interests between the two parties for them to trust each other," Rui realized that the probability of the Kandrian government being the true culprit was limited as well. "They also would not be able to transfer such large sums of money abroad with the Martial Union not noticing something fishy."

He had also noted the inconsistencies with the modus operandi of the Underworld and what he witnessed, thereby reducing the probability that it was the Underworld. By comparing the known modus operandi of the four suspects and the actual culprits, he was able to revise his evaluations of the probabilities of the four suspects.

The only option out of the four possibilities that he had shortlisted two weeks ago was the royals.

It became increasingly likely that one or more royals had cooperated to take Rui out.

The only royals he could trust not to take him out were Prince Raijun because Rui was his ticket to winning the Kandrian Throne War and Prince Raul. Since, as hard as it was to believe, the man was fit to be considered a saint.

"Well, do you want me to assassinate them?" Master Reina asked curiously.

An amused smile emerged on his face. Had anyone else offered, he would have scoffed, but when Master Reina did, he knew that she wasn't jesting in the least. He would not bet against her being unable to assassinate somebody not protected by a Martial Sage.

"...No," Rui heaved a sigh, shaking his head. "That will make things worse."

If it came to light that he was indirectly involved with the mass assassination of the royal family, he was dead. Not even the Martial Union could protect him from the gravity of such a situation. It was completely over.

On top of that, even though he knew she probably wouldn't get caught, he didn't gain anything from their deaths. In fact, it just allowed Prince Raijun to become Emperor with zero competition.

Rui needed the other princes and princesses to restrict him so that a bit of a deadlock could return. He would rather delay the unofficial victory of any one prince or princess as much as he could by ensuring that they kept each in check.

It was quite likely that multiple royals and factions would need to come together to actually successfully keep each other in check. But alas, that was the best he could do for the time being.

Regardless, his own priorities took precedence, and he needed to suppress the threats that the royals represented without getting himself into major trouble and completely throwing the Kandrian Throne War sideways and ruining the country.

At that moment, Rui couldn't help but feel like the Kandrian Empire was a little child, depending on him, the adult, to sustain it.

Chapter 1709: Preparations

"So now what?" Master Reina asked him.

"Now we wait," Rui replied. "The assassins have probably already begun shadowing me, keeping an eye on me. I can't do anything too suspicious."

He turned to Master Reina. "You're sure none of them can see you, right?"

"Of course," She nodded. "Nobody except for you two."

Master Reina had the ability to selectively choose who could or couldn't see her. This allowed her to speak to them normally without worrying that anybody would see her.

"Good," Rui nodded. "As for me, I'm going to have to spend the next two weeks just living life normally for Rui Quarrier."

He needed to ensure he didn't deviate from his standard daily schedule and travel pattern to ensure that he didn't throw them off.

"You, on the other hand, are going to have to spend some time pulling off a perfect Voidreaper persona," Rui noted. "As long as you can do that, that's good. You'll be able to fool all of the Master bodyguards of the royals."

"How many will there be?" Master Gurren raised an eyebrow.

"Probably no more than three to four per Royal," Rui shrugged.

"That's a lot..." Master Gurren narrowed his eyes. "The two of us cannot fight off sixteen Kandrian Martial Masters. I'm just not strong, and she's a strong assassin, not a strong warrior."

"She doesn't need to be a strong warrior," Rui turned to Master Reina. "She just needs to be a strong assassin."

Master Reina smiled as she understood what Rui was telling her. "Sounds fun. It should work."

"Good," Rui replied. "As for me..."

His eyes narrowed. "I need some time to train."

Although the data that he got on each of the many assassins that had been called to take him down was not too much, it was enough for him to get started.

He had avoided creating a predictive model during the briefing. That could be done later. What couldn't have been done later was gathering data on them. That was why he had focused on observing them like a hawk every millisecond of the briefing.

Now, he could get started on not just the pattern recognition system but also the other strategic and tactical systems of thought. These were a large variety of practical combat considerations and lines of thought that included even the voidlet techniques in their own way, adjust for his circumstances.

'I also need to form some very specific counters to some of them,' Rui narrowed his eyes as he thought about the Maneater.

The epithet was befitting an apex predator that only hunted human beings. It was not something he could expect to refer to a seductress Martial Art who had sealed away being effective against most women for the sake of being extremely effective against most men.

He had confirmed that her Martial Art was quite powerful. She had only displayed a small speck of it in the briefing by accident, and it had been overwhelming. If he didn't do anything about her, he might end up getting 'eaten' by her.

'I could go to the Beggar's Sect to learn more about her, but...' Rui heaved a sigh. 'That would be too suspicious in my currently surveilled circumstances. I'll just have to stick with what I know.'

It would also alert the Beggar's Sect about what was going on. He didn't want them to find out if they hadn't already.

'Considering the royals know about how dangerous the Beggar's Sect can be to them, they should have taken the extreme measures needed to keep the Beggar's Sect at bay,' Rui noted.

Martial Masters thoroughly and individually vetting each and every person was one way, but having them involved with each and every single step with the utmost stealth precautions taken. This was the bare minimum to prevent the Beggar's Sect from learning, and even these did not guarantee secrecy. Thus, even more measures would need to be taken to be completely safe from the Beggar's Sect.

'However, the royals should already know the necessity of these measures,' Rui narrowed his eyes. 'Unless they have forgotten about the fiasco that Princess Raemina suffered when all the strategic and tactical plans cooked by her and her advisors were leaked,' Rui mused.

when all the strategic and tactical plans cooked by her and her advisors were leaked,' Rui mused.

He, too, did not want the Beggar's Sect to know about these assassinations.

While his relationship with the Beggar's Sect had always been cooperative and cordial, that did not mean that they were his friends. They were an astronomically gigantic organization spread across all human civilization. It probably was not possible to be 'friends' with them. To them, he was an asset worth befriending. To him, they were just a convenient source of information.

He shook his head as he began working hard to form specific counters and adaptively evolved manners of combat.

That was what consumed most of his mind in the days that followed. He meditated, simulating outcomes and scenarios as he dedicated immense time to the Martial Artists that had earned his highest priority. Some of the assassins were obviously easier to deal with than the others. He spent less time on them.

However, none of them were 'easy.'

They were all high-grade assassins.

Worst of all, he would be facing them in an assassination, which was their domain of expertise and specialty. Not his. All of their techniques. All of their Martial Bodies and prototypical Martial Minds would be centered around assassination and killing; precisely the circumstance that they would be taking him on in.

On top of that, he was not going to be facing one but many, one after the other. Overcoming one could leave him too drained to face the next, causing his death. He needed to defeat each and every single assassin without rest or rejuvenation.

Even for a powerful high-grade Martial Artist like himself, these were extremely dire circumstances.

However, he had several advantages.

The first was, well, he was strong.

Extremely strong.

He didn't know how strong. But this opportunity served as a good way to test the newfound power he had gained since consuming the Roaring Dragon Blood Potion and developing his newfound Yggdrasil System.

Chapter 1710: Heavenly Convergence

Another advantage he had was that he knew what they knew, but they didn't know what he knew. In other words, he was the one ambushing them, not the other way around.

This is why he could set traps to catch them off-guard.

The final advantage he had was that they were operating on what was essentially misinformation in regards to his power level. That was a huge advantage that would do him well at the beginning of the fight.

"Huff..." He exhaled lightly. "I just have to hope that that does me well enough."

Days passed as Rui trained hard, preparing for the dreaded day.

Eventually, it came.

Two weeks had passed since the briefing. And the day of the assassinations had finally arrived.

Master Reina's body had morphed to match his silhouette as she donned the Voidreaper attire, heading off to complete the pre-assassination protocol.

His death-wishers were deliberately staying away from the assassination. M was nowhere near the location of the assassination, as far as he could tell.

That made sense. It was best to ensure that there were no inconveniences.

In the past two weeks, he had thoroughly prepared himself for the assassination. He had also gotten a good full night's sleep the night prior, having completely refreshed his mind and body.

He opened his eyes, leaving a deep meditative state to condition and temper his mind.

The atmosphere was tense.

"Are you ready, arrogant boy?" Master Gurren asked.

"I am," his voice was calm and composed.

Yet it was also steely and firm.

"Good," Master Gurren nodded. "Now get going. And survive. I still need you to teach me that Parallax Method."

"Hah..." Rui chuckled. "Of course."

Sometimes, the Martial Master just could not be honest.

He got up, leaving the mountain the Master resided upon, heading out down his regular path through the Great Jrava Mountain range that he had been following for nearly two years now.

As he got closer and closer to the point of assassination, the atmosphere became heavier.

His demeanor remained unchanged on the surface.

But inwardly, he grew graver and graver.

Soon enough, he had crossed the entirety of the Great Jrava Mountain Range. There was a camping convoy of various travelers that had happened to be conveniently set-up around at various spots where he would normally stop.

Quite conveniently, it circled him.

It was time.

STEP

He landed on the ground.

His demeanor was nonchalant.

Like it was just another day doing the same old thing that he did yesterday and would be doing tomorrow.

Yet everybody around knew that it wasn't just another day.

The moment had arrived.

WHOOSH

Rui's eyes widened as he felt a deep sense of peril from behind him.

BOOM!!!

A fake expression of shock and bewilderment arose on his face as he just barely managed to evade a double-fisted hammer fist with his Martial Heart.

RUMBLE!

The very lands beneath them shook under the weight of his attack,

Had it struck Rui...he would be dead.

He had narrowly avoided death.

Rui's eyes narrowed as he beheld his first opponent.

The man was gargantuan. A single one of his arms dwarfed Rui in size; he was inhumanly big and had an unbelievable stature. A wild grin appeared on his face as he didn't give Rui even the slightest chance to gather his bearings.

He opened his mouth, sucking air with a powerful inhaling force.

Yet it wasn't the gesture that stunned Rui; it was what followed.

An enormous, powerful suction force between them emerged, pulling everything towards the man.

His arms waited in anticipation, ready to crush Rui with the unfathomable weight of his powerful hammer blows.

This was the Hammerer, a powerful high-grade assassin who haplessly dragged his victims away from a distance and then pounded them to death with a single blow from his astronomical striking power.

His Martial Body was centered around power. Centered around the respiratory power and striking power of his Martial Art.

Yet, Rui had no intention of dying.

His eyes bore into the Hammerer's.

'Breathing Crucifix.'

"Hnnng!" The man choked.

His eyes widened with shock as he noticed that the suction force had reduced by more than half!

His lungs felt shackled.

They felt labored.

Like someone had attached weights to them.

He didn't understand.

Yet he could afford to try understanding, either.

He had a target to kill.

He had already flubbed his ambush, allowing Rui to avoid instantaneous death.

And now, the man had somehow sealed his breathing power!

Yet, just when he thought it was over, Rui's arms stretched out towards him.

Two words escaped his mouth.

"Heavenly Convergence."

Rui hated that he needed to utter the new name of the technique born from Project Skyfall out loud. The name was surprisingly literal, for it did converge the weight of the heavens on his target. He even liked the name; he just hated actually saying it in combat.

"It's a matter of psychological association and trigger," Master Gurren had told him many months ago in training. "Do you want to reach passive domain mastery or not?"

Yet, regardless of his sentiments, the domain technique unfurled.

It bore its power to the world.

RUMBLE!

The very fabric of heaven and earth shook.

It bent.

Bent to the will of Rui Quarrier.

Every vector in the air.

Every vector in the land.

He gently ushered them in a single direction.

Towards a single person.

BOOM!!!

AARGRGRHHRHRH!!!" The Hammerer bellowed as he gritted his teeth.

His joints creaked.

His muscles shuddered.

His flesh wrung.

He felt like a mountain had been placed on his shoulders in all directions.

His suction technique was overwhelmed as a tsunami of vectors crashed into him from the front.

"ACK!" He choked even further!

He was entirely unable to breathe.

Yet Rui had no intention of letting him gather his bearings.

CLASP!

His arms coiled around the man's neck as he squeezed hard, crushing it.

A rear chokehold was a simple maneuver, even if deadly. He was barely able to use it simultaneously with Heavenly Convergence, allowing him to hamper the man's breathing in three different manners.