

## Martial Unity 311

### Chapter 311: Observations

In summary, the able adult farmers worked relentlessly while the elderly and the children who couldn't work were used as leverage. The presence of arms as well as the powerful Martial Apprentice made their situation absolutely hopeless.

Rui only counted a little less than half of the gang members from the known number of members of the gang in his reconnaissance, which meant they were hidden in the village. He wasn't able to pin-point which seismic signatures he was sensing via Seismic Mapping were the unseen gang members, but they were likely cooped up in the building.

Now that Rui had completed the initial reconnaissance surveillance of the village. He wanted to take his time gathering more information of the movements and activities of the villagers and the gang members before making a plan of how to complete the mission.

He had already ruled out running into the village at this very moment at attacking the gang. Although the human gang members with muskets weren't a threat by themselves, they were a threat if he was fighting another powerful Martial Apprentice.

Although musket bullets were faster than he was to some degree, the humans firing them most certainly were not. By the time normal humans would shift, take aim and pull the trigger, Martial Apprentices could easily have killed all of them thanks to their enhanced battle cognition and superhuman speed, especially one as good as Rui. Even if some stray bullets hit Martial Artists, most of them had defensive techniques that could mitigate their damage.

The problem was that even though Rui could easily deal with the gang if they were by themselves, they weren't by themselves. Rui would be distracted with fighting Vranil and they could pepper him with bullets or even take hostages.

Although Rui could probably still fight and even win under those extenuating circumstances, it would be far riskier and would certainly end up with a lot of dead villagers. One of the conditional constraints of the commission was that the loss of life to the villagers needed to be minimized, and he could certainly be violating that condition with this tactic.

Thus, this idea was immediately tossed out. Taking a head-on brute-force approach was not really viable. That left more covert measures.

He would need to ensure that the conflict between himself and the gang occurred asymmetrically and non-confrontally. Meaning, he attacked them in ways, timings and places that mitigated their advantages and increased the significance of their disadvantages.

He had hatched up several potential plans, but intended to gather more information to gauge their probabilities of success and flesh out the ones with the highest probability of desired success while tossing out the ideas that probably weren't going to cut it.

Night was just an hour away, and Rui intended to see what their arrangements for the night were. That was a crucial piece of information that would be required before he decided on how to proceed.

Once it was night, he began circling the village while carefully observing what he saw. When it was night, the gang members who had patrolled throughout the day actually changed with a different set of guards who took their places.

('A day and night shift system.') Rui observed. The working farmers stayed in the fields for quite some time more until they were finally allowed to sleep.

('They're basically slaves.')

One of his plans was to ambush them during the night, however he realized that might not be as easy as he had hoped. The night shift guards and patrollers were actually quite alert and sharp, to their credit. Rui could see they were highly aware of their surroundings at all times. Despite the night, it would be difficult to ambush them without being instantly noticed. It seems they were extremely wary of being attacked at night

If he had more stealth techniques it would have been manageable. Rui sighed. Even though this hadn't meant to be a covert mission, it kind of was turning into one inadvertently because Rui wanted to optimize his approach.

He had Blink

Still, it was one of his best plans regardless. Unless something better popped up somehow, he would probably be sticking to this plan.

The night passed away boringly and statically. But in the morning, there was a change.

Early in the morning, a group of five of the gang members headed off into the forest, carrying muskets, ropes, a large bag among other things.

('They're hunting.') Rui mused. He had expected that. He decided to follow them at a distance, making sure he was never closer than two-hundred-and-fifty meters to them. With Seismic Mapping, he didn't need to be particularly close to them. Furthermore, they didn't seem to speak Sanskrit, so there was no intel he could gain from following them around.

In the span of four hours, they managed to catch four large boars as well as a deer. They hauled back their catch merrily, heading back to the village. The gang members feasted on the meal, even giving some to the villagers, albeit not much. What annoyed Rui was that he still hadn't even gotten a glimpse of Vranil Fra yet. The man refused to come out of wherever the hell he was.

The rest of the day passed the same as the previous day, and Rui got a complete picture of all the activities of all the members of the village, gang or otherwise.

He already had a plan at hand, but the problem was his lack of information on Vranil. Ultimately, the information he had on Vranil was not as updated nor detailed as he would have liked. If he could see Vranil fight for even a bit, he would understand the man's physical parameters, approach to conflict and even his combat mentality. These things could make the difference between life and death. It was possible that Vranil had grown much stronger since his last recorded fight.

In which case, Rui would be saving his own life by finding that out ahead of time.

## Chapter 312: Bear Chasing

The good news was that Rui had more-or-less figured out Vranil's location through analyzing the seismic radiation readings his Seismic mapping technique had picked up. Vranil's location was likely in the most

luxurious accommodations that the village had to offer; the village chief's home. Rui deduced his position based on the frequent incoming and outgoing traffic of the gang members in and out the building, compared to all other buildings. That along with the fact that there was only one presence of only one Seismic signature within the building, despite its size, gave him away.

"But how can I get him to fight?" Rui wondered. "The only reason he himself would fight instead of his gang members is if they cannot handle an issue without casualties."

Just then, Rui's eyes widened as an interesting idea flashed through his head.

"Hehe." He chuckled. "This might actually work."

He immediately turned around heading back to the Kingdom of Grahal, moving swiftly through the forest. Within an hour, he had entered the Kingdom of Grahal. He quickly made his way to the closest commissions office of Kandrian Martial Union.

"Excuse me." He addressed a staff member, having entered the building after the legitimacy of his documents were verified.

"How may I help you?" The staff member smiled at him.

"I wish to purchase information on all known Apprentice-level fauna within a hundred-kilometer radius of the Hefermaine village."

Martial Artists could purchase information from the Martial Union not included in the Mission bill, however extra information outside the mission bill was not free and had to be paid for.

"Alright, please give me your license."

Rui provided it to her as she verified it, returning it back to him.

"It will be prepared shortly." She told him. "It will cost around one-hundred-and-fifteen silver coins."

"Can it be deducted from my Martial Academy account?"

"Yes, of course. Give me a second."

Soon the process was completed as the woman handed him a box of files. "Here you go, Apprentice Quarrier. The information you requested for."

"Thank you."

Rui immediately took the box over to a couch and table on the waiting room. He immediately started skimming through the files, absorbing the information at an incredible rate. Normally, even the Mind Palace technique did not allow for such speedy storage of information, but Rui's enhanced mind as well as the extreme effort he had put into heightening his master of the technique had allowed him to reach a level with it that broke the ordinary limits of the technique.

In merely ten minutes, he had read through all the files, and had completely memorized all the data provided in it.

"Thank you. I'll be taking my leave." He put the box on the table.

"You've purchased the information, not rented it. It's yours." She said.

"I've memorized it, I don't need it anymore, I can't carry it around for my mission either." Rui said, turning around and leaving in a hurry as she stared at his back, dumbfounded.

There were many more Apprentice-level beasts within the the geographic vicinity of the Hefermaine village, more than he had expected. But, in hindsight, it was to be expected. The Kingdom of Grahal was poorer and couldn't afford the high amount of environmental and ecological control that the Ministry of Environment and Ecology of the Kandrian Empire had.

Thus, the fauna was more unadulterated. Rui quickly sorted through the information in his mind palace, as he found what he was looking for.

"The Frowning Bear... Mid-grade Apprentice-level beast. Thick-headed but also has a strong sense of survival and is also easy to aggravate. Not to mention, just strong enough to force him to show a bit of his strength. Just perfect for my needs." He murmured.

That was his plan.

If he wanted to see Vranil fight, then he merely needed to give him a reason.

A rampaging Apprentice-grade wild bear that threatened to sabotage his whole operation was just perfect.

Thankfully, the bear wasn't too far either, merely forty-two kilometers away from the Hefermaine village. Furthermore, it was a territorial creature that spent most of its time in its cave, this made it easier for Rui to find it.

Within an hour, he reached the location of its known territory. Rui uncaringly sprinted in as he used Seismic Mapping to look for it.

Thankfully, a big bear with Apprentice-grade power was hard to miss. Its seismic radiation was loud and Rui could perceive it from quite a distance away.

Half a minute later, it was already within his field of vision.

"Intimidating." he murmured.

The bear was quite large. Its eyes were blood-red and it had razor sharp teeth that adorned a huge jaw.

But despite this, Rui didn't feel even a pang of fear.

The bear was too weak, Rui could kill it quite quickly if he wanted to. At his current level, anything below the highest echelons of the Apprentice Realm could not even make him feel threatened.

"ROOOOAAAAR" The bear spotted him.

Rui wordlessly watched it as it rampaged towards him, angered at having its territory invaded

"ROAAA-" "Shut up."

His voice was soft, but the peril he emitted was not.

The bear froze as the air grew cold and sharp, stretching taut. A maelstrom of pressure crashed onto the bear's mind as Rui glared at it, releasing the shackles he had placed on his aura earlier to reduce his presence for the sake of stealth.

Suddenly, Rui dashed towards it at a high speed. The bear didn't even dare to try and fight back, as it turned around, running away at top speed.

"Good." Rui had predicted this. Its strong survival sense was one of the reasons Rui had chosen it. This way he could lead it wherever he wanted by threatening it, especially since it was slower than it. Rui slowly began forcing it to run in the direction he wanted.

He did this by barricading its path every time it ran in a direction that he didn't want it to. This involved a lot of circling around to ensure the bear followed a path he wanted it to.

They had a long way to go, especially since Rui couldn't just chase the bear to the village through the shortest direction, he had more or less figured out the general location of Vranil, he wanted the bear to enter the village at a location Vranil was closest to.

### Chapter 313: Plan

The task turned out more difficult than Rui expected, the bear was quite erratic and chaotic, causing Rui to spend literally every alternate second redirecting the bear in the direction he wanted to. He needed to use a combination of fear and pain with the Stinger to redirect it each time.

It took half a day until they were finally close to the village.

('Finally!') Rui was ecstatic. He was actually quite exhausted, but he focused. The crucial part was soon to come. He had redirected the bear where he wanted, through great difficulty. Now he needed to send the bear rampaging straight into the part of the village where Vranil was closest.

As they reached closer, Rui glared at the bear, exposing his hostility. He wanted to inspire even greater terror to cause the bear to speed up.

"ROOOAAARR." The bear roared as it picked up the pace in terror. Rui kicked it in the ass with the Stinger once more before stopping and diving straight to the ground. He had already reached quite close to the village and he could not go much further without revealing his presence.

But what he had done was already enough.

In the distance, nearly half a minute later he heard the bear roaring once more. However, this time, he heard the humans screaming in alarm as well. He heard several gunshots firing over and over again, followed by painful screeches drowning out grunts from the bear.

And then there was silence.

Rui jumped up to the top of a tree swiftly. Hiding behind the trunk as he stood on a branch. He pulled out a monocular not wanting to miss anything further. Thankfully, dusk had already long come and the darkness gave him cover.

The bear had run into a group of gang members patrolling the village, and had immediately attacked them in a frenzy.

This was part of Rui's predictions as well as his plan. Having been forced to run for half a day had caused it to develop an extreme sense of hunger. It had avoided Rui because its survival instinct was even stronger, but ordinary humans could not threaten it, even with weapons. It had immediately lunged at them even as they futilely shot at it, and killed them all, before beginning to eat silently and greedily.



But the deed was done, and it had already drawn the attention of the second of the two living beings that could kill it.

"There it is." one of the gang members shouted from a distance pointing at a distance. "It's already killed three of us."

Rui's eyes sharpened as he felt the atmosphere grow heavy.

The humans and the bear froze in terror.

"Strong." Rui evaluated, raising an eye.

Vranil Fra was a gargantuan man, he had an aggressive and savage aura. With unkempt hair and beard, he looked like someone who had resided in the wilderness for the past eight months, than luxurious quarters.

He ran to the bear with wide open arms.

"Not that fast at all, still not bad, especially for his size." Rui murmured.

The bear immediately turned around, running away. But it was too late.

SPLAT

He swung his open hand at the bear and five long finger-deep gashes appeared on its back.

"ROOOOAAAAR!" The bear roared in pain as it tried getting away despite the pain and the profuse blood loss. Yet Vranil held in place with fingers still in the wound.

Rui's eyes widened at that sight.

He was holding the bear back with just a single arm!

Even Rui would need to use his entire body to accomplish something like that. As far as sheer raw physical power went, Vranil was in the same league as Fae, probably even higher, being a male.

The bear turned around, biting him. It had realized escape was futile, its sense of survival forced it to fight back.

Yet, it couldn't even hurt him, another feat that impressed Rui immensely.

SPLAT

Five deep gashes emerged on bear's neck, spurting out blood like an open tap. It was already too late at that point.

The bear perished, quickly.

Vranil Fra had an ugly expression on his face. "Where did this bear come from? There were supposed to be no Apprentice-grade animals in the near vicinity of the Hefermaine village, nor has this bear been spotted in the past eight months. Why did this bear travel such a large distance away from its natural habitat?"

The men scratched their head in confusion. They hadn't even considered the matter; they had been too busy trying to stay alive.

"There's a chance it was driven here by a predator. A predator powerful enough to chase it. Look at these wounds on its body." He pointed at wounds inflicted by Rui's Stinger. "I did not give it those, and they're quite fresh as well." The man gruffly spoke. "Be careful when you head out for tomorrow's hunting, take more men."

The men gulped in fear at those words.

Vranil turned back to the corpse of the bear. "Drain and skin the corpse. Its meat can be of use."

He turned around at those words, heading back to his quarters.

"Yes sir!"

If Rui had been able to hear and understand their conversation, he would have been grinning ear-to-ear.

Everything was proceeding as he had foreseen. All of it.

Rui's plan to chase the bear was not just to see Vranil fight, it was also part of his plan to eventually take down the gang, all without a single casualty to the village. He intended to complete this mission as cleanly as possible.

If the gang members came to believe that there potentially was a predator in the forests powerful enough to hunt even mid-grade Apprentice-level bear, then would they suspect a Martial Artist when Rui killed all their hunting gang members in the forest tomorrow?

Furthermore, once all those hunting gang members did die in his hands tomorrow, would they foolishly send more ordinary humans? Or would they send in a Martial Artist instead?

Into the forest, misbelieving he was fighting a dumb beast instead of a superhumanly smart Martial Artist.

#### Chapter 314: Macabre

The answers to those questions were exactly what Rui wanted them to be. Rui had already made up his mind on how to complete the mission. He would no intentions of fighting them in the village where they were most comfortable, not immediately at least. He would draw them out to the forest and finish them before they ever even knew that their enemy was a human.

At the very least, he absolutely had to fight Vranil away from the villagers and the rest of the Ruyloken gang. That was a bare minimum condition he had created for whatever plan he would enact to complete the mission.

He had computed seventeen potential plans. Out of which only four had a reasonably high probability of success. Drawing Vranil out into the woods under the pretense of Apprentice-level beast had one of the highest probabilities of success.

Furthermore, these created the best and most advantageous circumstances for Rui to fight Vranil as well. The mentality one adopted was very different from the mentality needed to fight humans. This would work against him in their fight.

"Still, he's strong." Rui murmured. "It's been a while since the difficulty grade of my mission was inaccurate."

He thought back to his very first mission nearly two years ago.

Still, this wasn't nearly as bad as that was. The mission should have been a grade-ten mission as far as difficulty went, in Rui's opinion. Vranil was almost quite likely a grade-ten Martial Artist, instead of the grade-nine that was the estimated difficulty of the mission.

Vranil was strong. His offense was even greater than was advertised. His piercing offense was lethal.

"No, it was closer to ripping than it was piercing." Rui murmured to himself. The man had not conditioned his nails to be particularly sharp or anything of the sort. He had incredibly powerful hands and grip strength. He sheared the flesh off of the bear, which was an even more impressive feat as far as Rui was concerned.

"His defense was extremely impressive too." Rui murmured. The fact that the bear was unable to hurt his hand with its bite was quite problematic, even if the bear was already weakened and damaged immensely. Rui would not be able to win the battle with a single Stinger, most likely.

His speed, however, was unflattering. Rui definitely held a significant edge in this regard and that would most certainly turn out to be a huge boon in the fight. It was an advantage Rui intended to abuse.

For now, he had done everything he needed to. Rui merely needed to wait until the next morning,

And waited he did. He consumed a few rejuvenation potions. He had been quite exhausted from the bear chase, and he also did intend to stay up until the next day until the men went out for hunting. Falling asleep would be an absolute blunder, even if he had been trained to sleep very lightly in the Martial foundation stage.

The night passed as Rui observed the gang members on guard and patrol duty than night. It seemed as though word of a potential Apprentice-level predator in the forest had spread among the men of the Ruyloken gang, as they were all extremely tensed and alert as they patrolled the village, far more so than usual.

Soon, dawn came.

And as expected, the hunting team was loaded.

Nine heavily armed men set out cautiously, early in the morning just as dawn cracked in the sky.

It was a beautiful day that inspired positivity.

Yet the men looked terrified.

"Sssh." One of them whispered to the other. "You're making too much noise!"

"I can't help it!" The other replied. "It's literally a pouch of metal bullets!"

"Why the fuck did you bring that along with you?"

"It can save our lives! More bullets mean more firepower!"

"Idiot!" He cursed. "You won't have time to reload that many times if we do find the Apprentice-level predator!"

"Oh." Realization dawned on his face.

If Rui could understand their words, he might have burst out laughing, giving away his hidden position.

Once the men were one-hundred meters into the forest;

THACK

A sudden sound behind them drew their attention, as they instantly turned around with terrified expressions on their faces.

"It was just a stone that fell." One sighed, before his expression turned confused. "Fell from where?"

Suddenly, the air grew extraordinarily peril.

Yet, before they could even begin to process it.

THWACK

POW

BAM

...

In the span of two seconds, Rui had whizzed in and broke all the limbs of all the men.

They began screeching in pain even before they hit the ground, and Rui watched as they did.

CRACK

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARRRGHH!" One man screamed as Rui crumbled an already bone with a single step.

('I need to finish this now.')

He grabbed one of the knives, walking over to the men.

Raw terror coursed through their body as they understood what he was about to do.

Rui understood what he was about to do.

How could he not?

He could feel a part of his heart holding him back, begging him to stop as it moaned what he was about to do.

What he had to do

Every step he took forward felt heavier and heavier.

Yet, he didn't stop.

"NO! PLEA-!"

SPLAT SPLAT SPLAT

The man choked in pain as Rui hacked at his body thrice swiftly, leaving deep gashes that killed him on the spot.

Rui could feel it.

He could feel the very moment the light escaped the man's eyes, sending a shudder down to his very heart.

He forcefully turned his eyes away from the corpse's eyes that still contained horror in them.

The remaining men all screamed in terror.

They screamed at the top of their voices in despair.

And then, they didn't.

Their voices died down.

One-by-one.

It happened quickly.

Yet, it took forever.

When it ended, he was surrounded by corpses. His eyes were cold, and his lips were pursed.



The worst part was that he didn't quite feel as bad as he wanted to.

#### Chapter 315: Commencement

In less than a second, Rui had already made deep gashes across all their bodies, killing them on the spot. He ensured that the length and depth as well as the distance between the gashes was consistent and equal across all bodies.

All of this was to reinforce the idea that a beast had killed them instead of a Martial Artist. If Rui had killed them with his techniques, then it would be quite difficult to believe that a carnivore was responsible for his deaths. Vranil might come to suspect that it was a human.

Suddenly, Rui turned around sharply as Seismic Mapping picked up a powerful seismic signature in the village moving towards his direction at an incredible speed.

('It's time') He grabbed one of the corpses, slit its throat and sprinting away deeper into the forest an incredible speed, dragging the corpse with him by the arm.

The corpse left a large trail of blood as Rui dragged it along, indicating the path Rui had taken.

Just two seconds later, Vranil arrived at the location of the corpses.

As Rui had predicted.

Rui had ensured that all nine men were screaming as loud as possible, screeching to their absolute limits.

There was no way the Ruyloken Gang failed to hear them, the men must have quickly informed Vranil of the screams and he must have dispatched immediately. That was the reason Rui tortured them before killing them.

All to draw Vranil out from the village.

Hunting a predator in a vast forest was difficult, not just because predators were strong, but because they were also difficult to locate in such a vast amount of area.

However, in this scenario, the predator's location was largely known. The men walked the same path and hunted in the same area every day. This was a rare chance for Vranil to be able to easily locate and confront the beast immediately.

In Vranil's mind, if the beast wasn't dealt with immediately, there would only be more and more casualties as time passed. He intended to kill the beast that threatened to sabotage his operation as soon as possible, he couldn't let it wander around freely.

Thus, he had immediately sprinted into the forest at top speed when his men informed him of the screams. There was no doubt in his mind that the same beast that had hunted the bear into the village was definitely responsible for killing his men. They were armed to the teeth and would have easily dealt with the ordinary predators of the forest. He was also relatively certain that the beast would not leave the area immediately as it fed on the corpses of his men.

It was the perfect timing.

When he had arrived, his expression rotted as he beheld the corpses of his men with deep gashes that looked like they were mauled by the claws of a big cat predator.

He frowned. ('Why did it not eat them? Did it kill them for fun?')

Then he noticed one of them was missing, and soon the trail of blood that Rui had left entered his vision.

Vranil's eyes widened as he made a deduction. ('It didn't eat my men, but it took one of the corpses away with it. The only reason it would do that is if it had cubs or offspring that it wanted to feed!')

In his mind, this was an excellent and brilliant inference.

('I can't let them survive! If its offspring grow up and populate the forest, we're fucking screwed!')

If Rui had been able to hear his thoughts, he would have smirked. Rui had evaluated the probability of Vranil inferring the existence of offspring as around seventy-five percent. Unfortunately, he couldn't be sure, it would all depend on exactly how smart the man really was. Rui could not know such a thing, but he truly did not think Vranil was stupid.

Thankfully, Vranil was actually quite smart. Smart enough to be completely fooled by Rui.

Vranil did not even hesitate as he followed the trail of blood at top speed. He was confident he could catch up, the fact that the bear managed to escape the beast meant that the beast wasn't very fast, as long as Vranil chased after the blood as fast as he could, he believed that he should have been able to catch up.

Just as Rui predicted he would.

Everything was going as he had foreseen.

"He didn't react." Rui murmured, running, as he watched Vranil chasing after him, with Seismic Mapping.

He glanced at the corpse he was dragging.

There was no head.

Where did the head go?

Rui had tossed the head into a large bush five meters side of the trail of blood he was making.

Why did he do that?

He wanted to test Vranil's sensory capabilities. If Vranil had even decent sensory capabilities, he would have been able to detect the head inside the bush instantly, and most certainly would have at least reacted differently. After all, why would the predator put the head into a bush?

In order to test distinguish whether one had good senses or not, he nearly needed to create circumstances where someone with good senses would react quite different than someone with bad senses. Then he would be able to tell whether one has good or bad senses based on their reactions.

Rui had done exactly that.

However, Rui could not detect even a single hint of any reaction from Vranil based on the seismic radiation he was giving off. He had not even turned his head, as far as Rui could tell.

"He didn't react, I guess that means his senses are probably shit." Rui murmured to himself softly.  
"Regardless, plan D it is."

He dragged the corpse into deep a cave that he had scouted earlier and tossed it deep inside.

Vranil arrived ten seconds later, yet he paused as he saw the trail enter into a cave.

"Tsk." he tutted with irritation as he gritted his teeth.

#### Chapter 316: Clash

Rui watched his reaction carefully. In Rui's mind, there was a forty-five-percent chance he would head straight into the cave, a forty-five-percent chance he would go back to the village to get his hands on some lighting so he could see, and only a ten-percent chance he would forget about hunting the beast.

Vranil turned around and sprinted away in the direction of the village.

"Hm, cautious." Rui muttered unhappily. He had hoped Vranil would enter the cave blind. That would have made his life much easier. Had he done that, it would have been game over.

Darkness did not matter to Rui. The combination of Seismic Mapping and Primordial Instinct was more than enough to comfortably fight even with his eyes closed. Vranil on the other hand clearly did not possess great sensory capabilities. The test from earlier as well as the fact that Fria managed to escape was enough evidence in favour of that matter. The fact that he chose not to enter the cave blindly proved this as well.

Rui truly wanted to fight him head-on. He was quite confident in his ability to win. Vranil had defined weaknesses, meaning the VOID algorithm would eat them up, especially now that he had acquired the ability to use the pattern recognition system of the VOID algorithm.

However, he wasn't stupid.

This wasn't a training spar in the Academy. Nor was this a contest like that of the Martial Contest.

This was a real fight. This was life and death.

If he lost, it would be game over and the lives of those villagers would be at stake. There were plenty of powerful Martial Artists who he could fight in a fair setting. But when it came real fights where his life was at stake. He was not going to pull his punches by not using unfair tactics that gave him unfair advantages.

Everything was fair game in war.

"Get me torchs, lamps, matches and a rope!" Vranil snarled at his men when he reached the village.

His men had no idea why he wanted those items, but they did not dare question him as several of them scurried about to procure the items he wanted.

Vranil quickly tied the smallest of lamps to the belt loops in his lower garments. He quickly grabbed the matches and the torch and immediately sprinted back into the forest at top speed.

He had no intention of letting the beast go. The beast had already killed twelve of his men, and more importantly, if it did have cubs, then the situation was much worse than he thought and he would need to kill them as soon as possible otherwise they would become a threat even he would not be able to handle.

Soon, he reached the cave. He lit the torch quickly before tucking the matches in his clothes and immediately walked in.

The multiple sources of light he had with him gave him the confidence to jump straight into the cave. But the deeper he travelled, the more he felt something was wrong. He could not hear anything; it was almost as if the cave was entirely deserted. If there were indeed carnivore offspring feeding on the corpse of one of his men, then there wouldn't be such silence at all.

He was already quite deep into the cave and the light from the entrance was already dim.

Suddenly, he stepped on something soft.

His eyes widened when he recognized the headless corpse as that of one of his men. His confusion turned into fear when he realized that he already reached the end of the cave.

('Something's wrong here.') He could feel it. Something was very wrong.

Yet the realization came too late.

POW POW POW.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, several wind blasts came out of nowhere, striking blasting against his body. They did not do much damage to him. But the same could not be said for the sources of light he had brought along.

The wind blasts shattered the torches and the lamps into pieces, completely dispelling flames.

"Fuck!" Vranil had no idea what was happening, but his sense of danger was tingling. Yet before he could even turn away to leave.

PEW

"AAARRGHH!" Vranil snarled as he felt an excruciating piercing pain on his neck. He abandoned the plan of running back to the entrance.

He needed to leave immediately.

BOOM!!!

An explosion blasted a hole in a clump of rocks in the forest, reverberating across the entirety of the forest.

From the dust, Vranil's body emerged as he leaped out of the cave.

He glanced at his left shoulder.

His neck was bleeding profusely. He squeezed his neck muscles and bleeding stopped. He had applied an endurance technique that mitigated the impact wounds had on his combat prowess, it was a technique that had saved his life multiple times.

Vranil turned back to the hole he had made. He had come to realize what had happened.

"You...!" He said to the masked figure that emerged from the dust. "You did this! You did all of this!"

His eyes were bloodshot with rage.

Rui did not say a word to him. He didn't understand the language, but he more or less understood what the man was trying to say.

He raised his closed fist, and a single finger stood up, drawing attention.

The middle-finger.

"I'LL FUCKING KILL YOU." The man rushed towards Rui. Just as Rui hoped. Rui's only regret was that he wasn't able to inflict a critical-enough wound to the man, as the detrimental effects of the Stinger to the neck weren't enough. Furthermore, the man's flesh was quite tough.

Still, Rui was unperturbed. He took a neutral stance with an eager expression as the man lashed out at him. He was secretly and guiltily relived that his Stinger ambush hadn't done much damage. He intended to test his new-found prowess against someone at the peak of the Apprentice Realm, who was rushing towards him to kill him.

Chapter 317: No Longer of Earth

He lashed at Rui, swinging his clawed hand at him wildly.

WHOOSH

BAM!

Rui somersaulted out of the attack, landed a powerful drop kick on the man's head. Vranil grimaced as he swung at Rui once more.

Rui intercepted strike at the middle of his forearm, careful to avoid his hand.

FLIP



Vranil's eyes flew wide open as the world turned upside-down. Rui had cleanly flipped him using Flow Flux. Under ordinary circumstances, Rui would not have been able to but Vranil's state of mind was not conducive to stability.

PEW

Rui's toe flew, whistling as it cut through the air and buried itself in his throat.

"ARGH!" He choked as he landed on his head.

BAM!!

Rui soccer-kicked him to the head, sending his body flying across the forest, breaking past some trees. Even if the man was strong, Rui's raw power was immense.

Having mastered two highly-powerful high-grade techniques; Outer Convergence and Flame Breathing, as well as Adamant Reforging which also significantly increased the impact his fists were able to deliver had reached a whole different level. With four techniques in total amplifying his power, every strike of his was remarkably heavy. As far as he knew, only Fae, Ian and Fiona surpassed him in raw power.

Well, Vranil did as well. But his defense wasn't nearly as good. Even he couldn't shrug off such a powerful impact to the head.

He got up groggily.

BLINK

PEW!

Rui used Blink to pierce him yet again. Vranil stumbled unsteadily as he breathed heavily as he closed the new wound Rui had just inflicted on him.

He tried to gather his bearings, but Rui was just overwhelming. Had he been in peak physical and mental condition, he would have performed much better. But he was psychologically and physically far away from his peak. Rui's schemes and plans had affected him negatively in many ways, physically and psychologically.

Furthermore, he noticed Rui had changed. The pressure he exerted on Vranil had been rising, bit-by-bit. His fighting style slowly and gradually morphed as it flowed, changing forms.

And Vranil felt weaker and weaker.

Rui's timing and placement grew sharper and sharper. He had begun shutting down everything Vranil did, bit-by-bit.

Every attack.

Every defense.

Every evasion.

All of it crumbled. Rui mercilessly crushed all of it.

Vranil didn't understand. It was as though every movement Rui made was made to defeat him. Every step, every shift, every swing and thrust, even the tiniest of twitches. Each movement Rui made was as though it was made to defeat him.

Vranil's eyes widened as he met the boy's sharp gaze.

He felt transparent.

He felt naked.

He felt as though Rui saw through him.

Saw through his Martial Art.

Saw through the depths of his Martial Path.

Saw through, and denied.

Denied his success.

Denied his accomplishments.

Denied his pride as a Martial Artist.

Denied his Martial Art, and even his very Martial Path.

In his eyes, Rui had become the Antithesis; He who Denied.

Rui's fighting style took on a new light in Vranil's eyes. It was as though his Martial Art had been created to destroy his.

With every movement Rui made, countering every move his foe made, Vranil felt like his Martial Art itself was breaking.

He felt as though his very Martial Path was crumbling.

He felt despair.

A Martial Art that countered his own Martial Art to the very depths of his core, of who he was.

He felt as though Rui was denying his very being!

Every flaw. Every Imperfection. Every trace of weakness. Every trace of inadequacy.

They came to life.

It was as though Rui had given them life. They came to life and began eating away at his Martial Art. They ate away at his Martial Art as Rui's adaptive evolution exploited the void where Vranil's Martial Art was.

Vranil felt his power leaving him. He hadn't felt this weak since he was a human, before he discovered his Martial Path.

A Martial Path he could no longer see.

It was gone.

All that was left was a void.

All he could see was the Antithesis that had destroyed it.

His eyes lost their vitality as he went limp.

**BAM!!**

A powerful Flowing Canon crashed into his gut, sending him flying away at tremendous speeds, breaking past a few trees until one finally stopped him.

**THUD**

He felt to the ground, coughing blood.

He didn't care anymore.

He had lost more than just the fight and his operation.

He had lost his Martial Path.

Every time he thought about his Martial Art, he could only see the antithesis that had destroyed it. Every ounce of power in his body dissipated at the sight. He didn't want to be a Martial Artist in a world where that Martial Art existed.

"Kill me." He said the object of his despair as walked towards him.

He didn't respond.

He simply stared at him with his dark eyes.

"Kill me!" The man snarled in anger. "I said kill m-"

**BOOM!!**

**CRACK**

An incredibly heavy drop-kick landed on his head. The sheer power it contained shook the very land.

A pool of blood and cerebral fluid emerged on the ground from his head.

Rui simply watched, waiting.

He only left after he sensed that Vranil's heart stopped beating completely. No healing potion of any kind would save him.

"I wonder why he gave up at the end there." He murmured. "He should have felt he still could have won or definitely escaped alive if he had continued fighting. It's annoying to chase people after all."

Rui took one last look at the corpse in front of him, before sighing and shaking his head.

What shook him more than killing was how little he was shook by killing. He had been prepared to feel traumatized, prepared to feel horrible.

But no.

He didn't feel all too much.

Part of it was because these men had enslaved the innocent villagers of the Hefermaine village no doubt. He still felt angry when he thought about how much they must have suffered. But another part of it was, without a doubt, himself.

He had changed. Nearly sixteen years in a world where death was far more frequent and normal had altered his mentality, sixteen years of aiming for a profession that involved killing and risking being killed had changed him. It had changed him more than he had realized.

"I guess I'm truly no longer of Earth." He sighed.

## Chapter 318: Conclusion

Rui circled around the village in the forest. All of the remaining gang members' attention was focused on the direction that Vranil had gone in. Rui circled around where the security and surveillance had been

reduced drastically. The death of twelve of their members and now the deathly silence of the forest after all the noise that had come earlier had caused a lot of panic and anxiety.

Rui intended to exploit the chaos to take them down swiftly and quickly without giving them any chance to properly fight back. He reached the edge of the village, arriving at a field barricaded by a fence.

Two men immediately spotted him. But it was too late.

POW POW

Two Tempestuous Ripples blasted at their heads, breaking their skulls and killing them on the spot.

CLASP

He caught both before they could hit the ground.

There were two other men at some distance.

POW POW

They collapsed.

Four down.

Rui used the tall crops as cover as he crouched beneath them, sprinting at top speed. There were guards patrolling the street, their eyes widened as they spotted him racing in at speeds that well-exceeded even that of cheetahs.

POW POW POW POW

Rui blasted them with swift Tempestuous Ripples instantly, ravaging their bodies.

At this point, the rest of the gang patrolling the village noticed the commotion.

Rui could hear their shouts as they raised the alert to the rest of the gang and soon the rest of the gang had become alert.

POW POW POW!

Rui never let anyone who caught an eye live, bombarding them with Tempestuous Ripples. The crops were a great place to hide as it gave him great cover across a great amount of area. He engaged in guerilla warfare from the very beginning, taking them down one-by-one using the element of surprise and deception and confusion.

The problem for the gang members was they had no idea what was happening. None of the remaining surviving gang member had gotten even a glimpse of Rui, which is why they weren't dead, yet. Furthermore, with the fear and paranoia of the fictional predator beast that Rui had created, at the very least half of them thought the beast had killed their boss and come for them.

Had they known it was a Martial Artist from the start, they would have used the villagers as hostages, which inevitably would have led to their deaths. The villagers absolutely would have died if Vranil was here since the gang members would have begun killing them when Rui refused to listen to their demands of surrender.

But this way, he could get rid of them without a single villager being so much as hurt.

BAM BAM BAM!

One by one, they all began dropping like flies until the final group huddled together with their backs facing each other.

BOOM!



Multiple overlapping Tempestuous Ripples converged on the entire group straight down from the sky. Flattening them to death.

Rui landed right in between the corpses.

He sighed.

It was over. Suddenly, the door to one of the buildings opened on the street.

"Don't move!" A Ruyloken gang member yelled. In front of him was a child, and to her head was a musket.

Rui simply stared at him, waiting. There was a chance he could rush over extremely swiftly and kill him before the man could even react, but he didn't want to risk it. The man had wisely kept quite a lot of distance between them.

"Get on the ground!"

Rui didn't listen to him, he simply waited.

"I said, GET ON THE GROU-"

BLINK

BAM!

He died before he could even process it.

His corpse flew across the village, his head had been mangled to a bag of flesh pulp by the Flowing Canon that Rui had hit him with.

The little girl broke down shivering as she began crying at the top of her voice. The villagers who had been rounded and housed when Vranil left all came out in shock and bewilderment. Their eyes widened in horror at the gory and bloody scene.

They were far too shocked to understand that they had been freed. Furthermore, the trauma of seeing such blood and gore had been too much for many, they began puking on the side of the road. Several even fainted.

It had taken them a brief while of acclimatization, before one of them walked over to him with grateful eyes, asking him a question in another language.

He shook his head. "I don't understand."

The woman widened her eyes, switching languages. "I see, so you're not from the Kingdom of Grahal."

"No, I'm not." He told them. "I am a Martial Artist of the Kandrian Martial Union. I was commissioned to eliminate the Royluken Gang."

A wave of surprise rippled through the villagers at those words. Their reactions varied. Some were just overwhelmed and completely broke down. Some just stared at him in disbelief. Most expressed genuine gratitude to him through their tears.

"Who commissioned you to save us?" One asked incredulously.

"A girl named Fria." He replied. This drew an even stronger reaction to them.

"She's alive!" An elderly woman fell to her knees as she sobbed in relief as a man teary-eyed man comforted her. "I told you she was, she's strong."

The woman turned to Rui. "Where is she? Where is my daughter? Is she safe?"

Rui nodded. "She's in the kingdom of Grahal. I have already notified the Kandrian Martial Union of the successful completion of mission, which in turn will have likely already notified her. I imagine she's on her way here already."

"Thank you. Thank you for saving us." She held his hands in hers.

"Not at all." Rui replied. "I was just doing what I was paid to do. Your daughter is the who is truly to be praised."

He took the necklace Fria had given him, returning it to her mother. "Please give that back to Fria when you see her. Goodbye."

He turned around and sprinted away heading in the direction of the Kandrian Empire.

#### Chapter 319: Thoughts

Rui had to admit, nailing a difficult mission was one of the best feelings ever. An immense wave of satisfaction washed over him as he thought about the fact that not a single villager died. Although, one did come close.

Thankfully, there was only one hidden gang member inside the building. Rui had no idea what he was doing in there instead of joining his gang-mates, but thankfully there had only been one. If there were several and each had taken a hostage, then there would have been a bit of an issue.

For now, he was fine, but he really felt the need to improve his covert abilities. There were many missions just like this one where he felt his lacking stealth. Missions where, if he had been stealthier, he would have been able to complete them with much greater ease and simplicity.

This mission was an example. If he had a technique that at the very least allowed him to completely evade normal human senses, then life would have been far easier.

('I'll put it on the list for next time.') He mused. At the end of the day, missions were literally his livelihood. It made sense to purchase techniques that would make the completion of missions easier in

that regard. Even if his missions weren't of the covert-class, that did not mean he did not require covert capabilities. Generally, it was best if one possessed some amount of capability in all general and common fields. There were just too many reasons to not invest further into his stealth

But he didn't intend to do that immediately. He had recently come out of a seven-month-long training stage, he had no intention of jumping back into training. He intended to go for various, different kinds of missions that would enrich his experience and expand his worldview. He had lived in this world for nearly sixteen years, yet he had experienced too little of everything it had to offer. He wanted more, he wanted to do more.

He even had ideas on what he wanted to do.

('The Beast Domain...') His eyes lit up with wonder.

The Panama Continent was absolutely gigantic and a majority of it was colonized by humans. However, a little over a third of the continent's land was uncolonized natural environments that were occupied by diverse fauna. A large proportion of this land was at the heart of the Continent.

The heartland of the continent was entirely uncolonized, it was an extremely perilous environment where Martial Apprentices like himself were only qualified to enter the outskirts of the outer-most layer, going any deeper would be absolutely suicide for him.

When Rui had learnt of that, it had made sense to him that the Beast Domain was uncolonized and left alone by the human nations. The difficulty of colonizing and conquering the Beast Domain was so extraordinarily high that the nations simply could not afford to undertake such a herculean task. Furthermore, it wasn't just a matter of difficulty, perhaps if humanity as a species came together as one, it could take over the Beast Domain in a conflict that could shake the very continent.

However, the fact of the matter was that humanity was so astronomically far away from any semblance of united that it was genuinely hilarious, yet also incredibly sad. Humans fought with each other to a degree beyond what imagination could beggar. Conflicts on all scales were nearly omnipresent, these prevented the humans from coming even close to uniting.

It would take an absolute miracle for them to join hands, short of a global extinction-level threat, there was probably nothing that could unite the species.

Regardless, the Beast Domain was not going anywhere. And while it was a source of danger, it was also a source of great opportunity. Untold esoteric resources lay within the fauna, flora and the land of the Beast Domain. Many of the missions of the hunting-class were related to resource extraction and procurement.

These high-grade esoteric resources could be used to accomplish wonders. This was why the human species held a great amount of interest in the Beast Domain.

Because of its perilous environment, Martial Artists were really the only ones capable of surviving in the Beast Domain. As wondrous as esoteric technology was, it was extremely difficult and untenable to use it to allow normal humans to survive in the environment. It was far easier to dispatch Hunter-class Martial Artists who would complete their missions remarkably well and efficiently.

And thus, they did.

Rui wanted to experience the Beast Domain with his own two eyes at some point. Perhaps his next mission ought to be a Beast Domain mission?

Rui shook his head. If the Beast Domain was as dangerous as advertised, then he was not quite as ready yet.

His very first hunting mission with the Earthen Basilisk had shown him how inadequate his Martial Art really was when it came to non-human entities. Many hunting-class missions after that had reflected that as well.

The predictive model system of the pattern recognition system was not particularly bothered by the differences between humans and non-humans. However, the adaptive evolution model was designed for humans.

Now that Rui had largely found the main solution for the viability problem of the VOID algorithm, he needed to find solutions for the incompatibility problems. This was something he intended to target in his next training stage,

It didn't matter that he was a grade-ten Martial Artist. That was very general grade given to him by the Martial Academy in evaluation of his combat prowess. What mattered was his compatibility. He was not compatible with them as much as he'd liked.

Rui shook his head, putting aside such nebulous thoughts.

He still had time.

The world wasn't going anywhere.

What kinds of Martial Art would he fight?

What kind of places would he see?

What kind of people would he meet?

A whole world of opportunity awaited him, and he had a lifetime to explore it.

#### Chapter 320: Return

Rui returned to the Kandrian Empire in the span of few hours. He didn't feel the urge to travel back too quickly. The scenery was unique and beautiful. The fauna and flora were different from Earth thus it gave an exotic and alien feel to someone like Rui.

Eventually, he reached the Kandrian Empire, it took him a few more hours to eventually reach the Mantian Region and finally, the Town of Hajin.

"Ahhhh..." Rui sighed comfortably as he took in the cool weather. "There's no place like home!"

He immediately headed back to the Martial Academy. Swiftly completing the annoying post-mission protocols before heading to his dorm.

He took his time as he relaxed a hot water tub, looking into what he'd missed.

"Oh?" His eyes lit up. "Nartha got back to me."

The next Martial Games was going to be held at the DiViliers Hall, where it was held the very first time had attended it.

He couldn't wait. The Martial Games would allow him to test the pattern recognition system of the VOID algorithm against diverse set of Martial Art.

Several days passed as Rui simply sparred with his friends to pass time, and the day had finally come. This time, Nartha had finally resigned to his request and allowed him to wear a normal sparring garb.

"Ready?" She asked him.

"Absolutely." he replied.

"Still not willing to take that mask off?" She probed.

"Absolutely not." He replied.

She shrugged, sighing. It was worth a try.

"It's been quite some time since you last participated." She told him. "And the grade on your profile has gone from eight to ten." She said with raised eyebrows. "Gotten stronger this quickly?"

"Just a bit." He said cryptically.

Soon they arrived at the resplendent DiVilliers Hall. Rui got off the carriage first, as he escorted Nartha down. They were surrounded by guests and their fighters, and all of them recognized Rui's mask.

"Lady Nartha." The chairman of the Gregolion Company told her. "I see your champion has returned. Today's Martial Games are going to be most interesting haha!"

"Indeed, I'm looking forward to him whipping up a storm." Another said.

"Apprentice Falken, I can see you've grown stronger." The matriarch of a small Martial Family greeted him.

Watching all these elite members of society express goodwill to him made him realize that he had inadvertently engaged in a lot of connection-building by simply doing what he did best. Although this was never his intention when he signed up with Nartha Freier, it wasn't necessarily a bad thing. Perhaps one of these connections could help him in the future. Besides, earning their goodwill was vastly better than earning their bad will.

In the two months that Rui had served as the representative fighter of Nartha, he had gained a lot of respect and goodwill from many of the guests of this elite social circle. Although many of the more serious competitors who treated it as a competitive sport disliked him because of how annoying he was. The large majority of the more casual guests who simply attended the Martial Games for recreation or networking had come to appreciate him.

His fights were incredibly interesting and entertaining to watch, largely because they were never the same. With almost all other Martial Artists, their combat style rarely fluctuated much and eventually their fights grew monotonous and boring. There were only so many times one could remain entertained watching the same thing over and over again.

Yet with Rui, they soon came to discover that this wasn't the case. The more he fought, the more entertaining he became!

Every fight, it was as though he had become a different person.

They were mesmerized.



Normally, participating guests never kept one fighter for more than too long, largely because things got boring. For them as participants and for the audience. But even at the end of two months, no one was tired of Rui. When he left the Martial Games for training, they had all been disappointed.

But now, he was back!

A small crowd formed around Nartha and Rui as many came to speak to the two.

Yet suddenly, the crowd parted as a man walked by. He had long flowing white hair that reached his neck, while a thick white beard adorned his face. He had the bearing of majestic lion.

"Lady Freier, Welcome." Charles DiVillier smiled, as he bowed mildly at Nartha's curtsy. "I'm so happy you could join us today." He said before turning to Rui with a twinkle in his eyes. "And with an old face, no less, or an old mask I should say."

"Lord DiVillier." Rui bowed to greet him.

"How do you do? Apprentice Falken." He emphasized Rui's alias with a knowing smile.

"Just fine, thank you."

"I'm happy you could join us today. Today's Martial Games will be interesting indeed." He chuckled. "Come, let us not stand outside any longer."

Charles led his guests into the circular hall within the building that overlooked the fighting arena down below. The guests settled in their luxurious seating accommodations as the maids and butlers of the DiVillier Family tended to them.

"Ladies and gentlemen." Charles DiVillier's voice boomed across the hall, drawing everyone's attention. "I hope you're all feeling good today. We have an exciting session of games ahead of us."

He turned towards Rui. "I'm sure everyone recognizes our old friend Apprentice Falken. He has graced us today with his attendance, we look forward to his interesting and entertaining fights."

Rui's eyebrows knitted. Even if he was liked, wasn't Charles going too far putting him on the spotlight in front of all these guests?

Rui could suddenly feel the intense gazes and pressures of all the Martial Artists in the hall on him. Unfortunately, he didn't recognize most of them. It had been seven months since he last participated in the Martial Games. Most of the old fighters had been cycled out, only a few mainstays were still present after that long a period.