

Calamity 321

Naruto: The Wind Calamity

Chapter 321: Dreaming Beyond One's Capability!

The Council members agreed with Rasa's analysis. There were two main reasons for this. The first was that Fujin never used any Vacuum jutsu during his time in the Land of Wind.

And secondly, on a subconscious level, they would rather want the damage done to them by someone who had gained fame, was the son of the White Fang and was taught by the Fourth Hokage, rather than someone who had no fame and was merely thirteen years old.

Rasa asked, "Leaving his matter aside, what are your thoughts on the operation in the Land of Fire? Two of our ninjas were killed outside the Land of Fire. Now 27 are presumed dead here. And if Hideyoshi's squad is assumed dead, then our total losses reach 35 ninjas. 1 Elite Jounin, 16 Jounins and 18 Chunins."

The entire room went silent. Such losses would make their hearts ache even if it was wartime.

After some time, Gazo broke the silence by saying, "Adding the previous losses, we have now lost 2 Elite Jounins and over a hundred ninjas in total."

Ryusa sighed and muttered, "At this rate, we might have been better off not acting against Konoha."

Tojuro immediately rebuked him and shouted, "Are you crazy? Even if we didn't, we would have suffered the same losses in the future. Don't forget the stuff that Danzo keeps pulling in the dark!"

Ryusa looked back at him and said, "Stop yelling and tell us a good plan if you think this was such a good idea."

Tojuro snorted and said, "Of course, we have to continue attacking. This time, we should send more Elite Jounins. If the base had 3-4 Elite Jounins, then Konoha's plot would have backfired. And instead, Hatake Kakashi and Suszki Fujin would have died! We need to make Konoha feel the pain for daring to scheme against us!"

Ryusa replied, "We still don't know how Hideyoshi's squad was dealt with. And the base we created this time was destroyed after being attacked by just the Copy Ninja. What if the Sannins attack next time? All 4 Elite Jounins will die if they do. Can you accept the responsibility for such a loss?"

Obviously, Tojuro won't claim responsibility for such a matter. He thought, 'Why is this bastard pushing the matter on me? Besides, even if Konoha killed 4 more Elite Jounins and a few dozen Jounins, so what? It's not like they will dare to invade our country.'

The only thing that will happen is that Rasa's position will become very shaky. And with numerous Elite Jounins out of the way, I will have a good chance to become the Fifth Kazekage!

He replied, "Then do you want to cower and tell Konoha that Suna is weak and they can walk over us any time without any consequences? As for the responsibility, did you forget that we still have Lord Kazekage to protect us?"

Ryusa was about to argue back when Goza said, "That's enough, you two. Don't make a mockery of the council."

Hearing his words, the two stopped arguing. Goza said, "Tojuro is right. We have to retaliate. Otherwise, we will look weak and will invite stronger attacks in the future. But, deploying Elite Jounins is too risky. So is creating another base in the Land of Fire."

We should deploy ninjas individually with specific missions without letting them know about other ninjas and their missions. This way, even if someone is caught, they can't leak intelligence about others. So our losses won't suddenly become very high."

Rasa nodded and asked, "Any objections to it?"

No one said anything. Rasa said, "Alright, we will be deploying ninjas individually to target the Nobles in the Land of Fire. In addition, send a message to our current spies to dig for more information on Suzuki Fujin. If possible, keep track of his movements too, but don't do that if it risks their cover. And, ask Sajo to stop looking for the Copy Ninja and instead focus entirely on rebuilding the citizen's faith into Sunagakure."

Everyone nodded and left the room, leaving Rasa alone in the room. Rasa stayed seated with his hands on the desk while in deep contemplation. After a few minutes, he let out a sigh and thought, 'Konoha ended the Third Great Ninja war in a very strong position, leaving the rest of the villages helpless against their might. Fortunately, they suffered multiple setbacks after the war ended.'

Though I wasn't able to take advantage when the Nine Tails attacked and killed the Fourth Hokage or when Orochimaru betrayed them, the Uchiha Massacre provided us with a good opportunity. I began taking steps to break our alliance with Konoha and began preparing for a war against them in secret.

Though I expected Konoha to catch wind of my intentions and retaliate, I didn't expect it to be so strong. It's almost as if the Uchiha Massacre didn't weaken them and instead strengthened them. And despite such extreme actions, they don't seem to be worried about us starting a war. The important question is...'

Rasa became very serious as he contemplated, 'Is Hiruzen thinking that I won't dare to start a war? Or is he so confident in Konoha's younger generation that he doesn't mind a war?'

Thinking about the younger generation, Rasa began getting a headache. He thought, 'Ever since the First Great Ninja War, Konoha always had excellent youngsters who quickly filled the shoes left by their predecessors. In fact, they have had the next generation step up even when their previous generation was still at its peak.'

Other nations are lucky to have 1 or 2 S rank ninjas in every generation. In fact, Iwa hasn't had a non-Jinchuriki S rank ninja since Onoki. But Konoha produces S ranks every decade. If Hiruzen's actions are due to his confidence in his younger generation, then should I even be launching a war?'

Rasa had been thinking of starting a short war with Konoha for more than a couple of years. However, the recent losses Suna suffered against Konoha made him rethink his plan. After all, he had already lost one big war in the past. In order to ensure that he maintained his position, he even got rid of the only other rank S ninja in Suna's ranks from his generation.

After thinking for a long time, he concluded, 'No, right now is the best time. The Sannins barely stay in the village. All that leaves is an old Hiruzen and an injured Danzo. Though Hatake Kakashi's fame exceeds even the Sannins at his age, in terms of accomplishments, he is lacking. And if I compare it to Minato or his father, then it's not even comparable. He probably needs another 6-8 years to reach my level. As for this new kid, he is still at the Elite Jounin level. He will need even longer.'

As long as I make a move within the next 5 years, I will have a good chance. But, the attack will have to be a sneak attack. And it needs to be done at an accurate time.

If I attack directly, then the Konoha armies will crush us just like the last war. And if I attack when the Sannins are nearby, I will have to face two or more S ranked ninjas by myself. The best time would be to attack Hiruzen when the Sannins aren't in the village.

Once I kill him, we can cause some damage to Konoha and retreat. Then even if the two Sannins return to Konoha, they will be helpless to do anything to me. They won't dare to march in the desert and would need to keep an eye on Kumo. And the Wind Daimyo will be helpless as well. That war will leave him no choice but to give us all the missions.

But... There are two main issues. Can I kill Hiruzen with a sneak attack? And what if the Sannins hide waiting for me to make a move?'

Rasa analyzed the answers to both of his questions. Finally, he decided, 'As long as I catch him by surprise, I can kill Hiruzen! After all, he is far past his prime. But the main issue is Jiraiya and Tsunade. I need someone to keep them in check. An S rank ally!'

Rasa thought for some time, but couldn't think of anyone suitable. He thought, 'The only one that comes to mind is Chiyo. But she is way past her prime. She lost to Tsunade in the last war. This time, she might not be able to even put up a challenge.'

He thought of the remaining Kages but immediately removed that thought. In the end, he decided, 'I need to find a proper ally for the sneak attack. I will wait till I find one. If I don't find any, then I will do my sneak attack after 5 years. I will have to depend on Shukaku to divert the Sanins or other strong fighters.

In the meantime, I need to strengthen a few subordinates that are loyal to me. I will need a few Elite Jounins to block the Clan Leaders in Konoha.'

Unlike the rest of the council, Rasa had given up on the hopes of achieving any success in their current campaign against Konoha. Instead, he directly began preparing for a war against a village that had three times more S rank ninjas!

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Chapter 322: Wind Style Genjutsu!

The 4 Anbu squads dispatched by Hiruzen reached the base created by Sunagakure and took over the command from Kakashi. Kakashi and the rest began returning to Konoha. By noon, they were back in the village, returning in exactly 24 hours.

They met Hiruzen, handed him the scroll of the dead bodies and informed him about the poison. Hiruzen let out a sigh and thought, 'Other than elimination, this mission has failed on all parameters. Oh well, I'm sure that Shikaku has considered this situation as well.'

Understanding the importance of the mental health of a Kage, Hiruzen didn't bother planning for even a second before tossing another headache over to Shikaku.

He said, "Alright, you did a good job in eliminating the infiltrators. I miscalculated their strength and didn't think they would fight back so vigorously. Fujin, stay back. Others can leave."

Other than Fujin, the rest left. Hiruzen tossed a scroll at Fujin and said, "This scroll has the Genjutsu that you requested. I'll let you take a week off to master them. On the 8th day, come to my office at dawn. We will be having a couple more diplomatic missions. Burn the scroll after you are done and don't use them lightly."

Fujin nodded. He understood that Hiruzen wanted to keep the Anbu Guards in the dark regarding the exact matter. He said, "Thank you, Grandpa. I'll begin working on them right away."

Hiruzen nodded. Fujin kept the scroll and walked out while thinking, 'It took so long for them to read Susumu's memories? Normally the memories get checked within a day... Did Hiruzen keep them until today? But I don't see any reason for him to do that.'

I guess reading memories to extract jutsus is a more difficult task. Or perhaps he wanted to check each and every memory before giving me the scroll in order to remove any issues or dangers in the jutsus or that might arise while learning them.'

While Fujin headed to his home, Hiruzen entered Shikaku's office and closed the door. Shikaku looked at Hiruzen and had a bad feeling. He muttered to himself, 'This look. He is going to dump another troublesome task on my head!'

Hiruzen said, "Kakashi's group returned. Their enemy used poison to ruin the neural network in dead people. The only one who wasn't poisoned by it had his head destroyed by earth spikes. So we can't read any memories from them."

Shikaku raised his eyebrow and said, "I can understand a message being sent and someone escaping, but how did they fail so badly? Who did you send?"

Hiruzen replied, "Kakashi, Fujin, Ibiki, Genma, Yugao and Ken."

A look of annoyance appeared on Shikaku's face. He muttered, "Why did you send such a weak squad? I recommended sending at least 4 Elite Jounins and two who are close to that level."

Hiruzen shrugged and said, "I know, but you didn't arrange to have that many Elite Jounins available. I could just make do with the ones available."

Shikaku was stunned by the reply. He thought, 'Since when is arranging ninjas my job? It's your job as the Hokage to assign missions and move the ninjas around!'

Before he could reply, Hiruzen said, "Suna will soon start sending ninjas one by one in our country. Make plans to eliminate them."

He turned around and sighed, "I have a few meetings to attend. So I will leave this matter in your capable hands."

Shikaku watched as Hiruzen disappeared from his office without a hint of apology. His body slumped on his desk as he muttered, "What a troublesome old man. If he had informed me earlier, I'd have made Inoichi and Choza go instead of Ken and Yugao. Now I have to deal with another troublesome mess."

While Shikaku was sulking, Fujin reached his home. He entered the basement and began reading the information in the scroll. In a few minutes, a look of admiration appeared on Fujin's face.

He thought, 'This Susumu guy was a genius. Such precise, delicate but stealthy use of Wind chakra. He would first hide his chakra from being sensed so that no one would realize the extremely minute amounts of chakra he emitted from his body. The chakra would turn into harmless winds and slowly enter his target's body as they breathe the air.

Right when the target is about to use a jutsu, he uses his chakra in his opponent's body to influence the opponent's chakra and make him fall into a Genjutsu. And this Genjutsu has only 2 effects. One, it will cause the jutsu to fail. And secondly, it will make the opponent think that he has successfully used the jutsu.

But other than this, there is nothing that this technique does. The winds pose no threat and the chakra that infiltrates the opponent's body also doesn't pose any threat apart from being able to cast a low-level Genjutsu.

This is the ingenious part. Most experienced ninjas have a keen sense of danger. But since this jutsu doesn't pose any threat, the ninja won't feel any danger. The real danger comes from the jutsu that are aimed at the opponent.

For instance, if I hadn't sensed my chakra being influenced and used Body Flicker against Gaara, I'd have thought that I moved away when I hadn't. His sand would have killed or at least gravely injured me.

And the jutsu is so stealthy that even an experienced sensor would have difficulty sensing it unless he is actively looking for it. And the fact that it doesn't need any hand signs adds to the stealth part. If I wasn't on extreme alert due to being so deep in enemy territory and being heavily outnumbered, even I might have trouble detecting it.'

Fujin was extremely impressed by Susumu's ingenuity. However, he was more pleased with another aspect. While most other ninjas might struggle on the very first step, this technique was much simpler to learn for someone like him, who spent the majority of his time training Wind jutsus and improving his chakra control.

Fujin closed his eyes. A blue aura appeared around him. He controlled the chakra and began slowly emitting it in the air.

As the chakra left his body, it transformed into wind and mixed with the air in the basement. Fujin realized, 'I see. This is also excellent for sensing. Though the range is low, the accuracy is remarkable. I doubt anyone would be able to hide when I use this technique. I guess killing him without Gaara's distraction wouldn't have been possible.'

Fujin turned his attention back towards the technique and analyzed, 'Regardless, I am using a lot of chakra. I have to emit the chakra into the air without exerting any externally. The chakra emitted should be so low that no one should grow suspicious.'

'Multi Shadow Clone jutsu'

4 Shadow Clones appeared around Fujin. All 4 began practising the art of emitting chakra into the air and converting it into wind while suppressing their chakra as low as possible.

In the next hour, all 5 made rapid progress. Finally, an hour later, Fujin dismissed his Shadow Clones. He got a slight headache due to the memories he received. As all the memories and experiences mixed together, a smile formed on Fujin's face. One of his clones had managed to successfully learn the jutsu.

Fujin began emitting chakra into the air. Slowly, his chakra spread in the entire basement! And the density of the chakra was so low that other ninjas wouldn't be able to feel it unless they activated their chakra field or other abilities that could sense chakra.

Fujin thought, 'First step achieved. And since the amount of chakra that I had to emit was so low, I still have most of my chakra. The next step is to send this chakra into the opponent's chakra network.'

He created 1 Shadow Clone and sat on the ground. His clone nodded and emitted his chakra into the air. It engulfed Fujin's position and entered him as he breathed in the air. However, a frown formed on Fujin's face. He said, "I can feel the chakra entering my system."

The clone thought for a bit and said, "I see. Though I emitted the chakra in the right way, I tried forcing it into your body. I'll try it again."

Fujin nodded. His chakra suddenly flared and absorbed the chakra that his clone had inserted into his chakra network. Since the chakra of the clone belonged to him, he had no issue in doing it.

The clone began emitting chakra once again. This time, he didn't bother focusing it around Fujin and instead, just let the winds flow. As Fujin continued breathing, chakra slowly entered his chakra network. Over the next minute, Fujin continued inhaling the chakra.

His clone observed Fujin and thought, 'This should be enough.'

'Double Vision jutsu'

Suddenly, Fujin began seeing two clones in front of him. He disrupted his chakra and said, "That worked. The last part is stopping me from using my jutsus."

The clone nodded and said, "Let's fight!"

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Chapter 323: Plans for a Signature Jutsu!

Fujin nodded and stood up as his clone continued emitting chakra in the air. Fujin thought, 'The process is still quite slow. Susumu was able to influence my chakra almost instantaneously. But considering that he was waiting to ambush me, he might have set up the battlefield before I encountered his group.'

Fujin's clone said, "I am ready."

Almost instantly, Fujin began kneading his chakra.

'Fire Release: Great Fireball jutsu'

He exhaled a small fireball at his clone. His clone immediately moved backwards and raised two fingers. Wind began flowing around them.

'Wind Release: Blade of Wind jutsu'

Multiple blades of wind cut apart the fireball and dispersed the heat in the basement. He let out a sigh and dispelled himself.

Fujin received his clone's memories and began analyzing, 'I see. His genjutsu failed because he had too little chakra in my body. No, a more precise way of saying it would be that he couldn't cast the Genjutsu with such less chakra.

I guess I first need to learn how to cast this Genjutsu properly and then slowly decrease the amount of chakra I need to cast this genjutsu. Once it reaches the required level, I will integrate it into this technique. Now, who should I experiment the Genjutsu on?'

Fujin thought for a bit. His first thought was Goro. But he shook his head and thought, 'No. The Flying Sabertooths are too sensitive to wind and chakra. They will easily detect my attempts. And influencing Nature chakra with normal chakra is difficult. Normal Genjutsus don't even work on them.

And since Hiruzen asked me to keep this technique a secret, I can't ask for any other Konoha ninja to aid me. I guess I'll have to keep having my clones use the Genjutsu on me. Oh well, it should be good training to improve my alertness against any foreign chakra entering my body.'

Fujin created a shadow clone and continued his training. In three days, he mastered the Genjutsu and integrated it with the remaining technique. His clone kept casting the Genjutsu on him until he had 100% accuracy. Of course, this was when Fujin didn't try to disrupt his chakra.

A smile appeared on Fujin's face as he muttered, "Another deadly technique down. This combined with Vacuum Bullets or my sword is a deadly combination. Apart from Jinchurikis and Dojutsu users, very few might be able to withstand this combination.

And it still has some scope for improvement. For instance, Susumu only used it to stop opponents from using jutsu. But, I should improve it to stop opponents from even moving. I will just have to induce a Genjutsu that would make my opponent think that he has moved when he hasn't.

But, though this jutsu is strong, its effectiveness would depend on whether my opponent knows that I can do this or not. If they do, then they will be on alert. And I don't expect that an alert rank S ninja will fall to this. They might even be able to use jutsus by frequently disrupting their chakra.'

Fujin thought for a bit about how to use this jutsu effectively against rank S ninjas, but he couldn't come up with an idea. He shook his head and thought, 'Leave it. I have just learnt this technique. I'll get ideas to improve as I use it in real combat.'

Regardless, this jutsu gave me a few good ideas. Until now, the Wind jutsus I use take effect instantaneously. Apart from Wind Clone, Wind Dragon and Wind Gale Wolf jutsus, which can last for a longer time and are more versatile. But this technique has got me thinking...'

Fujin focused his chakra once again. A blue aura appeared around him and a vast amount of chakra was emitted into the air, transforming into winds.

Fujin raised his hand and pointed his palm at the wind. He exerted control over the wind. However, he couldn't exert much control over them. A frown appeared on his face as he exerted more chakra. Soon, he diverted the winds towards a nearby tree.

The winds passed the tree like a gentle breeze. Fujin sighed and muttered, "This is difficult."

He thought, 'Using the same concept, I want to emit my chakra into the air, transform it into the wind and then use that to attack my enemies. But to do that, I'll need two... no three things.'

The first is that I need to have the ability to make these winds sharp. Otherwise, it's completely useless. Next, I need to be able to control the direction of the winds so that I can accurately hit my target. And thirdly, I need the ability to speed up the sharp winds at will.

But, I am not able to do the first at all. And the other two are at a very low level.'

Fujin analyzed his situation. After all, he knew a lot of Wind jutsus. The things they could do were several times more complicated and devastating. So he didn't understand why he couldn't create what he envisioned. But soon, it clicked. He realized, 'I see. It's because my jutsu doesn't have any hand seals!'

For a jutsu to be effective, chakra had to be manipulated in a very precise method. Hand seals were the guide to aid in that process. But Fujin's idea was all over the place. Creating hand seals for it would be a very difficult and time-consuming process.

He shook his head and thought, 'I can't take the traditional route. It will need years to figure out the correct hand seals and their order. And the number of hand seals will be ridiculously high due to how complex the jutsu is.'

And for the jutsu to be effective, stealth is essential. So I will have to reduce the hand seals to zero after creating the jutsu. That alone will need several months. The time I don't have and can't afford to spend on just one jutsu with limited uses.

More than the jutsu, what excites me is its potential. As my chakra grows and my control over the wind improves, this method could become my main method of fighting. In the future, this style of combat might be what I am identified with. But that won't happen if it is limited to a single jutsu.

I will have to come up with an unconventional way to train this jutsu. Kinda like the 3 steps needed to learn the Rasengan. Rasengan after learning to just pop the balloon is very weak. After popping the rubber ball, it becomes more potent but has limited usability. And at stage 3, it is a rank A jutsu which can be a signature jutsu for rank S ninjas! My jutsu will have to go through some similar stages.'

Fujin made up his mind. However, he soon fell into another dilemma. He muttered, "I can't work on this jutsu and learn Fuinjutsu at the same time."

Fujin had to choose between the two. After a long struggle, Fujin let out a sigh and decided, 'I'll stick to Fuinjutsu for now. Though this idea is cool, I can still make do with Infinite Breakthrough and Vacuum attacks. But Fuinjutsu is my hope to stand out even among the S ranks. Besides, I doubt Flying Thunder God can be learnt quickly. I can train for this jutsu when I reach a roadblock on Flying Thunder God training.'

He decided to go out for dinner. En route, he couldn't help but think, 'It sucks that I don't have as much chakra as Naruto. I could have achieved so much with that amount of chakra and recovery speed.'

Though his chakra reserves were exceptional, they weren't even comparable to the weakest Jinchuriki. Unfortunately, there was nothing Fujin could do regarding it. It wasn't as if Tailed Beast would fall from the sky, let itself be sealed in him and obediently provide him chakra.

Fujin rested for the day and began focusing on Fuinjutsu the day after.

On the appointed day, Fujin arrived at Hiruzen's office. After interacting with him for a bit, Fujin sat quietly as he observed how Hiruzen interacted with the diplomats and a few clan leaders on what should be negotiated with the Land of River and the Land of Grass. After a few hours of discussion, Hiruzen, his Anbu Guards, Fujin, Aburame Shibi and Kurama Illumi left the village on the negotiating mission.

The negotiations with the two countries went very similar to the negotiations Fujin had seen earlier. Just the resources traded were changed. Of course, Hiruzen did ask for Elemental crystals. To Fujin's surprise, despite Konoha's relationship with them not being as good as with the Land of Tea or Noodles, they provided Hiruzen with more crystals than those countries.

However, after thinking for a bit, the reason was obvious. Fujin realized, 'Ever since my promotion mission, Suna ninjas must be moving around erratically. They even dared to create a base in the Land of Fire. The Land of River should be nervous about these movements.

As for the Land of Grass, that's even more obvious. Iwa's Jinchuriki entered the country and used a Tailed Beast Bomb very close to a town. This old fox is very good at extracting benefits. He waited until the right moment to visit these two countries and extracted the maximum benefit from them!'

Unlike the time before, they didn't encounter any attacks and returned back to the village after a 3-day long trip. Following the trip, Fujin got busy with his Anbu duties. Eagle assigned his team missions at regular intervals. Fortunately, none of their missions went awry.

Three months passed by in this manner. Though the villages were tense, no major issues flared up until one fateful day...

The Land of Water :

Renjiro stood while looking in a direction with a solemn face. He sighed softly, "I bit off more than I could chew."

A wave of Lava was heading straight at his team!

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Chapter 324: Breaking through a Siege!

A few minutes ago :

On one of the numerous small islands in the Land of Water, an inconspicuous house stood. In the house were 11 children and 3 adults. Suddenly, a person began knocking on the door impatiently.

A man got up and opened the door. The person quickly entered the house. Panic and fear could be seen on his face. He said, "Renjiro-san, I sensed multiple ninjas heading towards this island. I think the rebel faction is heading towards this island."

A frown formed on Renjiro's face. He asked, "How many did you sense, Makoto?"

Yamanaka Makoto shook his head and said, "I saw 4 ships heading towards this island from the West. And I felt multiple chakra fluctuations from each ship. I didn't dare to sense them or stare for too long."

Renjiro nodded, "Good work. They might be just passing by here. Change your transformation jutsu to another appearance and keep the kids quiet. It's best to not attract any attention."

Makato nodded. He dispelled his transformation jutsu and then transformed into a young lady and went into the room where the kids were and put them to sleep. The other two Konoha ninjas got serious as well. All four suppressed their chakra to civilian levels and waited.

In the sea, on one of the ships, a lady was standing on the bow while looking towards the island. She had long, ankle-length, auburn hair. She asked with a serious face, "Is your information accurate, Ao?"

Ao nodded and replied, "Yes. I have received information that a group of people are kidnapping young children. Though I am not sure if they have evil intentions as all the children whose information I received were orphans and in a very bad state.

But, there were many other similar orphans. Since only these kids were kidnapped, I'm afraid that it is one of the major villages trying to rescue and recruit young talent and probably kids with bloodlines."

Mei nodded. She agreed with Ao's speculation. After all, over the last decade, her family had done the same in the Land of Water. The kids she rescued were completely loyal to her and had a reason to get stronger.

Ao added, "But if it is one of the four major villages, we need to proceed with caution. Though I doubt anyone would want to enter into our mess, if they do and decide to support the Mizukage faction, we will be in deep trouble."

Mei nodded and said, "Let's decide after seeing who it is. If we can kill them all, then we will do so and dispose of their bodies. The news can be blocked as well. For now, create a perimeter and send 20 ninjas to attack them."

Ao nodded and flickered onto other ships to pass the instructions. Soon, all 4 ships reached and docked on the island. The Konoha ninjas were alarmed. But Renjiro said, "They might be here to restock supplies. Stay calm and don't leak any chakra. But be prepared to run. If any issues occur, then we may have to fight or even kill our way out."

Renjiro's teammates had solemn faces. They were aware that the number of Kiri ninjas would be at least ten times their number. However, all of them were Jounins. And everyone had Water affinity and could travel rapidly in the sea. They believed in their abilities to escape from an enemy that would be composed of a mix of Genins, Chunins and Jounins.

Akimichi Itaru asked, "But what about the kids?"

Renjiro replied, "We will leave them here. The rebels are known to take young kids and provide them with proper care and training. So they won't suffer."

Renjiro's teammates nodded.

After landing, Ao activated his Byakugan. He immediately noticed the 11 children in the house where the Konoha ninjas were. He whispered commands to the Jounin leaders. Half the Kiri ninjas moved normally towards the market on the island while the other half stayed near the ship. Ao and Mei waited on the coast.

All of a sudden, 20 ninjas got in action and surrounded the house. 40 more ninjas moved and established a perimeter to prevent their targets from running away.

Inside the house, a ninja sighed. Nara Kazuki said, "They are onto us."

Renjiro nodded. And said, "Break out towards the East. Avoid killing to leave some room for negotiations later. Also, don't use your secret techniques unless there is no choice."

Outside the house, one ninja said loudly, "We know that you have kidnapped young children and are hiding inside the house. Surrender yourself and give the children to us if you want to live!"

He waited to hear any responses. But he received none. His expression became serious as he thought, 'I can't blow up the house. It might harm the children. But if we attack, then there might be some traps.'

Without any other option, he commanded half of his ninjas to attack the house and while the other half prepared themselves to provide backup. Meanwhile, Mei and Ao kept an eye from a distance.

As the 10 ninjas reached the house and were about to break in, the walls suddenly broke apart on their own! And hundreds of small spherical stones were launched on the ninjas. The sudden attack caught them off guard. They were hit by the pebbles and immediately retreated back. The ninjas at the back immediately weaved hand signs.

'Water Release: Water Wall jutsu'

A water wall appeared on all four sides of the house. The Kiri ninjas retreated through the water wall while the pebbles were stopped. However, instead of trapping the Konoha ninjas, they received an

opportunity! They immediately broke out of the house and through the water wall on their East, that is, in the opposite direction of the ships.

The Kiri ninjas were taken by surprise. Renjiro and Akimichi punched their opponents in the stomach, knocking them out. Nara Kazuki analyzed, 'Good, they are just Chunin levels.'

They immediately broke through and began running. Renjiro observed the situation, '5 ninjas in front of us, 2 Jounins and 3 Chunins. 3 coming in from both directions. They will reach us. As for the rest, they are behind us.'

He instructed, "Itaru, stop any attacks coming from the rear. Kazuki, Makoto, slow down the ones on our flanks."

He immediately sped up towards the ninjas in front of him.

Itaru weaved hand signs and slammed his hands on the ground. A gigantic wall appeared behind them. A bunch of water jutsus crashed into the wall and were halted.

At the same time, multiple kunais with explosive tags appeared in the hands of Kazuki and Makoto. Both threw them at the ninjas running towards them from the sides forcing them to dodge and slow down.

Meanwhile, the 5 ninjas saw Renjiro rushing towards them. A few of them threw Shurikens while others weaved hand seals.

Renjiro used the snake hand sign.

'Earth Release: Iron Skin jutsu'

His skin turned into black and at the same time chakra appeared on his body. The shurikens hit his body and harmlessly bounced off. The two Jounins finally completed their hand signs.

'Water Release: Great Waterfall jutsu'

'Lightning Release: False Darkness jutsu'

The two jutsu merged together and rushed like a broken dam towards Konoha ninjas. Chakra appeared on Renjiro's palms as he slammed his hands on the ground. The ground in front of him rose diagonally. The electrified water hit it and was diverted harmlessly away from the Konoha ninjas. Instead, it moved towards the ninjas chasing them from the rear.

A frown formed on Mei's face as she watched the clash. She muttered, "They are strong."

Ao nodded in agreement.

The 2 Jounins frowned. The one who used the Lightning jutsu began weaving hand signs again. He wanted to destroy the ground that Renjiro had raised.

However, before he could complete his hand seals, he and the remaining Kiri ninjas jumped and retreated. The ground under their feet transformed and spikes were launched at them. Each of the 3 Chunins had 4-6 spikes pierced into their body while the Jounin who was weaving hand signs took a couple of hits. However, none of the injuries were mortal.

But, before they could regroup, Renjiro flicked behind one of the Chunins. With a strike to the back of his neck, he was knocked out cold. In the next couple of seconds, the other two Chunins suffered the same fate.

He flickered and appeared in front of the two Jounins. They grabbed their kunai and attacked Renjiro from both sides. Renjiro's body was already covered with the Iron skin jutsu. He punched at one Jounin and kicked at the other, forcing them to block.

Using the opening, Kazuki and Makoto appeared next to Renjiro and attacked the two Kiri ninjas, forcing them to retreat. Renjiro quickly flickered behind Kazuki's opponent and kicked his back. The chakra enhanced kick cracked numerous bones in his back and sent him flying! Being outnumbered by these times and seeing how easily his fellow ninjas were overwhelmed, the last Jounin immediately retreated.

The Konoha ninjas ignored him and began running away while defending themselves from the attacks coming from their rear. To their relief, they reached the other end of the island. Renjiro instructed, "Dive into the water and create 3 shadow clones. We will travel underwater in 4 directions."

Everyone nodded. Unfortunately, before they could reach the shore, they noticed a silhouette standing on the water. She weaved her hand signs.

'Lava Release: Melting Apparition jutsu'

She spat out a massive amount of Lava that headed towards the Konoha ninjas like a flood! It cut off their escape route and forced them to stop while the ninjas behind them closed the distance rapidly!

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Chapter 325: Threatening each other

Makoto looked at the incoming Lava wave and gulped. He muttered, "The rebel forces have someone who can do this?"

Renjiro became serious as well. He thought, 'Terumi Mei... It looks like the old man's information was accurate. Still, this isn't enough to stop me. Unfortunately, I can't ensure the safety of these three.'

Renjiro fell into a dilemma. He was confident in running away by himself. But his teammates didn't share his skill or stamina in the body flicker jutsu.

After thinking for a bit, he let out a sigh and made up his mind. He weaved a hand sign and said, "Don't fight. I will negotiate. They shouldn't dare to kill us."

Nara Kazuki sighed in relief. He thought, 'Good. I was afraid that he would try to leave. Renjiro might have managed to escape, but we wouldn't have managed to do the same.'

He looked at the lava wave and realized, 'We made an error. We should have escaped when Makoto returned.'

Renjiro slammed his hands on the ground. A deep, circular trench, with him as the center, appeared around the Konoha ninjas. A large, inclined wall raised up from the ground along the inside part of the trench. The Lava wave hit the wall and fell into the trench. Once again, another large-scale attack was directed away successfully by Renjiro.

Mei was surprised. She wondered, 'So strong? His wall successfully blocked my attack and even diverted it. Who is this guy?'

Before she could think further, her eyes widened. Thousands of spikes appeared on the surface of the inclined wall. Due to her lava, the spikes looked red and extremely hot. Her expression became grim as she shouted, "Take cover!"

The other Kiri ninjas didn't need to be told twice. They could see the spikes as well. Immediately numerous water and earth walls were raised! However, no spike was fired. Instead, a voice was heard, "Terumi Mei, we aren't here to create trouble for you."

Mei asked, "So, why are you here? And who are you?"

Ao appeared next to Mei as a part of the inclined wall crumbled, showing the 4 Konoha ninjas who had stopped using Transformation jutsu. Ao became serious as he said, "Senju Renjiro. The commander of Konoha's forces that faced us in the last war!"

Renjiro became serious as well. He analyzed, 'Two Elite Jounins, one with a stolen Byakugan and another speculated to have two Kekkei Genkai. I could take on any of them in a one-on-one fight. But I can't win against both of them in a head-on fight. Especially in water where I won't be able to use my Earth jutsus effectively.'

Though Renjiro was an expert at Water jutsus as well, so were most of the Kiri ninjas. Without Earth jutsus, he would get overwhelmed.

Since the spikes weren't fired, but still in position, Mei asked her remaining forces to stop attacking and asked, "What is an Elite Jounin from Konoha doing so deep into my country?"

Renjiro replied, "Lord Hokage was concerned over the state of affairs in this country. He was worried for the children and sent me here to ensure their safety."

Mei instantly knew that he was bullshitting her. She chuckled and asked, "To ensure their safety? Or to bring talented kids to Konoha?"

Renjiro ignored her chuckle and replied, "The kids I rescued are at the house I was staying in. Lord Hokage's orders were to wait here until the civil war ended and to hand over the kids to the winners if I think that they would be well cared for. If the Civil War continued for a long time or if there was a danger, then I would have no choice but to take them to Konoha with me for their safety."

Renjiro's words were loud. All the Kiri ninjas were circling the wall he had raised. Hearing his words made them reluctant to attack him. After all, they had seen what atrocities common people had to go through due to Mizukage's actions. Some of them had suffered in a similar situation until they were rescued by the rebels.

Of course, Mei and Ao didn't believe him. Mei said, "I don't believe you."

She let out a chuckle and said, "Give me one good reason why I shouldn't kill all of you right here!"

Renjiro let out a chuckle as well and asked, "Do you want the Konoha armies to enter the Land of Water and support the Mizukage?"

Mei squinted her eyes. She riled her chakra up and asked, "How would they even know who killed you?"

Renjiro maintained his smirk and riled his own chakra up. The chakra he displayed was equivalent to Mei's chakra, shocking the Kiri ninjas who hadn't been a part of the Third Great Ninja War. He said, "You won't be able to keep me here. Unfortunately, I can't say the same about my teammates. So why don't we come up with a result which is acceptable to both of us?"

Mei looked at Ao, who nodded in response. She looked back at Renjiro and said, "Alright. But I will have to ask you to stay as my guest. And I will be taking the kids that you have 'rescued'. In addition, Lord Hokage will have to send me a formal letter explaining your presence in the country and compensation for the same."

Renjiro nodded and replied, "Alright. We will be staying in the same house. But I will need a messenger bird to contact Lord Hokage. As for the kids, as long as you promise to take good care of them and ensure their safety, you can have them."

Mei nodded. The Konoha ninjas were secretly relieved. But no one showed it on their face. Mei and Ao followed Renjiro to the house while the other Kiri ninjas began taking care of the injured. To their surprise, no one was dead and only one had major injuries. Mei and Ao knew it and hence had agreed to a truce.

After the fighting stopped, the people on the island were relieved. They were afraid that they would be impacted by the fight. Fortunately, the fighting happened far away from civilian areas. Konoha ninjas were afraid that some Kiri ninjas might be hidden there for an ambush while the Kiri ninjas didn't want any harm to befall them. So both stayed clear of them.

After entering the house, Makoto woke up the kids while using a transformation jutsu and handed them over to Mei after consoling them a bit. At the same time, Renjiro and Mei negotiated an amount for compensation.

Ao took the kids and analyzed, '11 kids... I had received information for just 5 missing kids. But I calculated that at least over 30 would be missing.'

After sending the kids away, he asked, "Renjiro, I have received information about 18 missing kids. Where did you keep the rest?"

A frown appeared on Renjiro's face. He said, "These are all we rescued. Feel free to search the house or anywhere else on this island."

Ao asked, "If they aren't with you, who took them?"

Renjiro shrugged and replied, "We are the only ones from Konoha here. If not us, then there might be someone else who is rescuing or abducting the kids. I'd recommend that you look elsewhere for them just like you found me."

Ao looked at Renjiro but couldn't find anything on his face. He thought, 'Looks like there are other forces active here as well. I guess Kumo also sent someone. The fourth Raikage is always looking to kidnap kids with Kekkei Genkai! That said, he is most likely lying.'

While Renjiro thought, 'I have already sent 35 promising kids to Konoha. Even if he suspects me, there isn't a thing he can do about it. Besides, I'm sure Kumo and perhaps even Iwa are doing similar operations here. So if they look in deeply, they will find and suspect them.'

After completing the negotiations, Mei said, "I will ask the four of you to stay inside this house. If you need food or water, I can arrange them."

Renjiro replied, "Alright. As for food and water, we have it."

For obvious reasons, Renjiro wouldn't consume any food or water they provided. In fact, he was worried about them releasing poisons or chemicals into the air.

Mei realized his concerns. She nodded and left. She arranged for 16 Jounins and 12 Chunins to keep an eye on the Konoha ninjas all the time.

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Chapter 326: Hiruzen's Response

After leaving the house, Ao said, "Lady Mei, I am afraid that he has abducted more kids."

Mei nodded and said, "Yeah. But seeing his confidence, they shouldn't be here. He must have already sent them to Konoha. Unfortunately, there isn't much we can do. If we ask, they will deny it. Until the civil war ends, such cases will keep happening. What we need to do is end this war as soon as we can."

Ao looked at Mei. He could see the seriousness on her face. However, he knew that Mei couldn't end the war. He thought, 'Unfortunately, that isn't possible. The Terumi clan leader is too old, while the Sakai clan leader got injured in the 3rd Great Ninja War. The other clan leaders can't take on rank S ninjas. So we don't have anyone who can take on the Fourth Mizukage. At least until Mei becomes a rank S ninja!'

Renjiro wrote a letter and sent it to Hiruzen. His teammates approached him. Itaru said, "Sorry, Renjiro-san. Because of us, you got captured as well."

Renjiro replied, "I can't just leave my teammates behind to die. Besides, we will be fine. Don't worry."

His teammates nodded. Despite his statement, they knew that they were under a lot of risk. Kazuki thought, 'If another Elite Jounin from the Rebel faction arrives, then even Renjiro would have difficulty escaping.'

Renjiro was aware of the risks as well. He didn't want his teammates to let down their guard and warned them, "Though I am sure that they won't try anything funny, be on your guard. Mei's mother was from the Sakai clan. And there are rumors that she can use the Vapor release."

His words surprised his teammates. Kazuki asked, "She can use 2 Kekkei Genkai?"

Renjiro nodded and replied, "Most likely. Vapor release jutsus can harm us while we are inside the house, while Lava jutsus can submerge the entire house in an instant. Luckily, we can avoid both by entering the ground. So stay on guard."

His teammates nodded. They consumed soldier pills to stay awake.

Around 16 hours later, a messenger bird reached Konoha. As soon as the message was received, the ninja immediately rushed to Hiruzen and handed him the scroll. As soon as Hiruzen opened it, his eyes widened. He looked at the ninja and said, "Call Shikaku here immediately."

The ninja nodded and left while Hiruzen continued reading the scroll. In a few minutes, Shikaku appeared in the room. Hiruzen tossed him the scroll. Shikaku's expression became serious as he started reading. After he read the entire scroll, he sighed in relief and said, "Renjiro did well."

Hiruzen nodded. Shikaku added, "Still, what bad luck to have. They didn't encounter any Kiri ninja for months and then directly attracted one of their strongest units. But for Kiri to extort so much money from us..."

Hiruzen said, "40 million Ryo for the life of 3 Jounins and the safety of 1 Elite Jounin is fine. Even though Renjiro could have escaped, it's difficult to say whether he would have managed to do that without any injury. Besides, we do have a lot of funds lying around."

Shikaku nodded. Their excess money is why Hiruzen had sent Renjiro to pick up promising kids in the first place. He realized that Hiruzen had disregarded the costs the rebel faction would have had to pay to achieve that. But knowing Hiruzen, he didn't bother mentioning it.

Hiruzen said, "If everything went as in the scroll, then it won't be an issue. But what are the chances of the rebel faction attacking Renjiro and his team and setting up an ambush for the squad we send?"

Hiruzen's words made Shikaku fall into thought. For a few minutes, he properly analyzed all the information. Finally, he shook his head and said, "That is very unlikely. Doing that would force us to support the Mizukage faction. Even though we can't send many ninjas, we can provide them with substantial financial aid.

Considering that they have requested our aid several times in the past, they won't do something so reckless."

Hiruzen nodded. He had reached the same conclusion but wanted Shikaku to analyze it too. Shikaku added, "The only question is, who do we send?"

The first names they thought of were Kakashi, Eagle and the other two Elite Jounins from the Senju clan. But after some discussion, Shikaku said, "The Senju clan was very active on the Kiri front in the last war. If there is still some hate against them, the rebels might try to kill all of them. So sending them is risky.

As for Kakashi and Guy, the mission is too risky. They already have someone who has stolen a Byakugan. They might get greedy for Kakashi's Sharingan to gain both of Konoha's Dojutsu. As for Guy, they should still remember the humiliation his father inflicted on them. Not to mention, the way Kakashi and Guy are growing, both will reach rank S in the future. Risking them on the same mission isn't wise.

As for Eagle, he knows too many of our secrets to send him on a mission where things can go very badly. After all, even though chances of them making a move are minuscule, if they do, then they can easily assemble more than 500 ninjas there."

Hiruzen agreed with his analysis. Due to the history of each village, it was easy to set off a conflict between their ninjas. He said, "Then Fujin? He is Renjiro's student after all. And he has no history with Kiri."

Shikaku analyzed for a bit and nodded. He said, "He would work. He was able to escape from Roshi despite Roshi being able to use the Tailed Beast Bomb. So he shouldn't have an issue in escaping if things go wrong. Though his team might face their demise.

But he can't go as Fujin and instead should go as the Spectral Swordsman. Unlike Kakashi, the Spectral Swordsman is still covered in mystery, be it his identity or strength. The mystery can be a good deterrent, especially when combined with his high chakra reserves. And he did kill numerous Kiri ninjas from the Mizukage faction who pretended to be bounty hunters.

In addition to the money, we can also give them the information we gained from Higashi Renzo. The information will make them think twice before getting any funny ideas. And will make them indebted to us at the same time."

Hiruzen nodded and said, "Alright. I'll dispatch his Anbu squad there."

Shikaku nodded and left while Hiruzen called for Fujin. Fujin's team had just returned from a mission and were about to leave for their home when they were summoned. All immediately left towards the Hokage's office.

Hiruzen looked at them and said, "A squad led by Senju Renjiro was active in the Land of Water on a humanitarian mission when they were intercepted and captured by Rebels."

Fujin's eyes widened. Hiruzen noticed it and said, "Don't worry, they are safe. Renjiro could have escaped but stayed behind as his team couldn't. They have reached a deal with one of the rebel leaders. Your mission is to complete the deal and bring them back to Konoha safely."

He gave Fujin the scroll that Renjiro sent and said, "This scroll has the information regarding the deal. See and memorize it."

He handed Yugao and Fumito a scroll each and said, "These scrolls have information on Mei and Ao, the two strongest Kiri ninjas there. Memorize their abilities."

Everyone began reading. Fujin let out a sigh and thought, 'Looks like he will be fine.'

He handed the scroll back to Hiruzen and read up the information on Mei and Ao. It was quite similar to what he recalled in addition to some more information that wasn't very important.

After everyone was done, Hiruzen handed Fujin a couple of scrolls and said, "This scroll contains 40 million Ryo. Keep it properly. And the other scroll contains information we gained from the fake Bounty Hunter who targeted you. Read up. Provide this scroll to Terumi Mei. You can use this information to get an advantage over her or a favor from her."

Fujin nodded. Hiruzen's expression became serious. He said, "Though I believe there wouldn't be any conflict, there is a chance it might be a trap. If it is, then focus on surviving. Disperse in different directions and make your way back here somehow. I will have ninjas deployed along our coast with Kiri."

Fujin and his team nodded with solemn expressions behind their masks. They understood how bad the odds were if a conflict were to break out.

Meanwhile, Hiruzen thought, 'If Renjiro ends up falling because of being held back by his teammates, then it will be sad. If his student were to fall due to the same reason, then it would be a tragedy. Only by dispersing can they guarantee Fujin's safety.'

He said, "Fujin, you will inspect Renjiro properly. If he is placed under Genjutsu or some other means of mind control or if they are tortured, then I will give you the full autonomy to decide on how to proceed."

Fujin nodded though he hoped that situation didn't reach that stage. For one, he didn't want anything bad to happen to Renjiro. And secondly, he had no confidence in defeating Mei.

After explaining all the details, Hiruzen said, "Fujin, use your Hawk mask for this mission."

Fujin realized what Hiruzen's plan was. He nodded and asked, "Does Kiri have anyone who can fly?"

Hiruzen shook his head and said, "Not that I know. But their Mizukage is a perfect Jinchuriki. Flying against him won't be much help."

Fujin nodded. His team left immediately.

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Chapter 327: High Speed Travel

As they travelled, Fujin thought, 'Facing a rank S... Sigh... I hope that no combat happens. But if it does and they kill or mutilate Renjiro before I reach, what should I do?'

Noticing Fujin being lost in thoughts and recalling his reaction earlier, Bunjiro asked, "Captain, who is Senju Renjiro?"

Fujin answered, "He was my Jounin Sensei after I graduated."

Yugao already knew it, while Fumito and Bunjiro were surprised. Bunjiro said, "Don't worry, Captain, he should be alright. Lord Hokage said that the chances of it being a trap are very low."

Fujin nodded and replied, "Don't worry, I am fine. It's best if the situation is peaceful. But if something goes wrong, prepare to run away. I might not be able to help you guys much considering their numbers. But I'll slow them down enough to give you an opportunity. Don't miss it."

Yugao immediately said, "You can't risk your life for us, Captain. Your speed with the Body Flicker jutsu is very high. We don't want to slow you down."

Bunjiro nodded. However, Fujin said, "You don't need to worry about me. They won't be able to hurt or capture me. Just focus on escaping."

The determination in his voice made his team unable to respond. They just nodded and travelled without speaking more.

Despite speaking with determination, Fujin wasn't very confident. After all, Mei was a rank S ninja. Someone who'd become a Kage not long after. And unlike Gaara, who was still a kid, she was in her mid-20s.

Fujin thought, 'I knew that Mieko would eventually die. As for Hoka, his life and death are controlled by the main family of the Hyuga clan. Which is why I tried to keep a sufficient distance from them. Only Renjiro was someone who I knew wouldn't die for sure... But this world is too dangerous. One wrong mission or bad choice is all that is needed to be at risk of losing your life!'

Fujin was very close with Renjiro. Of all the people he had spent time with in this world, he had spent the highest with Renjiro. Though he wouldn't give up his life for Renjiro, he didn't want to see Renjiro die. Fujin sighed secretly and thought, 'Let's put my emotions away. They won't help me. If conflict breaks out, can I take on Mei?'

He recalled her performance from the Fourth Great Ninja War and thought, 'If I were to rank the five Kages in that war from strongest to weakest, Mei would probably be the weakest. Though having two Kekkei Genkai is cool and sounds strong, her jutsus aren't very effective on an open battlefield.

Her lava jutsus are too slow and I can easily dodge them. Same for the Vapor jutsus. They are only effective in a closed space. As long as I don't get trapped inside a formation, I should be fine. But there are still some issues.

For one, it's the 70 other ninjas with her. I can't take on them while fighting with her. Any distraction could be deadly. Secondly, if her speed is as fast as Hiruzen, then I will be in trouble. And thirdly, the sea... I have no expertise in water jutsus. I can barely perform a few rank E and D jutsus. But they should all be able to manipulate water and make the fight ridiculously difficult for me.

In addition, even though I am confident in dodging her attacks and making them harmless, it doesn't mean that I can harm her. To dodge her two Kekkei Genkai jutsus will force me to maintain distance, which would give her enough time to dodge my Vacuum jutsus. So the best result I can hope for is a stalemate, which won't be of any help to me in this particular situation. Fortunately, I have two means of dealing with the situation.

The first is obviously running away. But... I don't want to do it. I couldn't do anything during Mieko's death. After all, Itachi and Obito were just too damn strong. And I had no confidence in facing Danzo's and Hiruzen's schemes or Mieko's threat if she became unstable.

But now, even though I'm not strong enough to face stronger rank S ninjas like Hiruzen, Ay or Onoki, facing someone like Mei and making her regret should be possible. I'll just summon Kurogan and make them experience hell! After all, how will they fight me when I'm so high in the air?'

Having thought about all possibilities, Fujin made his decision. If a conflict breaks out, he would engage them in aerial guerilla warfare.

Land of Water :

Not everything was merry in Mei's camp. Though Renjiro's words had gained the support of a good number of her ninjas, a few were still skeptical. There were many whose family was harmed by Renjiro or his subordinates in the previous war. Many ninjas still hated Konoha.

A few banded together and approached Mei. Since they were her subordinates, Mei couldn't dismiss them casually. She sighed and said, "I understand your emotions but keep the bigger picture in mind. Right now, we are in a stalemate against the Mizukage faction.

If we push Konoha towards them, we will be at a bigger disadvantage. If the sensors from Konoha were to join them, then our allies, who are hiding and building their strength, will be affected."

Her words made them quiet down. They wanted revenge but understood what terrible cost it would have. One girl among them sighed and said in a sad tone, "Aunt Chou had entered the Land of Fire a few years ago while she was being chased by a squad from the Mizukage faction.

But both the squads completely disappeared after that. They should have encountered Konoha ninjas. I just hoped that we could ask Konoha what exactly happened to her and to return her body."

Hearing her request, Mei replied, "It's been 3 years since then, Yumi. But alright, I will ask Konoha to send any information they have regarding her. Though I don't expect them to say much. Does anyone else have such requests?"

No one else said anything. After all, their family members were mostly killed in the Third Great Ninja War. It had been a long time. And after Sakai Chou went missing in the Land of Fire, the rebel faction

avoided entering the country and instead preferred the weaker countries around it. So no similar issues occurred.

Land of Fire :

After Fujin gathered his thoughts and made a decision, he thought, 'Travelling there even if we go at full speed will need around 2 and a half to 3 days. But going at full speed will exhaust us. It'll be stupid to do so when the enemy is fully rested.

But if we take a ship, then it might take over a week to reach. And the longer it takes, the more the chances of something going wrong. Oh well, no other choice.'

Fujin suddenly stopped. His teammates stopped as well. All three activated their chakra fields but didn't sense anything and were confused. Yugao asked, "What's the matter, Captain?"

Fujin answered, "Nothing. Not many people know about this. So keep quiet."

A small blade of wind cut his thumb as he began weaving signs and slammed his hand on the ground.

'Summoning jutsu'

A majestic 9-meter-tall Sabertooth appeared in front of them, shocking Fujin's teammates. Due to having their chakra fields activated, they could sense the vast amount of chakra in him. He turned his eyes to the strangers, who immediately stepped back.

Fujin chuckled and said, "He is my summon. You can call him Kaito."

He looked at Kaito and said, "Kaito, we need a lift to the Land of Water."

Kaito grumbled, "I don't mind flying you, but don't treat me like a free transport service."

Fujin jumped on his back and chuckled, "Sorry buddy. It's an emergency this time. I might even need some aerial support from you later. Though I hope the situation doesn't deteriorate to that state."

Though Fujin chuckled, Kaito could hear the seriousness in his voice. He asked, "Is it that serious?"

Fujin nodded and replied, "I might have to summon Kurogane."

Kaito replied, "Ah, big brother has been itching for a fight for a long time. I'm sure he'll be delighted. But don't count much on me though. Fighting isn't my forte."

Fujin nodded. Though Kaito said that he wasn't strong, Fujin knew that he was numerous times stronger than Goro. He looked at his teammates and said, "Hop on."

Seeing that he was friendly, they jumped on his back. Bunjiro asked, "Is Kaito gonna run all the way to the shore? It would help us save a lot of stamina."

Fujin didn't reply. In the next moment, Kaito spread his wings. Bunjiro, Fumito and Yugao were surprised. With one flap of his wings, he took off the ground and broke through the clouds.

Bunjiro was stunned by that sight. So were the other two. Despite being a ninja for over a decade, neither of them had seen such a sight.

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Chapter 328: Hand me the Money!

Bunjiro said, "Summons are cool! I want one as well!"

Fujin replied, "Good luck. You can find the summoning seals in the library. But be careful. It's very dangerous. I almost died. Preferably discuss with your sensei or the Anbu Commander. They might help you reduce the risk."

Bunjiro nodded. Fujin said, "Kaito will carry us close to the target. Use this time to rest. Eat a soldier pill. Your chakra and readiness need to be at the highest levels."

Everyone nodded. Kaito flew straight towards the target for eight hours straight. They finally reached close to the island. The island was surrounded by water for tens of kilometers. Fujin asked Kaito to stop around 7 kilometers away from the island so that they would be out of reach of all sensors.

The group landed on the water. Fujin said, "Be on your guard. We will be heading straight to the island. Kaito, hide above the clouds. If a conflict happens, then sneak attack their strongest fighters from above with your Wind Breath. If that fails, clear out their weaker ninjas.

Also, one of them can spit lava and blow extremely hot steam. Both will be very harmful to you if they hit. So stay on guard against them and sudden changes in the temperature.

Kaito replied, "Alright. Good luck to you."

He took off and disappeared above the clouds. The Konoha ninjas ran straight to the island. When they were around 2.5 kilometers from the shore, a sensor sensed them. Everyone in Fujin's squad felt it and prepared themselves. 1 Jounin and 3 Chunin from Mei's forces moved towards Fujin's squad while a ninja went to inform Mei and Ao.

The Kiri squad running towards Fujin noticed that they weren't slowing down. They were alarmed by seeing the Anbu outfits. Around 1 kilometer from the shore, the two squads met.

The Kiri Jounin weaved hand signs while shouting, "Stay where you are and state your purpose!"

'Water Release: Water Wall jutsu'

A wall of water appeared in the path of the Konoha ninjas. However, blades of wind suddenly appeared out of nowhere and hit the water wall, causing it to crumble down. The Kiri ninjas were surprised by the result. Fujin said, "I'm here to meet Terumi Mei. Lead me where she is."

The Jounin frowned and asked, "Are you from Konoha?"

Fujin nodded.

The Jounin replied, "I will have to ask you to wait here."

Fujin sneered, "Wait on the water to meet with Kiri ninjas?"

He exerted a bit of his chakra and killing intent and said, "Get out of the way. I'll wait for her on the beach."

The Jounin frowned. He understood that conflict there would result in unnecessary casualties. He thought, 'If we fight on the island, then they will be outnumbered heavily and at a greater disadvantage. The chances of escape would be zero. What a fool!'

He replied, "Alright, follow me."

They began rushing towards the island. Mei and Ao were informed about the intruders. Ao activated his Byakugan and observed, "There are four ninjas. They clashed with one of our squads, but they are much stronger."

Mei frowned. She got out of her tent and asked, "Are they in danger?"

Ao shook his head and said, "Fortunately not. They are coming to the beach."

Mei nodded and moved towards the beach. She wondered, 'Are they from Konoha? But how did they send a squad in just around a day? Did Renjiro send a message to Konoha or is he scheming against us?'

Meanwhile, Renjiro noticed, 'Hmm, Mei and Ao stopped keeping an eye on us? Did they encounter trouble?'

He looked at his teammates and said, "There seems to be an unusual movement. Sense what is happening, Makoto."

Makoto nodded and activated his chakra field. His chakra field covered the entire island and went a kilometer into the sea. He said, "I sense 4 additional chakras. Three at the Jounin level and one at the Chunin level. Most of the Kiri ninjas are reacting to them."

His words confused them. Itaru asked, "Could Lord Hokage have sent a squad to rescue us?"

Kazuki shook his head and replied, "It's just been a day since we sent a message. They can't reach so quickly. I'm afraid that it might be a squad from the Mizukage faction or someone who isn't allied with the Rebel faction as of now."

The others agreed with his analysis.

While being just a couple of hundred meters away from the sea, Fujin felt 7 sensors scanning him. He thought, 'Well since everyone is scanning so liberally...'

He activated and spread his chakra field as well. It covered the entire island! He immediately focused on three Chakra signatures. Two were rushing towards him and were clearly far stronger than the other Kiri ninjas on the island. And the last one was a familiar one.

A smile appeared on Fujin's face as he realized, 'Looks like he is safe. At least there is nothing wrong with his chakra. And the number of Kiri ninjas is the same as reported. Though a few could still be hiding.'

Inside the house, a smile appeared on Renjiro's face as well. He had felt such a chakra field scanning him several times in the past. He muttered, "Sending my student on a mission to rescue me... The old man still loves to make everyone feel embarrassed."

His voice was very low. Kazuki asked, "Did you say something, Renjiro-san?"

Renjiro stood up and said, "They are allies. Get ready. We will break out as soon as there is a clash."

Renjiro's words surprised them. But no one questioned him and prepared for a fight.

Though Mei and Ao had left, there were still 16 Jounins and 12 Chunins keeping an eye on them. Breaking through them would likely lead to a clash. Since Renjiro wasn't sure who the rest of the ninjas with Fujin were and because they were still heavily outnumbered, he decided to be patient.

On the other side of the island, Mei and Ao reached the beach and saw Fujin and his squad. Fujin observed Mei and Ao. In addition to them, there were 20 other Kiri ninjas. 7 were Jounins while the rest were Chunins.

Fujin analyzed, 'Their numbers are divided into four groups. One is keeping an eye on the ships, another is in the village, the third is keeping an eye on Renjiro and finally these guys here. The odds are a bit better than I anticipated. Though winning is still impossible.'

At the same time, Mei also took a measure of Fujin's group. She wondered, 'Who are they? And how did Konoha send a squad so quickly? And why didn't the Hokage send an Elite Jounin to ensure the safety of the captured ninjas?'

She thought a bit and concluded, 'Did Konoha send a weaker squad to reduce their losses in case this was a trap?'

Seeing that she wasn't speaking, Fujin said, "Lord Hokage received Senju Renjiro's message and asked me to take him from here."

A scroll appeared in his hand. He added, "This scroll has the negotiated 40 million Ryo. So bring the Konoha ninjas here and we will complete the deal."

Mei asked, "How did you come here so quickly?"

Fujin replied in a neutral tone, "I'm afraid that isn't your concern."

His tone surprised Mei and Ao. They thought, 'Despite being outnumbered and outmatched, he isn't afraid. Does he have something up his sleeve? Or is he not afraid of death?'

Mei said, "I am afraid it is. How do I know that you are from Konoha?"

Fujin replied, "Just release them and they will confirm."

That sentence eliminated the doubt of their identity. However, Mei didn't want to appear in a weaker position against a nobody. She asked, "How do I know that the scroll has the money? Give me the scroll first and let me check."

Fujin answered with a question, "Why would we bother travelling so far with so few people if we didn't bring the money?"

Ao and Mei's expressions became serious. Fujin's rhetorical question was both, a compromise and a threat. It implied that they couldn't win a fight but at the same time, it also threatened Mei that Konoha could crush them on a whim.

Fujin knew that they would be smart enough to understand the hidden message. The serious expression on Mei's face faded away as a seductive smile appeared. She giggled, "What an interesting young man. Unfortunately, you have no power here. Hand over the scroll or I will capture you as well!"

She suddenly riled her chakra! Massive pressure was exerted on the Konoha ninjas. A look of surprise appeared behind Fujin's mask. As for the rest, they were completely shocked. In fact, Bunjiro was terrified.

Despite having met with Hiruzen numerous times, none of them had seen him exert his chakra. So they had never sensed such a massive chakra from anyone other than Roshi. But Roshi hadn't focused on them, so they never experienced such a domineering chakra. All three of them instinctively grabbed their weapons.

Unlike his teammates, the surprise on Fujin's face was due to an entirely different reason!

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Chapter 329: Not yet S rank!

Unlike his teammates, the surprise on Fujin's face was due to an entirely different reason!

He thought, 'That's it? Her chakra is barely higher than Renjiro's! But why is it so low? I thought that it'd be higher than Hiruzen at the very least!'

Suddenly, it clicked. He realized, 'I see. She hasn't reached the S rank yet. There are still 6 years until the start of the war. She should have reached that level during this time. Now that I think about it, the scroll with her information said nothing about her being an S ranked ninja. And if she was rank S, then the rebels wouldn't be hiding so much. Maybe even the Genjutsu on the Mizukage would have been figured out by now!'

During the last 8 hours, Fujin was under a lot of stress! Taking on S ranked ninjas was not a matter he could take lightly. Even more so when they were holding hostages. But since Mei wasn't at that level, all the stress was released.

A smirk appeared on Mei's face seeing the state of Konoha's ninja. The Kiri ninjas were also smirking. They saw that the leader of Konoha ninjas was looking dumbfoundedly at Mei while his subordinates were under heavy pressure.

Unknown to them, a smile appeared behind Fujin's mask. The scroll in his hand disappeared. He said softly, "Unfortunately, you won't be able to afford the cost."

To everyone's surprise, Fujin riled his chakra as well! And to the horror of Kiri ninjas, his chakra was at the same level as Mei! In fact, it could even be said to be barely higher!

His chakra lifted the pressure from his teammates and put the Kiri ninjas under pressure. At the same time, two swords appeared on the left side of his waist. Their sheaths had intricate designs carved on them.

Ao's eyes widened as soon as they landed on the swords. He looked at Fujin again and realized, 'Hawk mask... Those two swords... And those patterns!'

He immediately whispered, "He is the Spectral Swordsman!"

Mei was already surprised to see another Konoha ninja match her chakra. However, after learning about his identity, she felt that it was normal. The name Spectral Swordsman was very well known throughout

the Land of Water. The reason for that was the insane number of rogue Kiri ninjas that fell to his blade! Over 80% of the rogue Kiri ninjas were estimated to have been killed by him.

On the other side of the island, a look of surprise appeared on Renjiro's face as he felt Fujin's chakra! He looked in the direction of Fujin and thought, 'He has already reached this level?'

Soon, the look of surprise was replaced with a prideful smile. He said, "Let's move!"

They appeared on top of their houses as Renjiro riled his chakra as well.

Both Fujin and Mei sensed his chakra. Fujin chuckled and asked, "Do you still refuse to accept my terms? If you do, I'm afraid that the losses you will experience, even in victory, will far exceed what's in the scroll."

Mei wasn't offended. She said, "I never thought that Konoha would show that the Spectral Swordsman is from your village. But, if the Hokage sent you, I doubt he'd lie about the money."

She stopped exerting her chakra and said, "Ao, bring Renjiro and his squad here."

Ao nodded and immediately flickered. Mei looked at Fujin. Though she was confident in taking him on, she knew that the circumstances weren't in her favor. A conflict would result in a large number of casualties on her side. And even if she managed to kill all Konoha ninjas, she wouldn't gain anything apart from a new and strong enemy.

Renjiro's squad was surrounded by 28 ninjas. They were extremely tense. But since no conflict had started on the opposite side of the island, they didn't start the fight either. Their actions would depend on what Mei and Fujin decided.

Soon, Ao appeared and said, "Renjiro, come with me. You guys follow too."

Renjiro and the Kiri ninjas nodded. Everyone left towards Fujin and Mei. Though no one showed it on their faces, everyone was secretly relieved. None of them wanted meaningless casualties.

Meanwhile, Mei looked at Fujin and said, "If it weren't for the circumstances, I'd have liked to fight the one who killed so many of our rogue ninjas. I wonder who you are behind the mask."

Mei thought, 'Though I have information on all the top Konoha ninjas and have a few guesses, I have a feeling that none of them are right.'

She focused on Fujin to memorize his chakra. Unfortunately, Fujin's chakra kept fluctuating the entire time. So Mei realized that Fujin could disguise his chakra. But, the frequent changes gave her more information. She analyzed, 'To be able to change his chakra fluctuations so rapidly... He should be a very good sensor.'

Fujin chuckled and replied, "Why would I bother wearing a mask if I'd be willing to reveal my identity so easily? Besides, even if I show you a face, would you trust me?"

Mei replied, "I guess not. Still, I do have a bone to pick with you. You killed too many of our rogue ninjas. I was planning to recruit them after this civil war ended to recover our strength."

Fujin replied in a deep voice, "I would suggest you focus on winning the war first."

Mei frowned. She analyzed, 'What does he mean by that? Does he know something that I don't?'

She had a bad feeling. Before she could ask, Ao and Renjiro arrived along with the rest. Fujin's eyes glowed as he observed the 4 Konoha ninjas. He and Renjiro exchanged glances. Renjiro nodded in acknowledgement to say that everything was fine.

Fujin thought, 'Good. No injuries or signs of torture. And their chakra flow is steady as well.'

He looked at Fumito, who nodded in response. Fujin said, "I'm glad you honored your part of the deal, Terumi Mei."

He tossed the scroll with 40 Million Ryo to Mei. Mei grabbed it and checked the contents inside the scroll. She nodded and said with a smirk, "It's been a pleasure doing business with you."

Fujin knew that it was a taunt. After all, Mei had received 40 million Ryo without giving anything in return. She didn't even risk the lives of her subordinates. However, the money didn't belong to Fujin. So he wasn't bothered.

He thought, 'If that was my money, I'd definitely steal it back. But, Hiruzen is too loaded. Just the trade deals he did with those 4 countries would bring over a hundred million Ryo on a monthly basis. And that is without considering the cost of Elemental Crystals. 40 million Ryo is probably just pocket money for Konoha.'

Though it might be a small sum for Konoha, for Mei, whose finances were tight, this was like a boon from the heavens.

Fujin looked at Renjiro and asked, "Ready to leave?"

Renjiro nodded. The Konoha ninjas were about to leave, when Mei said, "Wait, I have two things to clear up."

From their exchange so far, Fujin knew that she wouldn't abruptly begin attacking. He said, "Speak."

Mei said, "Around 3 years ago, one squad from my faction was chased into the Land of Fire by a squad from Mizukage's faction. However, both squads disappeared. I want to know what happened to the squad from my faction. I hope the Hokage can provide me with the truth."

Fujin thought, 'Just cause he gave you money, you expect him to speak the truth?'

He was about to agree, when Renjiro asked, "Who were in the squad? And who were the ones chasing?"

Before Mei could answer, a young girl said, "The leader of the squad was Sakai Chou. She was chased by a squad led by Karatachi Kazuki."

Fujin looked at the girl and thought, 'She looks a bit familiar...'

After a few seconds, he recognized her and thought, 'Sakai Yumi. I didn't expect to see her here. Regardless, it looks like Mei is nurturing her. Or at least has some hopes from her.'

Fujin didn't pay any more attention to her. He was stronger than her during the Chunin exams. And right now, the difference in their power was even larger.

Renjiro said, "I don't know anyone by the name of Sakai Chou, but the mission to deal with infiltrators back then was taken by me. I remember encountering a squad of 5 led by Karatachi Kazuki. Unfortunately, we didn't see anyone else.

We managed to find him because we found 2 corpses that were brutally mutilated and blown up into pieces. After defeating him and searching the forests, we found another body that was destroyed and blown into bits.

I don't remember the exact number, but the blood on their weapons was tested to be from more than 15 people. But we never managed to find any other bodies. So they might have been eaten by Wild beasts or killed before entering the Land of Fire."

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Chapter 330: A Tragedy!

Renjiro's words shocked the rebels. To be killed and then blown up to pieces was extremely cruel. However, most Kiri ninjas didn't doubt his words. They had seen the horrendous acts committed by the Mizukage faction. They had no doubts that they would do something as heinous as that.

Mei was a bit doubtful of the accuracy of Renjiro's words, but she knew that nothing good would happen by pursuing such an old matter. Even if Konoha were the one to kill her, she wouldn't be able to get justice for Chou. Instead, her followers might pressurize her to make a new enemy and reduce their chances of victory in the war. After all, it was unreasonable to expect everyone to see the bigger picture.

She let out a sigh and said, "What a tragedy."

She looked at Fujin and asked in a serious tone, "I hope you can tell me what you meant by that statement."

Her first question was just to satisfy the people who believed in and followed her. However, the answer to the second question was what she wanted to know. She had a feeling that it would have a significant impact on her campaign.

Fujin replied, "Sure."

He took out a scroll from his jacket and tossed it at Mei. Mei caught the scroll and opened it while Fujin said, "You have underestimated the Mizukage faction. Your estimates regarding their finances are way off. I'd be very careful if I were in your position."

Fujin's words confused the Kiri ninjas. Some thought, 'Why would we hide from them if we had underestimated them?'

However, they became serious as they noticed the change in Mei's expression. Her face had a very grim expression. She thought, 'I thought they were all tired of the situation in the country and went rogue. But the majority of them were rogue only in name. They did bounty hunting and sent money back to the village.'

If that is indeed the case, we have heavily underestimated their finances. And their resolve as well. We thought that if we stayed hidden, their forces would begin disbanding in large numbers and our chances of victory would increase. In fact, we even tried to recruit them... WAIT!'

Her eyes widened as she realized, 'No! We managed to recruit a few of them. But, with this information, there is a chance that they are spies that infiltrated our forces. Shit, we are in danger.'

The rebel camp was currently hiding and engaged in a guerilla campaign. But if they had spies among their ranks, then it was only a matter of time before they encountered a trap or were assaulted by a massive force!

Fujin studied her expressions. They were as per his expectations. He had already read the scroll and was waiting for an opportunity to hand it over to her.

Mei looked at him and let out a sigh. She said, "I don't know how to thank you for this information. Its value far exceeds the 40 million Ryo we agreed upon. I'd have returned the money if my finances

weren't so tight. Unfortunately, I have nothing of equivalent value that I can offer you right now. We owe you a favor."

Fujin nodded and said, "Good luck with your campaign."

Mei nodded. The Konoha ninjas finally took their leave. Fujin looked at the skies for a second before leaving. As soon as they left, Ao asked, "What information did he provide?"

Mei rolled back the scroll and said, "We might have a problem. I'll need your help later. For now, let's leave."

Mei didn't want to spread the news. It might cause unnecessary suspicions. The Kiri ninjas under her command quickly boarded the ships and left the island. While alone, Mei informed Ao of the information sent by Konoha. Ao was stunned as well. They decided to properly inspect every rogue ninja they took into their forces in the last 3 years and to limit their participation in critical activities.

Meanwhile, the Konoha ninjas ran rapidly across the seas. After creating some distance, Renjiro asked, "How did you come so quickly?"

Fujin replied, "We had some aid. I'll tell you later."

Renjiro was puzzled. But he understood that Fujin didn't want that information to spread. So he didn't push him for an answer.

As for Kaito, he had seen Fujin look up at him. After they left, he ended the summoning jutsu and returned to Mount Muteki.

Fujin asked, "Did they do anything after capturing you?"

Renjiro shook his head and said, "No. She didn't want to get into a conflict with us. Besides, she profited heavily from our encounter."

Fujin nodded. Mei received 11 talented kids, 40 million Ryo and a critical piece of information that could save the lives of hundreds of her allies. Her gains were too high. And the only cost she had to pay was the time she used. By comparison, Konoha didn't get much.

Fujin thought, 'It's rare to see Hiruzen suffer a loss in diplomacy. I guess he wants the rebels to win and used this as an opportunity to provide them some assistance. It should also create goodwill between the two villages when Mei wins in the future and could provide an opportunity to ally in the next Great War.'

Considering how brittle the ties between Konoha and Suna are, this could provide more breathing space for Konoha. After all, Konoha doesn't have the same domineering power as it did during the previous Great Wars.

Hmm, thinking about it from this point of view, he didn't exactly suffer a loss. After all, 40 million Ryo isn't much. And the information was useless in our hands. And the kids originally belonged to Kiri too. So getting 3 capable jounins, and a prospective ally for the next war is more than enough gain for such a small cost.

That said, I wonder if Hiruzen would have taken the same steps if he had known how strong Naruto would be during the next Great War or that the next war wouldn't be fought between the villages?'

Unlike Fujin, Hiruzen didn't know what the future generation would accomplish. Though he was hopeful about their futures, he had to make his calculations based on the ninjas that were active currently. And he didn't know that the next Great War would be fought between the Alliance of Shinobi Villages and Akatsuki. So his calculations were very appropriate.

As they moved, Nara Kazuki asked, "Did you bring any means of transportation?"

Fujin replied, "Nope. Did you guys consume any soldier pills?"

Kazuki replied, "Yes, around a day ago."

Fujin said, "Alright, let's just run all the way back to the Land of Fire then. We will rest in a Patrol camp."

Fujin's casual reply stunned the Nara. He muttered softly, "Run for two days straight. Great!"

Makoto and Itaru chuckled at his sorrow. As for the others, they were already used to the laziness of the Nara clan ninjas.

They quickly formed a basic plan on how to travel, which places to avoid and how to use their sensors to avoid any more confrontations.

The group travelled for half a day straight and reached close to the outer ring of islands in the Land of Water. Once they exited it, they would leave the area officially controlled by Kirigakure. However, Makoto sensed something.

He turned his attention towards a small island to their right. Smoke could be seen coming from the island. He said, "Something horrible is happening there. It's as if death is spreading across the island."

His words surprised the rest. Fujin extended his chakra field as well and said, "There are no ninjas there. But I can feel numerous people dying by the minute."

Renjiro said, "Let's check it out."

The Konoha ninjas changed their directions and entered the island. They headed straight to the village on the island.

But, as soon as they got close to it, they slowed down. Everyone's eyes widened! The scene in front of their eyes was straight from a horror story!

The houses in the village were all damaged. Some had a few cracks, others had crumbled. However, that wasn't the worst sight. The entire village was dyed in blood! Corpses, that were sliced open, littered the streets. Among these corpses were a few people that hadn't died yet, but were not too far away from it.

Fujin frowned. He walked into the village and asked softly, "Who did this?"

Renjiro let out a sigh and said, "It is likely the Mizukage faction. Over a dozen villages and towns in the Land of Water have been eliminated by them in this manner. Mostly due to suspecting some people with bloodlines among them or if their village had any dealings with the rebels."