

## **Martial Unity 661**

### Chapter 661: Considerations

"That sounds like a great idea!" Senior Ceeran declared without hesitation. "Let's rally our troops and rush down and attack another Martial tribe immediately."

"No, we're not going to do that, with all due respect," Rui tried to hit the breaks on his enthusiasm as soon as he could. "We've painstakingly built an image of a peaceful and friendly group over many, many years of sustained diplomatic efforts. We cannot destroy all of that in the blink of an eye by provoking a conflict out of the blue. It will destroy our credibility."

Senior Ceeran frowned. "Then how do we engage in conflicts with the other tribes?"

"Oh don't worry about that," Rui smiled. "There are many ways to indirectly provoke a conflict without actually aggressing it."

"What ways are those?" Senior Ceeran raised an eyebrow.

"Well, for one, infringing on their interests is one. Ordinarily, this alone wouldn't lead to conflict, but given how violent the natives of Vilun Island are? They won't hesitate to lead an assault on us."

Senior Ceeran frowned, throwing a puzzled look at Rui.

"Don't worry about the details, we'll handle that. I'll inform you when the preparations are made," Rui nodded.

The two split ways as Rui headed towards the diplomatic office to flesh out the plan with his assistants.

He initially planned on telling commissioner Derun but eventually decided against it. The reason he had called her regarding the settlement plan and the sabotage plan was that he needed her authorization for it to work.

He needed her to dispatch the necessary Martial Artists, skilled labor and manpower, supplies, and the necessary means of production. And he still needed her to make all the preparations for the sabotage plan that she hadn't yet approved.

However, this was still his mission, and he had the autonomy to operate within the confines of his mission.

"And that is the plan," He said, after having explained all of it to the diplomatic team.

They were taken aback, wordless, at his bold plan.

"I don't know boss, there are risks to this plan, and there definitely will be losses," Zeyra was the first to reply. "You don't spark conflicts if you don't want to suffer losses."

"That is absolutely correct," Rui nodded. "What we need to do is be very careful, and be highly calculated. Thankfully, we've collected a lot of anthropological data on the Martial tribes of Vilun Island. We can use it to ensure that whatever conflict arises will be controlled, and limited to the degree that suits our interests."

Rui was quite confident that this plan, albeit difficult would be quite successful as long as they acted with scrupulous care.

"Well, if we're going to provoke them to trigger hostilities to break out, then we need to cross the lines of the right target just enough," Stemple nodded.

"Deciding the target is more important," Zeyra interjected.

"That's right," Rui nodded. "There are several conditions that the target would need to fulfill in order to serve as a viable target for us."

"Such as?"

"Well, for one. They need to be unable to dedicate all of their war capital against us if push came to shove," Rui replied. "They need to be in already constrained circumstances that prevent them from escalating any conflict with us to the peak."

The members of the diplomatic team frowned. They hadn't quite caught on yet to what Rui was suggesting in a pragmatic sense.

"I mean, that they need to be in existing ongoing, long-standing, and continuous conflicts with other Martial tribes," Rui said. "That is the only thing that these damn tribes are ever preoccupied with in the first place; conflict. So, we find a Martial tribe that cannot afford to go all out against us because they are already fighting against preferably two or maybe three other Martial tribes."

The diplomatic team nodded as realization dawned on them. Rui's suggestion was a good way to minimize risk and inevitable loss. If they waged an all-out war against a Martial tribe with no other militaristic preoccupations, then they would end up eventually having to withstand all of the militaristic power of the Martial tribe.

The losses would be devastating, the Martial tribes on the island were almost all highly aggressive folks that fought like there was no tomorrow. On top of that, they had more militaristic capital than the small settlement of the Martial Union on the island, meaning there was a chance that the settlement that they were building would lose, and even if they didn't many Martial Artists and people would die without a doubt. The only reason it was a fair fight at despite the difference in numbers was that the quality of Martial Squires of the Martial Union was much greater thanks to a superior Squire breakthrough and evolution procedure. Maybe one Martial Squire of the Martial Union could manage to fend off two of the native Martial Squires at the same time. That is what it would need to come to if a focused all-out war broke out.

Ultimately, even if Rui did succeed in getting the techniques from the G'ak'arkan Tribe in the long run, it would be a highly pyrrhic victory, and Rui doubted that his efforts would be appreciated.

And if he failed to obtain the techniques even after all of the time, energy, funds and resources, and most importantly, all the Martial Artists lost. Then that would be a complete and utter fiasco with no redeemable outcome whatsoever.

That was why Rui was extremely paranoid about getting everything absolutely right. They could not afford to make a single mistake, at all, whatsoever. Rui had already resolved to personally double and triple-check all the work and data that he would be making crucial decisions and judgments upon, while

also making sure to double-check the entire team's work as well. If they made a mistake that blew the whole operation away, it wouldn't matter, he would be fully and completely liable and responsible for the outcome.

#### Chapter 662: Vetting

"Sir, are you perhaps overestimating how bad an all-out large-scale conflict would be?" Zeyra couldn't help but ask. "After all, there are several other advantages we have asides from just higher-quality Martial Artists. We also possess a massive advantage in covert operations like intelligence gathering, sabotage, infiltration, destabilization, and assassination. We also possess an advantage in tactical and strategic asymmetric warfare. These are all considerable advantages that would no doubt, in conjugation with higher quality Martial Artists, grant us an advantage against any Martial tribe. Wouldn't we be impressing the G'ak'arkan Tribe more if we go all-out and defeat a Martial tribe?"

"You're not wrong, but your analysis is too shallow," Rui shook his head. "Yes, it is true that we possess advantages in the field of covert operations and intelligence, we also possess a more sophisticated approach to war. Not to mention, we even have better technological aid in the form of potions. But, have you forgotten why we are trying to execute this war operation? Hm?"

Rui looked around. "We want to demonstrate the prowess and utility of our Martial Art techniques, not everything else except that. What message does it send when we win a war through all of the aforementioned advantages and not the prowess of our Martial Art?"

Realization dawned on the team as their heads tilted downwards in thought.

"It overshadows what we are offering to them, the one thing that they have responded to positively," Rui sighed. "We cannot allow the only thing of ours that they have shown interest in to be overshadowed and trivialized to a certain extent. That's self-sabotage."

"Furthermore, an all-out war will still lead to too many casualties and too much expenditure. It would cross our bottom line and this whole diplomatic mission can be kissed goodbye," Rui explained patiently. "We need to ensure that this remains a scuffle, but scuffles that we overwhelmingly dominate and dazzle the G'ak'arkan Tribe scouts that will no doubt be paying close attention to us. Martial Apprentices mostly, Martial Squire conflicts too, and to top it off maybe one exchange between Senior Ceeran and a native Martial Senior."

His reasoning was solid, leaving the diplomatic team speechless. For a second, they had forgotten that Rui was not a career diplomat and was actually a Martial Squire. For several seconds, it was difficult to reconcile that fact with the image that they had inadvertently built in their head.

Squire Rui Quarrier. Shrewd and Sharp. Intelligent and rational. Knowledgeable and wise.

"Now," Rui interrupted their brief reverie. "Let's get to work. Break into teams and look into every Martial tribe and evaluate how well they satisfy these conditions."

"First," Rui raised a single finger. "As we just discussed, the Martial tribe needs to be preoccupied with existing opponents, or, otherwise preoccupied with its Martial forces."

The entire team nodded.

"Second," Rui raised another finger. "Their compatibility with long-range techniques must not be high. We aren't going to be able to show off much if our techniques aren't intrinsically effective against their Martial Art. Winning better is always going to make a better impression than losing better. Still, none of you are experts on Martial Art, so I will mostly evaluate this parameter by myself. Still, I want you to be aware of this condition nonetheless."

"Three, there needs to be an avenue or interest of theirs that we can clash with. Something justifiable," Rui raised a third finger. "Remember, we are not going to trigger hostilities to break out, we are going to provoke them to break hostilities with us. Which means we need an effective and guaranteed way to provoke them. The simplest way that comes to mind is infringing on home territory, however, that will most likely be interpreted as an act of war. Perhaps something more benign like infringing on hunting territory or airspace. Whatever works."

Rui listed out some more minor conditions before finally being done. "Alright, let's get started."

While the assistants immediately got up and ran around, picking and scouring through the documents that detailed the relevant information that they needed. Rui simply sat down on a chair and drummed his fingers on the table, absorbed in his thoughts as his eyes flickered around.

Unlike his team, he didn't need to reach for the physical documents, he only needed to enter his Mind Palace and access all the documents that he stored there.

The Mind Palace technique had proven to be invaluable to him during this mission. It could be said that because Rui was able to speed through information like a breeze thanks to it, the entire schedule and pace of the mission had increased a lot. The long and extensive process of familiarizing himself with the G'ak'arkan Tribe was finished in a matter of hours and days, after all.

What was going to be a long-term mission from the Marital Union became a much more mid-term almost solely due to this fiendish cognition.

"Sir, the X'erhnu Tribe might fit the bill," One group of assistants reached out to him after a few hours.

"No, they're not fit," Rui shook his head. "They are indeed in hostilities with two martial tribes, but the level and scale of the conflicts is too low and doesn't seem to be escalating any time soon."

All of them did a double-take at that. It had appeared as though Rui was simply daydreaming away, but now they weren't even sure what to say.

"Sir, the Q'ueta Tribe might be a good target,"

"Their Martial Art techniques give them remarkable maneuvering, allowing them to penetrate past offense and defense. They are a poor match for our techniques when you pair that with the environmental familiarity and expertise that they have, having lived on this island their entire lives. It's all they know and you do not want to challenge them on that part, trust me," Rui shut down the suggestion of yet another team.

Hours flew by as Rui vetted all of the work of his team.

## Chapter 663: Triggers

"Sir, I think I may have found the perfect candidate," Stemple announced, exhausted. "The K'ulnen Tribe. A Martial tribe centered around close-quarters combat, mostly focusing on striking. They have a

warmongering culture, as expected. And they are very touchy about their hunting territory. They are a good distance away with no other Martial Tribe territory butting in."

"Hm..." Rui considered the suggestion.

The diplomatic team's eyes lit up at this sight.

"You might actually be right," Rui murmured. "Furthermore, one of the Martial Tribes that they are in conflict with at the moment is the G'ak'arkan Tribe. It's a very direct measure of the performance of our techniques. There is no clearer perspective to offer them."

"Then..." Stemple peered at Rui with hope.

"Everybody double-checks everybody's work, make sure we have not missed anything," Rui announced. "I'll go through it myself as well."

The diplomatic team spent an entire week making sure there was nothing wrong at all.

While the diplomats of the Martial Union were fleshing out their plans, the G'ak'arkan Tribe had their own things to consider.

"Sir, we received reports from one of our scouts regarding one of their hunting sessions," K'Mala patiently explained to the chieftain of her tribe.

"And..." N'kulu asked, raising an eyebrow.

"The same as the previous one," K'Mala sighed with a hint of admiration. "Their techniques allow them to strike down Dusk Eagles with a single attack, all while on the ground, never having sky-walked into the air. These were all from Martial Artists of the second rank."

"What...?" K'ahru was the most surprised out of all of them. "Impossible! Martial Artists of the second rank should not be able to do that."

"And yet..." K'Mala followed up with a smirk. "They are clearly capable unless you think the scouts were daydreaming."

The two bickered back and forth until N'Kulu intervened.

"Enough..." He raised a hand, silencing the two immediately.

"What should we do, chief?" K'ahru sighed.

"Nothing," N'kulu replied straightforwardly.

"Huh?"

"They are simply hunting game within their territory," N'Kulu calmly recognized. "While this has led to interesting discoveries. That's all that is."

"It also gives their claims of their own techniques more merit." K'Mala pointed.

"It's just one or two techniques in the second rank. That's far from enough from being able to chase after all of our techniques!" K'ahru snarled.

"Neither of you is wrong. K'Mala, you're correct in saying their claims of their own prowess are more credible, however, K'ahru is also correct that this in and of itself is far from enough for possessing the merit to exchange all of our Martial Art in an equal manner," N'Kulu pointed out. "For now, nothing has changed. My ultimatum still stands."

His eyes grew narrower as his aura grew more perilous. "We will destroy them should they cross the line."



The G'ak'arkan Tribe was content with observing the Martial Union settlement while it was constructed. The Martial Union, on the other hand, ironically didn't have any time or leeway for the G'ak'arkan Tribe at the moment.

For now, the construction was still underway, and Rui had been concretely fleshing out the various potential plans for provoking them to trigger a conflict.

He needed to carefully measure how much aggression the Martial Union could show, by looking at the responses to such aggression displayed by other Martial tribes to their target the K'ulnen Tribe. By looking at how vehemently the G'ak'arkan Tribe responded to certain kinds of provocations or slights against the Martial Tribe.

"Kidnapping some of their women is a big no-no," Rui murmured as he scoured through the documented history and the second-hand intelligence gathered from the other Martial tribes and such.

Another Martial tribe had once done such a thing to have more women to increase the birth rates of their tribe, and the K'ulnen Tribe had dropped all conflicts with the other Martial tribes in a heartbeat and had deployed all of their forces against the offending Martial tribe to retrieve their women.

"Infringing on their hunting territory and airspace are much less severe slights against the tribe in their eyes,"

This led to parties present at the time of the infringement to escalate the situation and get into a fight. It also caused more frequent clashes between the two sides.

"Stray attacks in their direction are declarations of war and will be treated as such. Also, infringing on their water source the Challan River is a pretty serious slight against them too. Perhaps this wasn't at the level of all-out war despite water supplies being very important because rivers were not confined to one location.

"Spats between human-level conflicts aren't that big a deal," Rui shrugged as he read through how human-level conflicts happened even without the knowledge and authorization of the higher-ups of Martial tribes.

Apparently, these conflicts were so inconsequential to the big picture that all of the martial tribes let all of it slide, they could not be bothered and even viewed it as a good thing given their warmongering nature.

"Hm, this is starting to become more transparent,"

Rui had become increasingly clear regarding exactly what buttons he could press and what lines he ought to cross in order to trigger an initially mild conflict that would go on to escalate just at the pacing that Rui wanted it to.

He intended to take his time with Apprentice-level conflicts, followed by more serious Martial Squire conflicts.

Maybe the Martial Union could really cross the line and abduct some women of the K'ulnen just to piss them off enough to deploy their Martial Seniors so that they could display the prowess of their Martial Senior versus Martial Seniors that were native to the island.

"I bet Senior Ceeran would have no issue with that whatsoever," Rui chuckled.

Of course, Rui did not intend to toss him into combat with many martial Seniors only for the man to very likely die. That would ruin not only the mission but also Rui's career in the process.

Chapter 664: Fleshed

Months passed before the construction had finally been completed, and the Martial Union settled into its first colony on Vilun Island.

Rui considered holding a big speech in celebration but decided against it at the end of the day.

This was merely part of a mission, and the settlement would be dismantled once they got over. It wasn't as though this would end up being one of the permanent residences of all those who were partaking in this mission and operation.

The settlement plan was already underway, and Rui had already expected that the G'ak'arkan Tribe would have had their eyebrows raised on more than one occasion since the construction of the settlement.

"The hunting... and the security, they're nothing compared to how impactful this next move is going to be," Rui couldn't help but smile when he tried imagining how impactful the victories of the Martial Union would be on the G'ak'arkan Tribe.

The plan was ready. They had scrupulously fleshed out all of the details and accounted for multiple possible routes that it could go down, as well as developing multiple contingencies.

"Let's go through the final plan one last time," Rui nodded to the diplomatic team. "Stemple, Zeyra."

The two of them nodded in acknowledgment as they walked up to the sets of pinboards in the conference room while Rui took a seat.

"The objective of the K'ulnen Operation is to engage in controlled physical conflicts with the K'ulnen Tribe," Zeyra began. "The constraints and conditions on this operation, however, are not little, and are arguably more important than the actual objective itself."

"The constraints that we will have to be working under include but are not limited to ensuring that the K'ulnen Tribe never dedicates the entirety of its Martial capital towards us. This alone is a complex condition that encompasses several other constraints. This means that we cannot cross any line when casualties or any kind of damage upon their civilian population, particularly the children, elderly, and women. We cannot dedicate the entirety of our Martial capital to each other since they won't settle for anything less than at least matching our effort. We cannot allow their conflicts with the other two Martial tribes to grow less extreme."

Rui nodded. Each of these was a constraint that they needed to adhere to and stay within, otherwise, the entire operation could be damned.

"The contingencies that we have in place all ensure that these constraints never disappear, or if they do slip away, then we have perfectly viable replacements that will ensure that we never engage in an all-out war with the K'ulnen Tribe," Stemple continued. "Having established the objective and constraints, we can move on to standard course of actions that we've chosen... The first step is to trigger regular and

frequent conflicts at the human infantry level. As we have gone through before, conflicts at these levels, unless at a gigantic scale, simply do not register much in the radars of the leaders of the Martial tribes. The intelligence department decided it was best to proceed slowly and organically."

Essentially, the conflicts would begin at the human level, before proceeding to escalate. The plan was, to begin with, individual conflicts, before escalating them to group conflicts, and finally bringing in Martial Apprentices.

"The moment one side deploys Martial Apprentices against the other side, we will officially have broken hostilities with the K'ulnen Tribe. From that point on, we suspect that K'ulnen Tribe will most likely not seek to voluntarily escalate the scale of conflict with us, at least not when they're fighting against two other Martial Tribes at once," Zeyra continued.

"This is the idea stage where the conflict growth of scale stagnates, and we can demonstrate all of the long-range prowess we have at the Apprentice and Squire Realms thoroughly. With a good strategy and the techniques of the Longranger Sect, the extreme value of our techniques to the warmongering and power-hungry G'ak'arkan Tribe will be made amply clear. Once we have sufficiently demonstrated the value of what we are offering and get that past their thick skulls, we can move on to ending conflicts with the K'ulnen Tribe."

"Except, as a highly warmongering clan themselves, they are not going to drop hostilities with us easily, making peace with them is highly dubious, thus we have Operation Endline," Zeyra stated, pointing to the final section of the board. "Operation Endline is a covert operation with Squire Kane Arrancar. We abduct some women of the K'ulnen Tribe, and plant them in one of the rival Martial tribes, leaving enough trails and evidence leading to them. Once that happens, we predict that the K'ulnen Tribe will forget about us and dedicate all of their militaristic capital towards the Martial tribe that we framed, putting an end to all of it."

The two of them paused, walking back and sitting down.

The general plan had long been fleshed out, but the details of conflicts were outside the expertise of the diplomatic team. Rui had already resolved that he would handle it with the interim captain and the Longranger Sect. Together, they would be able to figure out the best way to handle the demonstration of their long-range techniques.

"Alright, that wraps things up here," Rui announced to the whole team. "If this operation succeeds, then the next diplomatic talks with the G'ak'arkan Tribe will not be our last. If not, then at the very least we can say that the diplomatic approach will have failed for certain."

The atmosphere was a little tense with those words.

Rui however, was not being entirely sincere. There was, of course, the second plan that he had proposed to Martial commissioner Derun. She had yet to approve the measure, unfortunately.

('She's observing,') Rui knew. ('Observing the outcome of this operation,')

If the K'ulnen Operation failed, then Rui could forget about getting authorization for something much riskier and more difficult to pull off in nearly every way that he could think of.

"Alright, I got some work to do," Rui left the office.

Chapter 665: escalate

All the necessary preparations were made, and the plan was implemented immediately, and smoothly. Of course, the initial part of the plan was rather straightforward and easy, and low-risk. All they had to do was stage low-risk conflicts, before slowly turning up the heat and increasing the numbers that they dispatched each time.

They breached the hunting territory of the K'ulnen Tribe, infringing on the game, and water sources among other things, ensuring that they got into scuffles, and ensuring that they won.

It was nothing special and drew no large attention from any martial tribe, including even the K'ulnen Tribe.

Vilun Island was a relatively large island, especially when compared to the actual amount of land that was inhabited by humans. The Martial tribes were suspected to not attempt building empires by expanding their territory and population due to wanting to ensure that there remained enough of a separation between their territories and that of their enemies and rivals.

What that meant was that ordinarily, it wasn't easy to actually run into the groups belonging to the other Martial tribes.

Yet, it happened all too frequently on Vilun Island.

A good distance away from the Martial Union settlement, a large group of soldiers of the Martial Union was working together.

Today's operation was particularly important. Amongst the human soldiers were actually two Martial Apprentices of the intelligence team that had hidden and disguised themselves as ordinary humans. Their goal was to intercept any Martial Apprentice that the K'ulnen Tribe dispatched when conflicts broke out.

According to the data that they had at hand, they had managed to correctly identify the scale of human-level conflict at which the K'ulnen Tribe tended to escalate by deploying a Martial Apprentice.

The Martial Union had hit that stage very recently, and Rui had deployed two shadow-class Martial Artists and ensure that when that did happen, their forces were more than adequate to catch the Martial Apprentice off-guard.

Once that happened, hostilities would officially be broken with the first Martial Artist clash between the Martial Union and the K'ulnen Tribe.

Rui had even posted some Martial Apprentices some distance away further behind in case the K'ulnen Tribe deployed more than one. Rui didn't want the first Martial Art conflict between the Martial Union and the K'ulnen Tribe to go poorly. That would reflect very poorly on the Martial Artists of the Martial Union, even if it was only a superficial understanding of what happened.

"The A-team is about to make contact with a hostile group," An intelligence officer reported.

Rui and Captain Cravis stood together in the intelligence facility.

There was a team of analysts and intelligence agents that were coordinating with the large group of infantry personnel that had already been deployed to cross the K'ulnen Tribe's hunting territory.

Rui leaned forward as he glanced at the screens on the terminals resembling something one would see in the ancient spy thriller movies that were made in the twentieth century. The screen showed the approximate positions of the Martial Union infantry team, and the interception team that was deployed by the K'ulnen Tribe was only a minute away from clashing with the infantry of a Martial tribe that took itself too seriously.

"The teams have made contact, so says our surveilling scout at the sight," An intelligence officer cited.

Far away from the intelligence facility in the settlement, two large groups of infantry had already clashed with each other.

"Get off our turf!"

"Fuck off outsiders!"

"Alien bastards!"

Perhaps it was due to the fact that they were especially frustrated and wound up due to the many conflicts that they were involved with, at the moment. They launched themselves at their opponents without any hesitation. Rushing forward with primitive weapons in their hands.

"Bring it on!"

The Martial Union's infantry may pale drastically compared to its Martial forces, however, even the infantry was very well trained and honed. They were highly professional, and these kinds of missions and operations were the one place where their prowess had any meaning and bearing at all in this respect.

That section of the forest had so much noise coming from it that it drove away any of the animals away at the first century.

Suddenly, a strange noise drew their attention from all of the fighters on the battlefield.

Everybody turned just in time to witness a single small projectile elevate into the sky quickly before;

POP!

A large amount of smoke was the first thing that they all saw. For a moment, everybody stopped fighting for a second.

"They've deployed a signal," Captain Cravis announced to the teams. "Seems like the prediction was accurate after all."

Everybody exchanged glances. "Martial Apprentice. One."

"Let's go with plan B then," Rui nodded, sighing. He hadn't expected that two Martial Apprentices would be deployed from the very start.

"Understood, sir."

The two Martial Apprentices raced forward at a great speed, it hadn't taken them very much longer to reach their destination.

Yet just as their two Apprentice-level auras were about to completely overwhelm the human forces, three more rose up. Yet before the surprised K'ulnen Martial Artists could reply.

POW POW POW

The two Martial Apprentices guarded as they barely managed to block three wind projectiles, halting them in their paths.



"Targets' approach to our team has been halted," Captain Cravis smiled mildly at that news.

Rui on the other hand, was much more cautious, despite feeling happy himself.

"All that training and prep has paid off nicely, it seems," Rui nodded.

It wasn't just enough to have really good techniques, that's why the Martial Artists had been tested and trained enough to coordinate their attacks to make sure that the impact is also very high. Stopping two Martial Apprentices simultaneously would certainly look very optimal for the G'ak'arkan Tribe that was no doubt watching the fight, they probably developed a much greater impression of their techniques that has just grown much bigger. This was just the first step out of many.

Chapter 666: Personal

More importantly, the scale of the conflict had just crossed an important threshold which meant that the conflict would no longer be unofficial and under wraps.

"We are now at war with the K'ulnen Tribe," Rui softly stated out loud.

The mood was a little somber, yet everyone wordlessly waited for the reports.

BAM BAM

The K'ulnen Tribe Martial Artists gritted as they withstood the attacks from the long-range Martial Artists of the Martial Union.

"What's going on here?"

"Damn! How are they hitting us so hard from so far away so accurately?"

The two Martial Artists that had been used to take down the K'ulnen Martial Apprentices were in a sense heavy artillery. They embodied the sniper's way of doing things, powerful aim and power while sacrificing personal close-range prowess in order to pursue range.

They could not avoid or defend against attacks like this in order to give everything that they had toward long-range offense.

They were perfect for a first-time entry and debut to the Martial tribes of Vilun island.

"Tsk, retreat!"

Eventually, one of the K'ulnen Tribe Martial Apprentices realized how futile and bad this situation was, ordering a full retreat of all their people.

Immediately, all the people belonging to the K'ulnen Tribe retreated back to where they came from, seriously.

"Operation success!"

There were some general celebrations in the war room in the Martial Union settlement. The debut of the Martial Union as a party that is capable of competing with the other Martial tribes in, at least, lower grades.

('That will change given time,') Rui nodded.

Soon, Martial Apprentices would begin partaking in this war regularly.

Eventually, that would escalate to Martial Squires.

"Order full retreat," Rui nodded.

That team truly could no longer afford to stick around in the hunting territory of the K'ulnen Tribe. If they stuck around, then the K'ulnen Tribe would soon send stronger reinforcements that were much more capable of handling the specialties and the competencies displayed by the Martial Artists that had been part of the team covertly and some ways behind the team.

While the Martial Union cheered and the K'ulnen cursed them out, a third-party spectator watched silently, with many different emotions spiraling through their mind. Surprise, caution, skepticism, and fear.

"...That's quite impressive," One Martial Artist sighed.

"Maybe... Maybe exchanging techniques with them isn't a bad idea..."

The G'ak'arkan Tribe's attitude towards the Martial Union had begun changing slowly for a while. It all began with the hunting that had begun a while ago, hunting that was used to regularly bring in enough food for the entire settlement.

That, however, was against prey. The circumstances were highly in favor of the hunter in such scenarios. After all, the hunter has too much power over his prey. This was one of the reasons that the G'ak'arkan Tribe had reservations about putting too much weight on such feats.

However, what they had just accomplished, was much greater than the last time. They had walked into the K'ulnen Tribe's hunting territory, and beaten them back in their own territory despite the K'ulnen Tribe escalating the level of the conflict to the Apprentice Realm first and foremost.

The techniques that had been demonstrated were each solid and reliable, and very powerfully covered the areas of weakness and shortcomings that the G'ak'arkan Tribe.

Rui was absolutely confident that the G'ak'arkan Tribe was having a serious meeting that would deliberate once more on the matter of the Martial Union.

Now, whatever part of the G'ak'arkan Tribe had already expressed support in increasingly in was growing stronger and stronger in its political weight and capital.

"Can you handle the rest, Captain Cravis?" Rui asked the captain of the intelligence leader.

"Yes sir, but do you plan not to?" Captain Cravis threw Rui a puzzled look.

"For now, no," Rui shook his head,

The brain-storming part of the mission was done for now. Rui had to make personal preparations to make sure that he was personally ready to take part in the incoming Martial conflicts with the K'ulnen Tribe.

('Any longer, and my battle instincts will begin to dull,') Rui sighed, before steeling his expression.

In the past three months, he had been receiving very little logistical support in helping the mission succeed had, meaning that he was very busy, they did not have the capital to help him out despite the fact that he had something that could stay for him to suffer.

"Thankfully, this phase of the mission can safely be delegated to other qualified personnel," Rui grinned.

What this meant was that he had more free time than he had ever had in the past three months. What he was going to use that free time for, was entirely obvious.

"I need to train hard, and strong," Rui murmured.

His situation was particularly sensitive. The Mind Mirror technique causes him to be evaluated as far more dangerous than he actually was. This worked just fine when he was a diplomat on a warmongering island, but it did not create the best situations when he himself would be fighting out there against people who think that he was much stronger than he was.

Meaning, that it was quite likely that powerful martial Squires would be dispatched to target him specifically. Martial Squires were equipped to take down someone that they perceived was a grade nine or grade ten Martial Artist.

This was bad because Rui was much weaker than grade-nine or grade-ten Martial Artists. Rui needed to get back into absolute peak form otherwise, he did not stand a chance against any such measures if he did not go all all-out.

"This is going to be some good old fun times, just like in the old day," Rui smiled. Despite the tribulations that were incoming, he couldn't help but grow genuinely eager and even excited at the prospect of engaging in some conflicts, with meaningful and important relevancies to him. Growing stronger was something Rui was highly accustomed to doing.

#### Chapter 667: Debut

In an underground facility in the Martial Union settlement sat a lonesome figure. He sat on the ground with folded legs and his arms resting on his knees.

He had donned his combat attire, as opposed to the formal attire that he had grown accustomed to wearing in the past three months.

His black hair was unkempt, an increasingly rare sight to see due to his position.

His visage was hardly strange or unusual, yet almost everyone standing in the room as him would be paralyzed with primal fear. The fear that came from a great threat to one's well-being and life.

Not only had Rui donned his strongest mind mask as usual, but his mind which had been consumed with the diplomatic mission for more than three months had entered a state it hadn't in recent times.

He had ejected all considerations regarding his mission from his previously scattered mind. For the most six hours, he had been honing his mind on his Martial Art and Martial Path. It took him a while to gather the entirety of his focus, conscious and unconscious.

His eyes were closed, yet it wasn't the darkness that plagues his vision.

He saw a path.

One he was standing upon.

It stretched on forever onwards and upwards.

It winded on and about.

Yet it wasn't just the path that drew his attention.

What the path winded through was equally eye-drawing.

Monsters of all kinds plague his path, each more horrifying than the last. Calamities and catastrophes of all kinds made any attempt to try and reach the end of the path almost impossible!

It was a terrifying path, yet it was all too beautiful.

Yet despite that, it called out to him. Lulled him in.

It was a path he wanted to walk down.

('...It's been a while since I've been down here.')

He could only ever enter the mental landscape of his Martial Path when he immersed his everything into it. Yet, now that he was here, he realized how long it had been since he had actually come down here. It used to be a frequent visit for him, given how immersed in his training he would get. Yet he hadn't done so in the past three months.

('...A blunder.')

He couldn't help but feel some regret.

Playing diplomat was a new and refreshing experience. It was even enjoyable, yet now that he was immersed in his Martial Path, he realized that it could never compare to the path that he had already chosen. A path that he had perhaps been neglecting in recent times.

('Never again.')

A powerful yet stifled presence suddenly grazed against his senses drawing his attention and moving closer toward him.

STEP

STEP

STEP

"You know, it has been fascinating to see your work as a diplomat. I had completely predicted that you would be able to ace this mission when Derun informed me of her choice of picking you for it... but I have to say..." Senior Ceeran paused. "I still like this you more than that one, at the end of the day."

Rui opened his eyes slowly.

It was as though his pitch-black eyes had grown a few shades darker.

A mild grin broke out at the edge of Senior Ceeran's mouth. "It's not even a contest, in hindsight. Look at you, if I was a little sleepy, I might even mistake you for a Martial Senior. What a potent aura. I can't wait to see how strong it will be when you enter the Senior Realm."

Rui smiled mildly. "I'm assuming it's time?"

"Just about, you should get going."

"You didn't have to come down here to inform me of that yourself, you know?" Rui remarked as he got up.

"Yes, but I was just wondering how you were doing. It seems my concerns were unwarranted," Senior Ceeran shrugged.

Rui made his way up, taking in the busy bustling atmosphere in the settlement.

Today was the day, after all.

In the past few weeks, the scale of the conflicts between Martial Apprentices had reached the precipice, it had reached the tipping point where it would crossover into a higher realm of power.

The conflict would only keep escalating, and the only way up was into the Squire Realm. The analytics team had projected that the scale of the conflict that was planned today would cross the bottom line of the K'ulnen Tribe and a Martial Squire would be deployed, perhaps more than one.

That was why Rui would be joining today's operation. He would be there to intercept the Martial Squire that would inadvertently be deployed to handle the overwhelming scale of Apprentice-level conflict.

That wasn't necessarily the hard part. The hard part was that Rui needed to handle the man with his one and only long-range technique.

That wasn't easy to accomplish, even for Rui. His decision to take part in the first Squire-level conflict between the settlement and the K'ulnen Tribe was not well-received by everybody, especially the Longranger Sect Martial Squires.

If not for the fact that he was the leader of the mission, as well as the fact that he had accrued a lot of prestige for a Martial Squire his age and his apparent high Martial Artist grade, he probably wouldn't have gotten his way.

He had also managed to placate them with good reasoning.



"I am the face of our settlement to the G'ak'arkan Tribe," Rui had told them some time ago. "For now, at least. Their scouts have no doubt seen me managing the settlement, and I was the lead diplomat in our talk with them a while back. Taking down a Martial Artist in the manner that I intend to will be good for increasing the amount of respect that I will command from them. It will increase the chances that I will be able to secure a win on the diplomatic end in the future."

As long as it was for the sake of the mission, he could justify his actions well enough.

#### Chapter 668: Dispatch

Rui's plan was straightforward.

He would employ his Mind Mask technique and diminish his presence to an Apprentice level and his appearance and identity with a mask. The Martial Apprentices all wore masks anyway as Martial Apprentices normally did, so there was nothing suspicious or abnormal about that.

The Martial Apprentices had all been debriefed about his presence in the operation. However, they had all been informed very firmly that Rui would not divulge his power until the Martial Squire appeared. He would be operating at the level of a modern grade-ten Martial Apprentice of the Martial Union. When, and only when the Martial Squire from the K'ulnen Tribe would be deployed would he intervene and fight with them.

They were to retreat when that happened, for they could all potentially die being near the fight between Martial Squires.

('Not that it will even reach that stage,') Rui kept that thought to himself. If his plan worked out, then he would achieve the most shocking victory a Martial Squire could have over one of their peers.

Of course, this wasn't that easy given that he wasn't all-powerful within the Squire Realm like he used to be in the later years of his time in the Apprentice Realm. He was in grade-four, perhaps verging on grade five.

The natural growth of the Martial bodies due to evolved muscle hypertrophy and enhanced cell adaptability meant that the strains that came with subjecting the body to training and combat made the

Martial body stronger that was one of the reasons that the Squire Realm was so much larger than the Apprentice Realm, the body was a constant, rather than a variable, in the Apprentice Realm. What didn't kill a Martial Squire always made them stronger in the long run.

('Still, it's not like they're going to send in their top Martial Squires just to protect their Martial Apprentices from a losing battle against other Martial Squires,') Rui noted. ('It's quite likely they'll send in someone on the lower half of the grades of the Squire Realm. Which means it isn't likely that I'll be overwhelmed in a fight.')

Soon enough, it was time for the preparations for the operation to begin immediately.

Rui entered the military facility in the outer ring of the settlement, heading to the dispatch grounds.

"Squire Quarrier,"

The gathered Martial Apprentices bowed to him.

"Not anymore, no," Rui replied, before adjusting his mind mask to diminish his presence to the peak of the Apprentice Realm. "I'm a Martial Apprentice for the time being. Treat me that way."

This was a little hard for the Martial Apprentices. They all gazed at Rui with awe and admiration in their eyes. After all, at this point, there wasn't a single Martial Apprentice that hadn't heard of the great Rui Quarrier. There were many rumors and legends floating around him in many circles. He was the reason that the Martial Union adjusted the grading standards for Martial Apprentices. He killed a Martial Squire with his team. He was the reason the Kandrian Empire won the Serevian War.

Once all the preparations were done, they simply left the settlement, heading towards the K'ulnen Tribe at a solid pace.

('They should be getting ready in a hurry by now,') Rui noted calmly.

All the Martial tribes had scouts watching all of the others. Their means of surveillance were much more primitive than that of the Martial Union, but they were still enough to get the job done. It would be

impossible even for the Martial Union to dispatch such a large force without the K'ulnen Tribe realizing what was going on.

('A little over ten minutes to the tribe at this rate, though we will be intercepted by a force sooner than that,') Rui mused.

The speed at which they were running meant that even ten minutes was a huge distance between the two tribes was quite large, it was just that with how fast Martial Apprentices were, that distance was quite manageable to run across.

"I sense something," Rui said calmly as they were running.

Even if he was going to limit his aura and combat prowess to the Apprentice level, there was no way that he could suppress his own senses. He could sense far beyond any of the Martial Apprentices in their forces.

"How far away sir?" One of the Martial Apprentices asked.

"Four minutes," Rui replied. "Their force isn't as large as that of ours. Maybe about five to ten percent lower than that of ours. Hm."

This was a good sign. Not just because they were likelier to win, but also because it meant that they really were being stretched by conflict in three ways. It seemed as though they were hitting their limits with Martial capital.

The force they gathered was the bare minimum to ensure that a loss wasn't guaranteed.

('That means the likelihood of a Martial Squire being dispatched is quite high,') Rui noted.

No group, Martial tribe or otherwise, could afford to lose too many Martial Apprentices. Although a single Martial Squire would win against even dozens of Martial Apprentices, that did not make a single Martial Squire more valuable than dozens of Martial Apprentices.

Martial Apprentices were all, in some ways, Squire candidates in a sense. In the future, dozens of Martial Apprentices would yield a few Martial Squires. In the long run, the value of Martial Apprentices exceeded their combat prowess alone due to their potential to discover their Martial body and enter a higher realm of power.

The K'ulnen tribe was the same, they would not allow their Martial Apprentices to get butchered, and hence would send in reinforcements capable of helping and saving them; Martial Squires.

('When that happens, I'm going to kill them so quick they won't know what hit them... Literally.')

Soon enough, the two forces ran into each other.

The Martial Apprentices paused the moment they sensed them, before retreating slowly. They each began firing long-range attacks at their opponents from a great distance. A flurry of wings, sounds, and even rocks flew forward as the battle began.

#### Chapter 669: Variety

The battle began as the Martial Apprentices of the Longranger Sect fired all kinds of long-range attacks at the Martial Apprentices of K'ulnen Tribe once they entered the firing range of the Martial Apprentices.

Rui watched with interest as he studied the battle in slow motion.

('There is more diversity among the Martial Apprentices' long-range offense than I expected,') Rui noted with interest.

He even saw one Martial Apprentice wielding Seismic radiation as a weapon, used to destabilize the ground that the enemy Martial Apprentices traversed on.

('Nice. Bet the G'ak'arkan Tribe would really love to have that one.')

He hadn't seen many of the kinds of techniques that he saw with these Martial Apprentices. He had to admit, the Longranger Sect certainly knew its long-range.

('Still... Rocks?')

He glanced in interest at the Martial Apprentice who was hurling literal rocks at the enemies. Furthermore, she was doing it in the most primitive fashion, seemingly. She literally just kicked at the ground and debris flew forward at tremendous speeds.

('Wait a minute... She's not just kicking.') Rui realized as an eyebrow of rose. ('She's doing something similar to the reverse of my Flux Earther technique.')

The Flux Earther technique involved elastically converting the kinetic energy of an attack into the kinetic energy of his body through an elastic collision, before grounding it into the ground with the help of the Reverberating Lance technique.

What she was doing on the other hand was elastically converting her own kinetic energy into the kinetic energy of anything that she could kick. Once the object inherited her kinetic energy, it would naturally end up moving at tremendous speeds forward.

It was a bizarre technique, but Rui couldn't complain about its power or effectiveness.

('It doesn't require learning breathing techniques or any additional crutch techniques that many long-range techniques, so the difficulty was probably much lower than a wind-based technique. Quite practical, really. I bet the G'ak'arkan Tribe would like that.')

There were several other techniques that caught his eye. He didn't even bother contributing as he spent his time analyzing their techniques in interest.

('The seismic radiation technique is in a way the opposite of the rock flinging technique,') Rui mused.

He was converting the power of his strikes into surface-level seismic radiation techniques that allowed him to disrupt the grounding of approaching techniques.

('It's like a failed version of the second half of my Flux Earther technique,')

Reverberating Lance in the Flux Earther transmitted the impact of the attack deep into the ground such that it did not affect the surface, but if he didn't then it would affect the surface.

('The difference is that he's directing the seismic radiation in one direction; towards his enemies, rather than in all directions. Quite impressive.')

Rui acknowledged.

His eyes ran across all of the other techniques being employed. Wind was the norm, but he even saw arm extensions, and even fire. Something that he had only seen once.

('The gimmicks are quite attractive. But that isn't the area in which the G'ak'arkan Tribe is lacking,') Rui turned back to face their opponents, taking a good look at them as well.

They all simply rushed forward with balled fists or open palms.

From the few attacks that they had tried to launch, it didn't seem as though they had anything interesting at all.

Of course, Rui was starting to understand why the Martial Union hadn't been pining to obtain the techniques of the K'ulnen Tribe. Unlike the G'ak'arkan Tribe, the K'ulnen Tribe did not possess any remarkable novelties, thus the Martial Union had no interest whatsoever regarding that tribe.

('Well, let's speed this up a bit, shall we?') Rui sighed as he opened his mouth.

THWOOM!

He employed the power that he was capable of when he was a Martial Apprentices, which while nowhere near what he was capable of now, was still enough to overwhelm most Martial Apprentices.

BAM!

The sound projectile struck a charging Martial Apprentice, knocking him unconscious and giving him a concussion.

BAM BAM BAM!

Three more attacks invited three more groans and wails of pain. Broken ribs, face, and arms were just the direct consequences. In less than a second, he had taken four Martial Apprentices.

"Move backward and maintain distance!" The leader of their unit bellowed. The Martial Artists of the K'ulnen Tribe were closing too much distance even if the Martial Apprentices of the Martial Union were doing a great job mowing them down and hurting them with long-range attacks.

Retreating backward was a common way for long-range Martial Artists to ensure that close-quarters Martial Artists never managed to get their hands on them.

They moved backward as they continuously rained a volley of attacks on their opponents. Although one or two of the Martial Artists of the K'ulnen Tribe managed to sneak past the volley and get close to their opponents, Rui subtly launched a sound bullet, knocking them down before they ever managed to reach close.

Although he wasn't interested in fighting the battles of Martial Apprentices for them, this battle was important. He wanted to make as perfect of an impression on the G'ak'arkan Tribe as possible.

Not a single casualty, and not even a single injured Martial Apprentices. A literally perfect battle. Of course, if not for the fact that Rui had taken down some of the key Martial Apprentices while also sabotaging their success in breaking through, it would definitely have not been possible for the victory to be this squeaky clean.

Now Rui just needed to ensure that they pushed hard enough to force the K'ulnen Tribe to deploy as strong a Martial Squire as they were willing to deploy. The stronger the Martial Squire, the more impressive it would be when he took them down effortlessly.

As for how he intended to do that, he had spent weeks preparing a plan and making preparations to fulfill that plan when the time came.

Although it wasn't easy, he had gone to extreme lengths to ensure that not a single thing could go wrong.

#### Chapter 670: Changes

Time passed on more monotonously than Rui had expected, the entire battle was happening in slow motion within his eyes, so he had gotten rather bored for quite a while now. As time passed, his intervention in the battle reduced bit by bit, to ensure that the battle proceeded more organically, otherwise he would end up taking too much credit from the Martial Apprentices of the Longranger Sect that were partaking in this battle.

He had been launching fewer attacks and had also been sabotaging his opponents less as time passed by.

The problem for the K'ulnen Tribe was the fact that the advantages that came from the initial numbers advantage, as well as the higher-quality Martial Artists in general. On top of that the accumulated advantage that came from having an immensely successful battle up till this point was also adding on top of the pile.

It was slowly starting to get overwhelming at this point. Unlike before, a single Martial Apprentice of the K'ulnen Tribe had to face more than one long-range Martial Artist of the Martial Union and the Longranger Sect since their numbers had been cut down since the start of the battle.

It was already difficult for them having to deal with just a single Martial Apprentice, but now that they had to deal with a lot more, not a single close-range Martial Apprentice of the Longranger Sect was able to penetrate the wave of attacks that were coming from the distance and close the distance faster than the Longranger Martial Artist was moving back.

The Martial Artists of the Longranger Sect had also coordinated their matchups much more excellently than at the start of the battle. It helped that they had a solid intelligence advantage over the K'ulnen Tribe.



The heavy long-range artillery Martial Artists focused on the heavyweight durable close-range Martial Artists in the K'ulnen Tribe. The latter was extremely difficult to halt in their path and required serious firepower within the Apprentice Realm to stop them.

They were generally handled with techniques with high single-hit power or techniques that could be used continuously, resulting in a tremendous amount of power being outputted every second.

Only such techniques could stop the momentum of heavyweight power and durability-oriented close-range Martial Artists.

On the other hand, there were plenty of middle and lightweight maneuvering-oriented Martial Apprentices that were able to dodge the attacks of such unwieldy, albeit powerful, attacks. These kinds of Martial Apprentices did not fear such attacks since it was extremely difficult to hit them with such attacks.

Instead, they were handled by the Martial Apprentices of the Longranger Sect which was capable of highly flexible and adjustable, quick and wider attacks. Such techniques were inherently harder to avoid due to the higher area of effect, while also being easier for the long-range Martial Artist to tag due to their flexible nature.

The biggest downside to such techniques was the fact that their power was quite lacking. This meant that it would be nearly impossible to take out heavyweight power or defense-oriented Martial Artists. On the flip side, lightweight Martial Artists almost always tended to have low durability and toughness which meant that even such power-lacking techniques were strong enough to be effective against them as a means of offense.

BAM!

"Argh!"

Another powerful K'ulnen Martial Apprentice fell to a key shot that hit a vital, incapacitating them. The momentum of the K'ulnen Tribe's charge had stalled to a tipping point.

BAM BAM BAM!

Attacks rained on them wave after wave. Not only did they significantly hamper the path forward, but they were also beginning to push back!

Step by step, leap by leap, the Martial Apprentices of the K'ulnen Tribe backed off as the overwhelming amount of artillery piled on them.

('Anytime now,') Rui grew more alert as he waited for the signal.

"Chase after them!" An order was bellowed once the Martial Apprentices of the K'ulnen Tribe learned that they had effectively lost the battle.

The Longranger Martial Apprentices began charging forward swiftly, unwilling to let their enemies retreat easily when they had such dominant odds.

That's when it happened.

PEWWW...

What appeared to be a firecracker of some sort was launched into the air.

BANG!

It exploded, producing a lot of sound and light.

Rui grinned. "It's time,"

This was the signal that the Martial Apprentices were supposed to launch when they were in real trouble, according to the intelligence that had been gathered on the K'ulnen Tribe

That served as a signal to summon a Martial Squire to clean up the mess.

"Retreat!" Rui ordered them Martial Apprentices.

They were well aware of what was about to come, having been debriefed about this operation thoroughly.

Rui remained behind as he prepared himself to use the Void Pathfinder technique.

Normally, the Void Pathfinder technique, which was the VOID algorithm applied to the Pathfinder technique could not be applied to Martial Artists of which he hadn't prepared a predictive model and thus an adapted style to counter them.

That was why Rui had painstakingly built predictive models for all of the Martial Squires of the K'ulnen Tribe for almost two months. It had been quite difficult and had taken quite some time, but he had done all of that not just for today's spectacle, but also for future conflicts against the Martial Squires of the K'ulnen Tribe.

The VOID algorithm was necessary in this case for when the target of his Pathfinder technique was in motion since it would require some degree of prediction that he would use to input into the ODA System. Together, he would be able to achieve a feat that ought to leave even the G'ak'arkan Tribe's jaw-dropping.

('Now then... Which one will it be in the end?') Rui wondered.

BEEP BEEP

His comms device vibrated, drawing his attention.

[Code H]

Said the message that Kane had sent him.

('...Unexpected,') Rui shrugged as he prepared himself to execute the ODA algorithm in a split second when the Martial Squire arrived. ('But not a problem.')