

## Martial Unity 331

### Chapter 331: Plan

The Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana was a direct bordering nation of the Kandrian Empire thankfully, so the journey back and forth from the town of Hajin to the location of the research facility wasn't all that long.

"Have you guys memorized it?" Rui asked, closing the mission bill, after quickly storing all the data in his mind palace.

"No." Kane yawned. "But we have you. So, it's all good."

Rui rolled his eyes.

"I've memorized everything but the finer details." Fae replied.

"As have I." Hever calmly replied.

Rui glanced over at snoring Nel, sighing.

"Hey, wake up!"

"Hm?" His eyes flashed open. "Is it time to go?"

"Yes."

He stood up abruptly. "What are you wasting time sitting here for? Let's get going!"

Rui simply gave up, as they all proceeded to the dispatch facility, completing the required protocols before they could finally be dispatched.

The journey took longer than if Rui alone had set out. Partially because the group was as slow as the slowest person; Hever.

The Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana was almost in the opposite direction of the Kingdom of Grahal. They had to travel north past the Mantian region and even cross a tiny mountain range reach the border.

Unlike the Kingdom of Grahal, the weather and climate were cold and dry too. They ran in the cold until they finally reached the border.

Much to Rui's amazement, the border security of the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana was much worse than even that of the Kingdom of Grahal. Atleast the Kingdom of Grahal had something resembling a wall protecting the border.

Vinfrana had no more than a paltry fence marking its border. Even ordinary humans could casually cross it.

"How much further from here?" Nel complained.

"Three hours at our current pace to reach the Frujmel forest." Rui replied.

The general location of the research facility was in the north of the Frujmel forest, though its exact location was unknown. The intelligence was not gathered through direct surveillance, clearly.

Rui could see why the research facility was built in the forest. It was large and far away from population according to the mission bill. The only thing that surprised Rui was how they were able to build and underground research facility.

The more sophisticated civil engineering of Gaia, like all forms of technology in this world, was based on esoteric technology which was far more expensive than the civil engineering technology of Earth due to the scarcity of the esoteric resources used and also because of their value.

Building underground facilities even on Earth was not easy, he could not imagine how difficult and expensive it was in this world.

Furthermore, the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana was a poor sovereign nation. Meaning projects like this were highly extravagant and ostentatious for it.

Yet, it invested this much into the facility.

('My suspicions likely aren't wrong.') Rui thought as analyzed the data available. ('The research facility is researching something important, something related to Martial Art. Something it doesn't have and something the Martial Union does. Something significant enough that the Martial Union is willing to raid and annihilate all research on the matter so that the state doesn't gain the results it is looking for.')

('The fact that they've gone this overboard with the secrecy likely means they're aware that the research taking place is not something the Martial Union is willing to allow. If this was merely ordinary research, they would not go this out of their way to hide it.') Rui conjectured.

He grew more and more curious about what exactly was being researched in the facility.

Time passed.

They eventually ran into a sea of trees in the forest.

"We've arrived." Rui declared. "The forest does have Apprentice-level creatures. So, keep an eye out everybody."

"How do we find the location of the research facility again?" Kane asked.

"Leave that to me." Rui told them. "My Seismic Mapping is perfect for locating it. I'll scan... well, the entire forest I guess."

Rui sighed.

"Will you be able to locate the facility."

"Given enough time, yes." Rui replied. "I don't even need to directly locate the facility even."

"What do you mean?" Fae asked.

"A research facility of this size absolutely gets shipments of supplies no matter how self-dependent it is. Basic human sustenance supplies because they are this far away from the populace, energy supplies, esoteric supplies and human test subject supplies as well." Rui replied. "In fact, this is probably how the Martial Union discovered of the research facility's existence in the first place. Even if the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana did a good job concealing the physical location, it's not good enough. One needs to conceal all exchanges with the research facility to truly hide it."

Rui suspected the Martial Union learnt of the existence of the research facility via the expenditure of funds and resources of all kinds needed to build the facility. Such expenditure was hard to hide, and the Martial Union's intelligence department likely picked up signs of it early on.

Of course, the Martial Union would not bulldoze any and all research facilities of all small nations around it. That was a worthless endeavor that yielded no meaningful benefits. It was quite likely the Martial Union then narrowed down the general location to the northern portion of the Frujmel Forest looking at the flow of funds and resources.

Resources needed to be shipped physically, it was easier to catch a shipment travelling through the forest than it was for Rui to scan the entire forest with Seismic mapping looking for a facility that was God-knew how deep. The deeper it was, the closer he needed to be to be able to detect it.

Furthermore, the topography of the Frujmel Forest was uneven, which make it more annoying to use Seismic Mapping to accurately map out the environment.

"Hopefully we hit some luck" Rui muttered, sighing. "The sooner we locate the exact entrance, the sooner we can end this mission."

## Chapter 332: Next Step

Rui knew one of the reasons he had been picked was the Seismic Mapping technique. It was the best technique to locate a hidden underground research facility. Although there were sub-terranean specialists, the difficulty of the mission meant they needed to be extremely strong.

Furthermore, since the conflict wouldn't actually be taking place inside land or the actual ground itself, they were useless beyond detection. Thus, it was more efficient to send someone who had the sensory techniques needed but also the power needed for the mission.

How many grade-ten Martial Apprentices were there that had also coincidentally mastered the Seismic Mapping technique, that also weren't on a mission?

Not many, Rui suspected.

Still, it wasn't fun to be the only one working while his teammates were effectively doing nothing.

Rui opened his eyes, lifting his palm from the ground sighing. ('Nothing here as well.')

Rui had long begun grid-search across the northern part of the forest. It would take him a full day of non-stop work to be able to map the entire area with his speed and sensory range.

The problem was figuring out the sizes of the grid boxes because he didn't know the depth at which the facility was built at. The deeper it was, the smaller his grid boxes would need to be and the more grid boxes he would need to have. Because the deeper it was, the closer he needed to be in order to be able to detect it. If his grid boxes were large, the probability that he would be close enough reduced the few grid boxes he had.

Most people would simply try to be thorough and careful, and leave it at that.

That was the normal and even reasonable thing to do

But not Rui.

He was careful and thorough. But he also decided to mathematically construct a probability function of the likelihood of the research facility being missed by his Seismic Mapping at certain depths.

Thus, Rui had decided to create a probability function that inputted a possible depth of the research facility underground as well as the size of the grid boxes he was scanning the forest through, box-by-box, that outputted the probability of him missing it.

As for trying to gauge the maximum depth the facility could possibly be, he had conducted a small quick survey where he quickly dug holes into the ground as deep as he could to see where he would find hard rock. That would likely be the hard limit where he could safely assume that the research facility would not be below.

Inputting that into the function, he could estimate the minimum amount of effort he would need to exert with his grid searching to be absolutely certain that he would not miss the research facility with his Seismic Mapping sense.

With the Mind Palace technique, parsing through the data was easy, too.

This was how a man of science operated.

Just as Rui felt he needed to take a break, he froze.

('Hm?') His eyebrows knitted as he sensed something odd deep within the land at a certain distance ahead of him.

His eyes widened as he felt a flat continuous hard structure.

A structure that could not be naturally formed.

('This is it!') He turned towards Kane, who was accompanying him. "I think I found it."

"Brilliant." Kane replied, relieved. "Let's storm in and wipe them all out."

"We don't know the exact entrance location yet." Rui told him. "Besides..."

"Besides?"

"There's a reason this is a grade-ten mission with a minimum requirement of five members." Rui told him, narrowing his eyes.

There were six Martial Apprentices in charge of the security of the research facility.

Among those six was a grade-ten Martial Apprentice while the remaining five were estimated to be mid-to-high grade Martial Apprentices at most.

For the Kandrian Empire and the Martial Union, this was trivial. However, Rui suspected that for the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana, this was not a small amount. Its Martial Artist-per-capita, the number of Martial Apprentices for the entire population, was much lower than that of the Kandrian Empire.

Furthermore, because it hadn't had higher Realm Martial Artists in a long, long time. So, every Martial Apprentice was treated as a highly-valuable strategic asset. It wasn't easy for the sovereign state to dispatch these many Martial Apprentices to sit idle in a research facility when there were so many other urgent needs for Martial Artists.

Rui intended to gather as much information as he possible could before he would launch an assault. The current information available was too scarce.

Where was the entrance? How was it accessed? Could they access it the same way? Could the exit it the same way once the mission was complete?

The information that the Martial Union had gathered had allowed them to understand a very general broad structure of the research facility, the Martial Union entrusted them with figuring out all the details.

"What do you suggest we do now?" Kane asked, scratching his head. "Search for the entrance by scouring the area?"

Rui shook his head. "That's too direct, there's a chance they have basic surveillance near the entrance. If we go walking about, there's a pretty decent chance we'll be discovered immediately."

"Then what do we do?" Kane asked.

"Thorough extended surveillance." Rui replied. "You all have monoculars. The four of you will surveil the patch of land below which the research facility is below. You'll look for any opening using the monoculars from an elevated height with an eagle view of the entire area."

"What about you?" Kane asked.

"I'll keep track of activity with Seismic Mapping." Rui said. "You guys keep aerial vision. There's no way we can miss something if something does happen."

He turned to Kane. "Also, once we do discover the entrance and obtain an opportunity to enter. You're going in alone."

"Hey! Why single out me?" Kane complained.

"You have the Void Step technique; reconnaissance is your last name."

"My last name is Arr-" He paused, recalling he hated that name. "Alright fine."

### Chapter 333: Discovery

Rui smirked. "Get going then, tell the others what I've told you and begin executing the plan immediately. If any of you see something, send a beep to the rest of us."



"Got it." Kane disappeared as he Void Stepped away.

Rui turned back, continuing his surveillance of the research facility with Seismic Mapping.

He could sense part of the structure of the facility. Now he planned to circle around it and see if he could stumble into something resembling a secret opening.

At the very least, they could not launch the attack without having a clear means to enter and exit. That would be incredibly foolish and short-sighted and would probably doom the mission. The research facility would probably detect them and would inform the government which would probably send reinforcements. The Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana would also become aware that the Kandrian Empire was aware of the existence of the secret research facility.

Rui suspected that even if they themselves could not actively find the entrance to the research facility, they could, at the very least, detect the flow of resources into the research facility. A research facility of this sort absolutely required regular supply shipments to continue operating smoothly.

There were way no way Rui could miss any exchanges in and out of the facility, he had deliberately repositioned himself to the shortest route between the closest urban town that would likely be the location from which the research facility received supply shipments from. If something came, he would see it in a heartbeat

There were other ways to narrow down the location of the entrance as well. In all likelihood the entrance was some sort opening concealed by earth and some vegetation over it. It was simple and effective. And there really wasn't any other straightforward manner in which they could hide the entrance without leaving anything visible that could distinguish it as a location.

If that were the case, then there actually was a limited amount of area throughout the entire forest that the opening actually could be. The Frujmel forest was a dense forest with thick trees whose roots burrowed deep. The area the opening was constructed in could not be an area highly populated with the trees, the roots would likely be far too deep and widespread, furthermore the soil would also be quite tightly held. The most convenient locations to build a secret concealed underground entrance would be under light vegetation like grass or shrubs.

This remarkably cut down the proportion of the area of the forest that the entrance could be at, making their job easier.

Soon, time passed as Rui continued maintaining his surveillance. It wasn't as though there wasn't any human activity whatsoever. There were travelling convoys and carriages of humans across the entire forest, but Rui had deemed them to be unrelated as they continued through the forest without ever stopping in a human that cut through the forest at a much distant point.

Until one of the convoys detoured.

('Hm?') Rui's eyes knitted as he sensed a convoy approaching the general geographic area. ('Could it be?')

The convoy moved slowly and discreetly without drawing much of any attention at all, from what he could tell from such a great distance away. This was a good sign.

Half an hour later, they stopped at a location nearly a kilometer away from his location.

His eyes lit up as he felt a substantial increase in seismic activity from underground. He moved in closer discreetly, looking to get a better seismic view of the situation. At this point, he was relatively certain he had found what he was looking for.

('I see.') He realized as he got a better understanding of the underground layout Seismic Mapping. ('The opening does not directly lead to the facility. It leads to an initial layer for logistics and security before leading to the actual research facility deeper underground. That makes sense. It's also consistent with the general structure of the research facility that the mission bill provided us.')

He even felt the faint sensation of the Void Step technique from a distance. ('Kane's on the move, good.')

He nodded as he felt Kane approaching the area, circling to keep the Void Step technique as he waited for entrance to open. He likely wouldn't be able to return immediately, but when he did, he should be able give them valuable intelligence. Then, they could formulate a more thorough plan once they actually executed the assault.

The convoy waited as a large hatch in the ground open. Two Martial Apprentice and six armed men emerged from it, poised for battle.

('Strong.') He evaluated. ('But definitely not grade-ten.')

The Martial Apprentice walked over to the convoy, visibly alert and wary as they exchanged words with its occupants and verified documents handed to them before nodding and relaxing.

('Strict security.') Rui noted. ('This should be routine to some extent, yet they don't let their guards down.')

Soon, men from the convoy got off as they extracted boxes and other goods, walking into the entrance and down the steps as the Martial Artists and human guards inspected and guarded the area. Rui ensured he was far enough to not be detected but close enough to get a clear view of the situation with Seismic Mapping.

('Supply shipment, as I'd predicted.') Rui mused.

The men worked quickly and urgently. Quickly and hastily finishing the unloading and dropping before getting back into their carriages, while the Martial Apprentices and armed guards returned back into the facility and the hatch closed. And there were no signs of it anymore to the naked eye.

('Alright, time to catchup with the others') Rui decided as he sent a vibration message to his teammates, a standardized message that was a call to regroup. Rui turned around and stealthily returned to their temporary make-shift base.

Rui had immediately computed several plans in his head with varying degrees of probabilities of success, already. He intended to flesh them out with his teammates and with Kane later once he returned.

They had chosen a small cave as a temporary base to retreat to at any time. So, once Rui sent the message out to his teammates, he simply returned the cave to find them there.

"Hey." Fae greeted him. "What's the plan now?"

"We wait for Kane to return." Rui replied. "Nothing more until then. But we can talk about what happens after that."

"We kick their asses after that!" Nel declared. "Vanish boy doesn't get to have all the fun!"

"He's not having fun." Rui sighed exasperated. "He's probably having a miserable time."

"He gets to fight the enemies while we sit in this cave!" Nel scowled at him.

"He's not fighting."

"Then why did he go in???" Nel frowned, confused.

"I told him to observe everything inside and tell us what's going on." Rui said. "He will simply look around and tell us everything."

Rui wasn't sure Nel was even familiar with reconnaissance as a concept, so he had to spell it out.

"So he's only looking at the enemy but doesn't get to fight them?" Nel's eyes widened.

"Correct. Now then, moving on." Rui quickly shifted away from the mindless conversation. "Kane's information will help us optimize our plan, but the choices at hand fundamentally remains the same. We have a handful of options which can roughly be divided into three broad categories."

"The first..." He continued, raising a finger. "Is the direct, straightforward and brute force method. We effectively walk upto the hatch and break it open forcefully and go on a rampage killing everything in sight."

"The second is the covert option. We infiltrate the research facility undetected or disguised and then launch a secret ambush once we're inside with a dominant element of surprise."

"The third is the semi-covert/direct approach. Where we ambush them at an opportune time with a decent element of surprise but then transition to a head-on approach after the initial ambush. This is the most practical approach in my opinion." Rui concluded.

"Why do you say that?" Hever asked.

"The head-on approach is probably not good. It's almost guaranteed that the research facility is able to communicate the with the government of the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana. No matter how strong we are, we cannot possibly break open the secret entrance, kill all the Martial Apprentices, and then also kill all the personnel in the research facility before they manage to inform their government, and before the government sends some serious reinforcements."

"Even if they inform the government of the attack, can't we complete the mission before the reinforcements travel all the way and arrive here?" Hever asked.

"If they fought normally, we could." Rui replied. "But they won't. Not if they know that reinforcements are arriving."

"What do you mean?" Fae asked.

"If they know that there are reinforcements coming, then they'll fight to stall." Rui explained. "Not losing is easier than winning, much easier. If they spend every resource on prolonging our operation as much as possible, we're screwed. It will take an enormous amount of energy and time to complete it and it probably won't happen before the reinforcements occur."

"I see." Hever replied calmly. "That does make sense. What about the covert approach then, doesn't that approach completely solve the problem with the element of surprise and a huge head start?"

"It does." Rui admitted. "The problem is it's too unviable as far as probability of successful implementation goes. Only Kane could employ that strategy, realistically. There's no way we can sneak past the security via stealth or disguise, it was quite tight. If we attempt to, we'll probably get caught and be in an even worse version of the problems of the direct approach."

"That indeed does make sense." Fae admitted. "What about the third option? The semi-covert/direct option?"

"It's the best option as far as probability of successful implementation goes." Rui explained. "We use a minimal amount of stealth to ambush with a decent element of surprise and snowball that advantage with a quick devastating attack." Rui explained.

"Hmmm..." Hever pondered the matter. "There's one thing I don't understand. Can't the research facility contact the Vinfranian Duchy government even in this scenario?"

"That's only if all of us attack from the outside." Rui grinned. "But we have someone who can infiltrate the research facility and remain there undetected."

"Kane is your solution to the problem?"

Rui nodded. "The best role for Kane is to destroy communication devices and infrastructure and kill the department and security leaders from the inside. This prevents them from communicating with the outside and also prevents the security department and team from organizing efficiently. The more the chaos there is, the smoother our operation will be."

"You plan for Kane to not join us with the external attack, but be present inside the facility when we attack and coordinate the destruction of communications and leadership? That's..." Hever couldn't help but be quite impressed. "...Quite a brilliant plan. I cannot think of anything better, in fact."

"Kane can infiltrate a day before whenever the entrance is opened for a supply shipment and simply wait for the time of the attack." Rui explained. "We can simply beep him when we commence the attack and he can begin his operation. Once we meet inside, we can proceed with the clean-up."

"That is indeed a really solid strategy." Fae nodded. "How are we going to enter the research facility semi-covertly though?"

"There are several possibilities, but the best one is definitely intercepting and hijacking the supply shipment enroute to the research facility, when the hatch opens up and the documents are verified and they relax a bit, then we bust out and ambush them all." Rui explained. "We just need to kill them, asides from the driver perhaps and then compel him to proceed as if everything is normal. Jumping them at this point in time is quite high in the probability to succeed. In my opinion, this is definitely the best plan that can be employed in a short period of time."

### Chapter 335: Shocking Conjecture

"So, to reiterate the plan." Rui continued. "We have Kane infiltrate the research facility sometime prior the day of the assault and have him keep a close eye on the location of the comms and the leaders of the facility."

"Then, when the next supply shipment is enroute, we attack it and kill most of its occupants. Either we keep the driver alive or replace him with one of ourselves. Then show them the documents and once they go to the back to check up on the supply goods, we ambush them." Rui explained. "During the shipment unloading and docking, there were only two Martial Apprentices who stood guard during the entire process. If we gang up on them and overwhelm them quickly with a numbers advantage and the element of surprise, we're doing very well."

He turned to Fae. "The element of surprise is especially important and powerful. With the element of surprise, you should successfully be able to land your Whirlpool attack on one of them and I should be able to land my Stinger successfully. Once that's done, their hope of survival is absolutely zero. Taking them out early means we get to fight the remaining four Martial Apprentices with a five-on-four advantage, that should be quite solidly in our favour as well."

"While we're launching an ambush from the outside, Kane sabotages communications and leadership which shouldn't take more than a minute given his prowess. He can also stall the four Martial Apprentices from entering, although that can be dangerous. However, as long as it's merely stalling and distracting, and he's careful, he should be able to manage. The Void Step technique is overpowered, and he's grown stronger since mastering it."

"Once we enter, we regroup with Kane and fight the remaining the four Martial Apprentices while securing the secret entrance to the research facility so that none of them leave and begin our clean-up operation thoroughly and finish up the job as fast as possible, secure the data and leave."

Rui inhaled lightly at the end of the lecture. "This will be the general gist of the plan, any suggestions? Critiques? Questions? Note that the plan is tentative, until we scour through the intelligence Kane brings back, we can't be as certain as we'd like."

"Even if we sabotage the communications, won't the fact that the convoy shipping the supplies to the research facility did not return to wherever it was dispatched from raise alarms?" Hever asked. "They would certainly try to track the location of the convoy if it doesn't return."

"That's definitely true, however, we are geographically far away from even the closest population center, which means the convoy is expected to take several hours to return back to the dispatch location. By the time the time any measures are taken due to the convoy being late, we will have long completed the mission and left the research facility." Rui told them. "It's quite likely there's a verification report sent by the facility to whatever executive branch is responsible for the supply shipments. We need to begin our ambush after the report is sent or send the fake report ourselves. The details of which will be ironed out once Kane returns."

The four, no, three of them discussed the plan and thought it through thoroughly. A few days passed as another shipment of supplies arrived and Kane was able to escape once they opened up the secret entrance once more.

Soon, he regrouped with the rest of his team, collapsing when he was finally in safety.

"Kan-" "Later! I'm sleeping first!" Kane barked at Rui.

"Ah..." Rui forgot he hadn't slept in a while and had also been keeping the Void Step technique active for extended period of time.

It was only after ten hours of sleep that Kane finally awoke from his slumber. "Oh man... That was horrific, I never want to do that ever again."



"You've mastered the Void Step technique; you'll be expected to do that by people who commission you and the Martial Union as well." Rui scoffed. "Why do you think you were assigned to this mission? Your stealth is the strongest reason why."

Rui chuckled as Kane groaned loudly, earning chides from Fae.

"Alright, now give us a detailed report first." Rui told Kane.

"Okay." Kane took a deep breath as he began narrating the entire story.

When he had first entered, he saw a large and wide room with security personnel that inspected the supply goods before sending the goods down a heavily guarded elevator. The two Martial Apprentices who had overseen the unloading and docking of the supply shipments were permanent security in the security floor.

The remaining four Martial Apprentices were guarding down in the actual research facility below. Out of which Kane only ever saw three.

"Only three?" Rui asked. "Was the grade-ten Martial Apprentice among them?"

"No." Kane shook his head. "I never saw the grade-ten Apprentice. He was probably in the core wing of the research facility that I never got visit."

"Why not?"

"Because it never opened, not even once."

"Hmmm..." Rui's eyes narrowed. "The simplest explanation is that the most important and vital research is ongoing within that core wing. Which is why he's permanently guarding it at all times."

"That's what I thought too." Kane nodded.

"Tell me more about the research ongoing." Rui said.

Kane winced at those words. "Yeah. The research. It was bad. Hundreds of humans, locked in sealed glass rooms. Strapped in beds as test subjects. They would make them consume some kind of potion, subject them to some kind of torture or the other and the test subjects would all become brain-dead. They would never wake up and eventually die."

Rui frowned. That sounded remarkably bizarre.

"But their bodies were different, almost as if that procedure changed something."

"Different?"

"Yeah, improved, I guess. Whatever they did to them, basically killed them but also made their bodies stronger. Afterwards they would conduct tests on things like toughness of the body and a bunch of other things I simply didn't understand, but basically, something was always different about the body in a measurable way compared to before. From everything I could gather..."

His eyes narrowed. "It felt like they, the entire facility, all the researchers and everybody weren't just testing the human body... I think they..."

He paused, hesitating. "I think they are trying to enhance the human body. I think that is the ultimate goal of the entire research facility."

#### Chapter 336: Fleshed

Rui's eyes widened at his words as he pondered about them. It didn't seem implausible given what Kane described, but it didn't match his earlier deductions. The research facility was absolutely researching something related to Martial Art. Rui was quite certain about that. Either Martial Art techniques or trainings or something like that, or something that was a threat to Martial Art fundamentally.

('Human enhancement isn't exactly that much of a threat to Martial Art directly.') Rui mused. This was especially true because there already were extremely rare and high-grade esoteric resources that could

be used to create a permanent enhancement potion. This was a generally a field that the Martial Union would not involve itself in, this was more the Royal Family's business.

So, what exactly did all the mass experimentation on humans that Kane saw have to with Martial Art?

Rui sighed, shaking his head. He had far too little information. Furthermore, he was just trying to satisfy his curiosity to some extent, knowing the purpose of the research facility was not something that was necessary for the completion of the mission.

"Tell us more about the security floor." Rui told him.

"Right." Kane nodded as he began explaining his observations.

The security floor served as the gateway to the actual research facility, the only way down was through an elevator stand. As Rui had suspected, there was indeed a communication terminal on that floor through which verification messages for shipments were sent.

"When I entered the security floor initially after the hatch was open, the comms guy operated it to send a message after the documents were verified." Kane explained.

"Hm." Rui nodded. "Then we cannot begin our operation until after the shipment verification message is sent. However, as soon as it is sent. The device needs to be destroyed by you, Kane. Which means that you'll need to be at the security floor when we launch our ambush."

"What about the communications of the research facility down below? Kane cannot be two places at once." Hever told him.

"Hmmm..." This was indeed a problem.

He turned to Kane. "Does sound from the security floor reach the research facility easily? Could they hear a commotion from all the way down below?"

"No way." Kane shook his head. "There's too much of a distance of pure solid ground between the security floor and the research facility."

"Good." Rui nodded. "Then we'll have you wait in the security floor when the ambush happens."

Rui explained the plan of hijacking the shipment supplies and launching an ambush after the documents were verified to Kane.

"I see, so you want to wait for the message to be sent to launch the attack so that no suspicion will be raised." Kane nodded. "That means I have to destroy the communication terminal and the operators immediately after the message is sent?"

"That's right." Rui replied. "We'll hijack the shipment convoy, show them the documents that the shipment convoy original had once we arrive, as soon as the verification is done and the verification confirmation message is sent by the operator, you need to destroy them and then we launch an ambush immediately. We cannot launch an ambush before they send the confirmation message because if the confirmation message is not sent, an investigation will be launched at some point. It's too risky."

"Got it. That's a pretty solid plan. What happens after the message is sent and we launch the ambush and successfully take the security floor?" Kane asked.

"You said that no commotion on the security floor could be detected from the research facility directly." Rui reminded. "That means even if we slaughter the security floor, the research facility would not immediately learn of it on the spot at that very moment. Which means we can straightforwardly take the elevator down and conduct a second ambush. The fact that the security floor and the research facility are this isolated was a design decision that will ultimately bite them in the ass."

"So after we ambush and take the security floor, we just straightforwardly take the elevator down?" Kane asked, scratching his head.

"Do you know of any other entrance?"

"No." Kane admitted. "It just seemed like a pretty simple plan."

"Simplest plans have the highest likelihood of succeeding." Rui told him.

"Ok, so what happens when we take the elevator down and actually reach the research facility?" Fae asked.

"After that the plan is straightforward." Rui admitted. "We just take out as many people as possible as fast as possible. Though Kane, you need to disable communications and kill the leaders. Once you do that, their inability to call for help and the chaos will work in our favour."

"What about the Martial Apprentices?" Fae asked.

"You, Hever and Nel will take down the three Martial Apprentices who will run into us. We know that their grade isn't particularly high so the three of you should be able to win handily, in the worst-case scenario, I'll come to help though that almost certainly won't happen." Rui reassured.

"And the grade-ten Martial Artist?" Kane asked.

"I'll take him on for sure." Rui nodded. "In which case, you keep an eye on the other fights. Cleaning up comms and a few ordinary humans won't take much time with your speed. In the worst case, you might need to back me up if the grade-ten Martial Artist is too much for me."

None of them believed that Rui would need help, but Rui wanted to be sure anyway. Just a single mistake could be the difference between life and death.

They began fleshing the plan out. Considering different possibilities and outcomes, creating contingencies while optimizing the plan to suit all of the information that Kane had managed to gather from his reconnaissance infiltration into the research facility. Thankfully, the Void Step technique was perfect for reconnaissance and Kane had managed thoroughly gather all the information that was needed thanks to it. Thus, they were able to create the best plan they possibly could.

Soon, only the execution of the assault was left.

Chapter 337: First Phase

"When are they coming?" Nel groaned impatiently.

Rui sighed. "They should be here soon."

"You said that three minutes ago!" Nel retorted.

"Then stop asking every three minutes!" Rui glared at him. "Listen here young ma-"

Rui suddenly froze as he turned around, narrowing his eyes. "They're coming. Everyone scram. Fae, do the honours."

Fae immediately rushed to two large, tall trees.

BAM BAM!

With two powerful blows, the trees collapsed, blocking the usual path the shipment convoy would usually travel through.

They all immediately scattered to the sides as they hid some distance away.

Two minutes later, a few loaded carriages arrived at that spot, stopping at the collapsed broken tree trunks blocking their path.

Soon, the men emerged from the carriages, talking exasperatedly and loudly in vinfranese and sanskrit.

BAM BAM BAM BAM!

Four large Tempestuous Ripple attacks crashed onto almost all of them men, killing all those it touched.

Only four survived.

THUD

Rui landed heavily on his feet from the sky, sighing at the corpses. Killing was a dirty sensation, but it was one he endured. He could, at the very least, take solace in the fact that they didn't suffer. He launched a solid, heavy attack that killed them the very instant it crashed on their heads.

He turned to the only four men he had spared. "You're going to take us to the secret research facility. You will cooperate with us. Is that clear?"

They simply stared at his masked face in shock, their legs had long given in, and they were shivering in fear.

They furiously nodded. Rui had heard them speak Sanskrit so he wasn't too concerned that they didn't understand him.

The plan he had come up with had worked just fine. He wanted to draw them all out of the carriage and away from it so that the carriage would not even need to be forced into in a way that could damage it. He also killed them extremely quickly in a way that wouldn't agitate the horses too much. Both carriages and horses were perfectly fine and the entire hijacking took only ten seconds in total.

This was much better than conventionally attacking them, forcing their way in and damaging the carriage, losing the horses that would get far too agitated with all the screaming that would inevitably ensue. It was too messy and lowered the probability of success of the mission, which Rui wanted to avoid at all costs.

Soon the Martial Apprentices gathered and quickly boarded the convoy after they cleared the trees out of the way. Fortunately, because Rui finished the job that quickly, they would still be quite on schedule for the scheduled shipment.

That along with the fact that there no visual elements that would give away that the convoy had been hijacked by them, Rui did not see any way they could possibly be given away.

An hour later, they reached the secret entrance of the research facility. All of them tensed, yet maintained their calm and composure. They did not want to give their presence away because of a failure to keep their composure.

The hatch opened.

Like clockwork, the Martial Artists and the armed men emerged from within and approached the leading carriage.

The man immediately gave him the documents without saying a word, exactly as Rui had instructed him to. The Martial Apprentices skimmed through the document briefly, nodded, heading to the back.

Just as he reached;

BAM!

"AAARGH!"

A loud sound and screech from within the security floor startled the two Apprentices just as they were about open the door to the storage convoys.

Yet, before they could even move.

BAM BAM!

The doors of the two carriages they were close exploded open as Rui and Fae launched themselves at the two Martial Apprentices with ferocious speeds

Had the two Martial Apprentices been alert, focused and prepared, they might have been able to react optimally.



But they weren't.

And so, they didn't.

PEW

BAM!!!

The Stinger and the Whirlpool landed on them hard as the two attacks inflicted critical injuries. Rui didn't have time to aim, precision and accuracy usually came at the cost of speed and haste, and in this scenario the latter two were more important. As long as the Stinger landed somewhere, that was satisfactory.

"Argh!" The two Martial Apprentices grimaced as they leaped backwards in shock and pain.

Rui turned in the opposite direction towards the guards while Nel and Hever ran towards the wounded Martial Apprentices.

The reason for this was simple, it was a matter of compatibility. Hever was strongest in a one-on-one scenario; thus, he joined Hever. Rui was better at dealing with numbers than Nel thanks to Tempestuous Ripple, thus he let Nel take on the Martial Apprentice while he launched Tempestuous Ripples that killed the men who fired at them.

When he turned around to inspect the progress of his friends, he was impressed. It was overwhelming.

Hever and Nel had killed their Martial Apprentice before he had even realized while Fae was almost done.

WHOOSH

She pulled her hand back, and suddenly her opponent fell forward towards her as if being pulled by an invisible force.

BAM!

His skull cracked under the force of Fae's powerful blow, killing him.

('She created a vacuum between her opponent and herself with a combination of movements and breathing.') Rui's eyes lit up in interest. The vacuum pulled her opponents to her, increasing the probability of her landing her ferocious offense. Rui recognized it because it had mechanics similar to Tempestuous Ripple, just the opposite at its core.

He turned to the corpse Hever and Nel were standing over. The head was almost completely flattened, and its body was bruised gravel.

('Their lethality has increased.')

"They've grown stronger." Rui murmured as he turned back to the security floor. Primordial Instinct and Seismic mapping told him all but one was dead.

"You've grown stronger too Kane." He said to nobody visible. "You're getting harder to sense."

"And yet you sensed me anyway." Kane grumbled, appearing out of thin air.

Rui chuckled as he inspected the scene, nodding. The first phase was a crushing success.

Chapter 338: Clean-up

"Let's get going quickly." Rui said as they all entered the security floor.

It was wide with different compartments and sections. And they were all littered with corpses.

"You memorized the means of operating the elevator, correct?" Rui asked as he glanced at the closed doors at the end of the security floor.

"Of course." Kane replied.

He walked over to the elevator. Hitting a few buttons and pulling a lever and then rotating it until the doors finally opened leading to a spacious platform meant to accommodate many.

Kane spun a lever on the inside, closing the doors and the elevator automatically began descending.

The tension in the air rose. None of them were particular fond of what was about follow.

Except for Nel, who was grinning at the prospect to a fight to the death with hopefully strong Martial Apprentices. If they were weak, Nel intended to crush them and fight the grade-ten Martial Apprentice. However, he didn't reveal this to Rui in a rare moment of logical analysis. He knew Rui would probably not allow it.

He was right.

But what he didn't know was that Rui was already well aware of his intentions. He simply decided to personally ensure that the mission wasn't screwed up due to Nel's desire to fight strong people. He did not think he could control him.

THUD

The elevator touched the ground.

"Here we go." Kane said as he opened up the elevator doors. They all took their stances as he opened it. Rui merely executed the breathing technique needed for the Tempestuous Ripple.

One moment before he launched it, he saw a bustling energetic research facility with all kinds of men and women hurrying around vibrantly, busy with something or the other.

He sighed.

Not a single one cared to look towards the elevator, asides from stationed guards whose eyes widened at their sight.

Yet before they could even do anything;

BOOM!

Rui launched a fully charged and powerful Tempestuous Ripple that blasted away expanding in front of him.

It instantly killed all humans within fifteen meters of him and went on to inflict varying degrees of critical damage to most humans in their section of the research facility. Kane immediately disappeared as he raced through the facility at incredibly high speeds, sabotaging communications and killing

Only two people were unharmed to Rui's senses.

"Two Martial Apprentices, approaching us at high speeds, gang up on them." Rui instructed. He had no qualms of using a number advantage against them. Primordial Instinct told him that they weren't particularly strong.

Rui ran forward as he saw the two Martial Apprentices rushing towards him.

WHOOSH

He avoided their attacks as he fainted behind them.

POW POW!

He sent them flying towards the trio, who quickly pounced on the hapless Martial Apprentices. He turned around, employing Seismic Mapping and Primordial Instinct to locate the hiding and fleeing survivors, killing them swiftly and painlessly.

Once he entered the main research and development infrastructure and area, he paused. Taking a look around.

There were tons of test subject humans who were being subjected to all kinds of things. Rui felt a less horrible about his actions when he thought about the suffering they went through. This was one of the most horrific things that a human being could be put through. Rui would rather die than be put in through this, yet the researchers of this research facility did not even give them even that.

All of them were medically alive upon closer inspection, but their eyes were lifeless and rolled over. Rui's instincts told him that there was no consciousness or mind left.

('Brain death.') He recalled Kane's descriptions as he noticed that all the test subjects possessed the same trait. Medically alive, but brain dead.

All of this seemed to support Kane's theory of the goal of the facility being human evolution. But Rui's gut instinct as well as certain logical rationales told him this was not true, or at least incomplete.

He shook his head. He had a mission to complete. The grade-ten Martial Apprentice and the remaining Martial Apprentice were the only things that could obstruct the mission anymore.

('Speak of the devil.') He turned as he felt faint weight on his mind from a distance, locating the source with Seismic Mapping. ('He's not grade-ten, but he's strong for sure.')

Rui dashed towards the Martial Apprentice, finding him quickly.

The man attacked him immediately, throwing a swift and heavy punch.

WHOOSH

Rui simply fainted as he shifted past the attack and launching a strike with ferocious power and speed.

BAM!!

The attack crashed into the man's neck, creating a devastating impact. Rui could even feel something cracking from the strike. After all, it was a strike strengthened with four Apprentice-level techniques, three of which were grade-seven.

THUD

The man crashed into a thick wall, falling down.

BOOM!!

A Powerful dropkick from Rui crushed his skull, denting it.

At his current level of power, even Martial Apprentices of high-grade were no longer even worthy of being subjected the VOID algorithm. It would simply be a waste of time. They would all die before the predictive model was even completed.

('Now there's only the grade-ten Martial Apprentice.') Rui mused. ('But where the fuck is she?')

Grade-ten Martial Apprentices were certainly strong without a doubt. But Rui had already killed a Martial Artist who was, at the very least, at the lower-end of grade-ten. Even if this grade-ten Martial Apprentice was as strong as Rui, he did not see himself losing. He had four powerful Martial Apprentices in his team and that was an overwhelming numeric advantage that nobody in their Realm should be capable of overwhelming.

The quality of those Martial Apprentices was high as well.

Fae, Kane, Hever and Nel had grown significantly stronger in the past nine months since the preliminary contest, they had all been promoted to grade-nine since then. Rui had absolute confidence in all of them.

('Unless something absolutely crazy happens, this mission is a complete success.') He thought confidently.

### Chapter 339: Understanding

Rui was beginning to think this team was perhaps a little overqualified for the mission. So far it had been overwhelming success, the Martial Union had chosen a team with a decisive advantage over the security of the research facility. Out of the six Martial Apprentices assigned to security for the research facility, four of them were mid-grade, one of them was roughly grade-seven and only one was a grade-ten Martial Apprentice.

They had sent a grade-ten Martial Apprentice who had experience taking down grade-ten Martial Apprentices in response.

The human security was insignificant. Even low-grade Martial Apprentices could deal with a large number of guards easily, they were mostly a token and were there to enforce order in the research facility.

('Now the only thing left is the grade-ten Martial Apprentice.') Rui mused. ('I'll round up the others and we'll go together.')

The original plan was that Rui handled the grade-ten Martial Apprentices alone while the remaining four handled the remaining three Martial Apprentices. However, things had evolved a bit unpredictably and all the remaining Martial Apprentices were handled before the grade-ten Martial Apprentice had even appeared.

However, this was in their favour. Now, they got to fight with a huge dominant upper-hand. The moment the grade-ten Martial Apprentice showed up, it would be game over for her.

('Speaking of which, seriously, where the fuck is she?') Rui wondered as he finished off a few more researchers. The only thing he knew about her was whatever the mission bill had told him; that she was female and a defensive Martial Artist. Which made sense given that she was assigned to a bodyguard mission from the Vinfranian government.

A section of the research facility had been massacred, God knew how many researchers had died, all the other Martial Apprentices were also dead. Yet this grade-ten Martial Apprentice had refused to leave the deepest section of the research facility that Kane hadn't manage to infiltrate before.

"You guys are done?" Rui asked as the three of his teammates appeared.

"Just sweeping up some survivors." Fae replied.

"Where's the grade-ten?" Nel excitedly asked.

"I'm heading there right now." Rui said.

Kane appeared out of thin air. "Count me in."

Rui nodded. "Let's get going then, we'll finish off all survivors on the way there."

In the deepest section of the research facility, a commotion that didn't escape past the confines ensued.

"Wait doctor!" One researcher said. "Subject SQ007 is not yet fully ready for deployment! The project has only succeeded the day before yesterday! This is against protocols!"

"IDIOT!" The head researcher snapped. "WE'RE GOING TO DIE YOU MORON! NO ONE GIVES A FUCK ABOUT PROTOCOLS. The Martial Apprentice guards are all dead!"

"But still!" Another researcher. "We shouldn't-!"



"Move!" The head researcher pushed his way past her as he gazed at a giant transparent cylinder with a woman inside. "She's our only hope!"

He walked over to a terminal before operating a few controls. "We'll show those bastards that coming here was the worst mistake of their lives."

The man looked up, grinning when he saw the woman's eyes opening slowly.

Quite some distance away, Fae broke into the sealed section of the facility. The five of them entered the research area through the hole in barrier.

Inside was a wide spacious facility with many sections across it. Inside were many containment rooms with even more test subjects in the same state as the test subjects in the rest of the facility, though far fewer in number, only in the single digits.

However, Rui suspected this part of the research facility was special. The technological infrastructure was larger and more extravagant.

Furthermore, there was something strange about the few test subjects. Each of them had their own large sub-section. Clearly, they were special.

Rui walked in closer towards them as his senses told him something was wrong. Their eyes were rolled up and they were barely medically alive. But still, something told him these weren't ordinary humans in the first place.

"Rui?" Kane asked, pausing as he looked back at him.

('Are they test subjects that managed to endure the experiments?') Rui wondered, shaking his head. ('No, they're in the same state. That's unlikely.')

Primordial Instinct could almost feel something. Rui closed his eyes, homing in on a particular sensation. It grew clearer and clearer by the second.

Until he recognized it.

His eyes widened in shock!

"Martial Apprentices!" He exclaimed. "These are Martial Apprentices!"

"Are you sure?" The four of them glanced over at the test subjects.

"No doubt." Rui had become surer of it.

The research facility was ultimately trying to successfully apply their human augmentation procedures to Martial Apprentices. Rui had become more and more certain that this was the core goal of the research facility.

"They are trying to elevate Martial Apprentices to a higher level-" Rui froze as another realization hit him. "...No. Not to a higher level. To a higher Realm."

This research facility was researching the breakthrough to the Squire Realm. The Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana had long lost all of its higher Realm Martial Artists, who taken away the secret to the Squire Realm with them, leaving them with a weak Martial Art foundation that was unable to elevate their remaining Martial Apprentices to the Squire Realm.

Finally, all of it made sense to Rui. This was why the Martial Union wanted to destroy the facility and slaughter all the researchers. Once the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana obtained Martial Squires they would probably eventually obtain Martial Seniors and then maybe even Martial Masters in a more distant future. It wouldn't be enough to defy the Kandrian Empire, but it would be enough to share a significant portion of the market in the Duchy that the Kandrian Empire had a monopoly over.

It would create an upward and elevating trend in the growth of Martial power in the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana.

Yet, before Rui could ponder about the issue more;

BOOM!!

A loud explosion in the distance shook the very facility, drawing their attention.

"The grade-ten is here." Rui warned. "Get ready."

Chapter 340: Confrontation

They all got into position, even if Nel urged rush forward and attack.

In the distance, a silhouette could be seen through the dust, walking in their direction.

STEP

STEP

STEP

It took its time.

Nothing out of the ordinary happened.

Yet, their eyes widened.

The air grew taut as an unimaginable amount of pressure crashed onto them. The air froze, and they haplessly followed suit.

Something was wrong.

Very wrong.

They felt primal fear arise from within their depths, crippling their body.

It was as though time itself had slowed down.

STEP

She emerged from the dust.

Completely naked.

Not a single shred of cloth covered her ample breasts or her pelvis. Yet the sight of her generated nothing but unparalleled fear in all of them.

Rui's eyes widened as he recognized the sensation Primordial Instinct was sensing.

This wasn't just fear.

This wasn't just danger.

Nay.

This was a sensation that only those in a higher Realm of existence could exert onto one.

This was a sensation that only those at a far deeper depth of their path could exert onto one.

"Martial Squire...!" Rui whispered, shocked.

The research facility had succeeded. They had managed to discover the secret to the Squire Realm just in time.

The woman examined them expressionlessly. Raw hostility emerged from her, crashing onto them. Rui was the only one who was able to maintain some semblance of composure. He adopted a stance in defiance. Yet, he was the only one.

The woman adopted a bull-rushing stance, aiming at them.

Rui snapped out of his reverie. "Shit. DODGE!"

Yet he was the only one who dove to the side. The other four were frozen, not even Nel had been able to move.

"NOOOOOO!!!" he bellowed with terror as the woman launched herself at the four of them.

BOOM!!!

The woman launched herself at a with an astronomic speed that far exceeded even that of Kane's!

Her body tore the very atmosphere apart!

The sheer titanic power she had launched herself with would absolutely have killed the four of them on the spot.

Would have.

Yet, it didn't.

She went flying far over their heads crashing through a part of the wall many meters above the ground, crashing through more obstacles until her tremendous momentum had finally been killed, landing a great distance away from them

She... missed?

('...Huh?????') Rui was so mind-boggled he just stared at her with an expression that was saturated with confusion.

Even the four of them who had been paralyzed turned over in shocked confusion. The woman got up, unharmed. Yet she wasn't pleased, she glanced at her own palms in irritation.

It was then that Rui understood. His mind flashed back to a conversation he'd had with Squire Dylan a long time ago.

"Because we are fundamentally different, our techniques function mechanically different." Squire Dylan had once told him long ago when Rui had asked him about the difference between Apprentice and Squire level techniques. "An Apprentice-level Martial Art technique simply cannot utilize our full power because it is not meant to handle our power. Squire-level techniques are simply techniques that can handle the power of Martial Squires, and can only be used by Martial Squires."

"So, they're just designed to be compatible with the power of a Martial Squire?" Rui had asked him back then.

"Yes, and it's harder than it sounds." He had directed a pointed look at Rui back then. "The difference between us exceeds your imagination."

Rui's eyes widened in elation as tinge of hope entered his eyes. It was quite clear she was a test subject in this facility, which meant it was extremely likely that she had only very recently broken through to the Squire Realm.

Which meant she had not mastered any Squire-level techniques! It was especially impossible since Rui highly doubted the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana even had any Squire-level techniques in the first place.

('No, forget Squire-level techniques!') Rui realized. ('She hasn't even gotten used to her own power, clearly.')

Meaning she could not be considered a full-fledged Squire. She would be crushed by the likes of Squire Kyrie or Dylon. The combination of her unaccustomed demeanor and her lack of Squire-level techniques meant that she was well below the Squire-Realm as far as overall combat power went.

('It's more accurate to think of her as a quasi-Squire.')

The woman took her time leisurely, trying to analyze and rectify her whopping inaccuracy. She didn't immediately rush over and resume killing the Martial Apprentices.

In her mind, they were already dead.

She was a Martial Squire. They were going nowhere.

A new-found arrogance had already taken her mindset, but this worked in Rui's favour. If they had any chance of not dying. It would only be if all of them worked together.

Rui glared at all four of them, focusing all of his mind on them. The sheer pressure he exerted drew their attention in an instant.

"Is this how you want to die?" He asked. "Is this how you want to go down? Frozen in fear like pathetic cowards? Dying at the hands of a Martial Artist that hasn't even mastered her power?"

He insulted them on purpose. They all had their well-earned pride, such an insult would surely evoke defiance.

Nel was the first to crack.

"SHUT UP! I'm going to fucking CRUSH her! You'll see!" He snarled at Rui, turning to face the woman with determined eyes.

That shook them all out of their reveries as determination crept into all of their faces. They turned around.

"That being said..." Rui said. "We need to run away."

He immediately dashed off in the direction of the security floor at top speed.

"What was that about cowardice?" Kane caught up to him, grumbling.

"This is a strategic retreat." Rui insisted. "If I have to choose between fighting a Martial Squire and running away from a Martial Squire, I'll choose the latter in a heartbeat."

"I thought we were going to fight her!" Nel complained.

"You'll get to fight Martial Squires when you break through." Rui retorted. "So shut up and train when we get back!"

The elevator could be seen in the distance.

Yet;

WHOOSH

She arrived in front of them.

"Did you really think I would let you escape?" She spoke in Sanskrit



Rui narrowed his eyes. "You can either let us go, or die trying to stop us."

"Bravado." She chuckled. "Come, young one, I will show you the power of a higher Realm. I will show you power that you will die too young to achieve."

One moment, there was a deathly silence.

The next?

All hell broke loose.