

Martial Unity 421

Chapter 421: Outcome

Rui felt nostalgic about his current circumstances, it had been a long time since he had faced a Martial Artists genuinely capable of forcing him to pause and think. Before he mastered the pattern recognition system of the VOID algorithm, he had always been forced to fight with creativity and tactics in order to win.

However, the previous two training sessions had simply made him too strong. It took literal Martial Squires to force him to strategize and rely on tactics. Against other Martial Apprentices, he was usually too strong. He didn't need to strategize to win against them.

He was glad that there were still Martial Apprentices out there strong enough to force him out of his comfort zone.

('Alright, think, how do I get past this wall of wind?') He pondered as he blocked yet another wind blast from his opponent.

He couldn't outmaneuver it because it was simply too large and swift. He couldn't force his way past the wind attack with brute force alone. The wind that his opponent generated was incredibly powerful, overwhelming the friction between Rui and the ground. It wasn't a matter of strength, Rui simply lacked the leverage needed to apply his strength against the wind attacks.

WHOOSH

Rui dashed towards him with remarkable swiftness.

BAM!

He put together a guard as he skidded away some distance away from the wind attack. He glanced up at his opponent, after finally having paused.

He stopped attacking, as he took a moment to process his circumstances. The predictive model had been completed, but unfortunately, it wasn't nearly of much use. Sometimes, even predicting your opponent wasn't enough to counter them.

Even if Rui predicted his opponent accurately, he wouldn't gain some massive advantage. He still had no way to close the distance.

('My feet aren't fast enough.') Rui mused. ('It's hard to picture me outpacing the attack with my speed alone.')

Suddenly his eyes lit up with interest as a crazy yet plausible solution hit him. He took a few moments as he fleshed out a plan.

('If my feet aren't fast enough, then I ought to use more than just my feet.') Rui realized.

It seemed like an extremely silly thing to think, but Rui saw potential in it.

('However, I need to ensure that my accuracy and precision are high enough, otherwise, I'm screwed.')

One thing Rui was grateful for was the fact that even though he was having difficulty getting to his opponent, his opponent was also having difficulty hurting Rui. Although the size of the attack made it very difficult to evade, it also reduced the potency of the attack because the power was diluted over a large area. Furthermore, Rui bled off a lot of the power of the attack with the help of the Tempestuous Ripple attack.

He was in no danger of going down to the attack any time soon.

However, something needed to change and Rui intended on doing just that.

('Alright, here goes nothing.') Rui crouched as he prepared himself for yet another attack.

His opponent stiffened as he saw that Rui was about to attack once more, prepared to immediately use his wind blast attack at a moment's notice.

WHOOSH

Rui dashed diagonally forward at a tremendous speed. The Martial Apprentice immediately launched the wind blast attack toward Rui.

Yet;

WHOOSH

Rui's image disappeared, evoking shock from the Martial Apprentice.

It was a feint.

Rui was on the other side. He had feinted using Phantom Step while misdirecting his opponent's attention toward the feint, causing it to be even more effective. He ran in the opposite direction with more than just his feet. He propelled himself forward by launching Tempestuous Ripples in the opposite direction. Using Newton's third law of motion to exceed his normal limits. He moved at a staggering speed as he rushed forward toward his opponent.

His opponent's eyes widened in shock as he hastily tried to launch a second wind blast in time, yet Rui had no intention of letting him succeed.

BAM!!

A powerful Flowing Canon crashed into his opponent's guard, slamming him backward as he grimaced in pain.

Rui immediately chased after him, ensuring that he simply lacked the space or the time to launch a wind blast attack.

POW POW POW!

He threw a flurry of straight body blows that struck his opponent's guard. Rui discovered that despite being a long-range specialist, his opponent was quite tough even in close-range quarters. His defense was tough enough to withstand the onslaught Rui unleashed.

('As expected of a genuine grade-ten Martial Apprentice.') Rui mused.

WHOOSH

He avoided a blow with tremendous power. His opponent had extremely high striking power, close to that of Fae's, from what Rui could tell. This made sense since the immense power of the wind blast attacks came from his striking, after all.

Yet, despite his surprising competence in close-quarters combat, he was still a far cry from being able to defeat Rui.

WHOOSH

BAM!

Rui casually evaded a strike he saw coming from a mile away as he landed his own., the VOID algorithm and the Mindmirror Brain were simply too much together.

His opponent fell to his knees as he grimaced in pain. Rui hadn't thrown an ordinary attack, it was an attack that permeated the impact with Reverberating Lance. The attack had struck his liver, as Reverberating Lance exacerbated the effect.

BAM!

A swift and powerful kick struck his opponent's gut, the impact permeating all the way to the diaphragm, stunning it.

He was unable to breathe.

POW!

A final kick to the jaw rattled his brain enough, triggering enough blunt-force trauma.

THUD

He collapsed flat to the ground, unconscious.

Rui paused a moment before saying out aloud to apparently nobody;

"I appreciate you not intervening," Rui said.

Kane appeared out of thin air, shrugging. "I knew you'd be fine, there was no need to intervene."

Kane had been running around the field, helping out his fellow Martial Apprentices in battle. Yet he had abstained from doing so with Rui's fight.

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He had complete faith in Rui winning his fight. After seeing how strong Rui had become, he had almost no doubt that Rui was the strongest Martial Apprentice in the modern era. Furthermore, he knew Rui would not have appreciated his intervention.

"How's the rest of the battle going?" Rui asked as he turned back.

It was impossible to confine a large number of Martial Apprentice battles over a small volume of space. It was too dangerous for each one of them, and a single attack from their blind spot could critically injure or kill them, and none of them were willing to take that risk.

Thus, the battle had spread out over a large area.

"Hard to say when there's so much happening," Kane replied. "Anyways, let's return to the battle immediately."

"Sure thing."

The two immediately dashed back.

Rui immediately saw a Martial Apprentice of the Kandrian Empire getting overwhelmed by an enemy Martial Artist. He quickly dashed over, looking to intervene.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH

He threw a flurry of strikes, which his opponent successfully dodged cleanly.

('Evasive maneuverer. But not nearly as good as Kane.') Rui mused.

BAM!

Rui managed to land a strike on him after faking him out with Phantom Step. His opponent grimaced, struggling to endure even a single attack. Defense wasn't his strong suit, clearly.

He tried retreating, being painfully aware that he couldn't defeat Rui. Yet Rui had no intention of letting him go.

BAM!

Rui intercepted him with Tempestuous Ripple at a distance, causing him to collapse. He turned around in fear and Rui was already there.

POW!

A swift strike to the jaw triggered blunt force trauma that caused him to collapse unconscious on the spot.

Rui sighed.

BOOM!

He launched a blow with tremendous power at the unconscious Martial Apprentice's temple.

CRACK

He immediately turned back to the Kandrian Martial Apprentice.

"You alright?" Rui asked him.

He nodded, looking at Rui with awe. "Thanks."

Rui turned back towards the direction of the main battle. "Alright, time to get back."

From that point on, Rui wreaked havoc on the battlefield. Very few opponents could last long against him. Regardless of whether they were offensive, defensive, or maneuvering-oriented Martial Artists. Rui simply disemboweled all of them with casual ease.

It was to the point where he was single-handedly making a visible impact on the battle all by himself. Yet to his surprise, he wasn't the biggest impact on the battlefield.

WHOOSH

BAM!

Kane instantly took down an enemy Martial Apprentice with the Godspeed technique.

Rui's eyes widened at that sight. ('He chained the Godspeed technique with the Void Step technique!')

One of the biggest weaknesses of the Godspeed technique was the fact that it required preparation in advance which left the user vulnerable to being attacked. However, by completing that preparation while using the Void Step technique, he had reduced the probability that he would be attacked during the preparation significantly. After all, an overwhelming majority of Martial Apprentices were unable to sense Kane when he was using the Void Step technique.

This meant that Kane could now use the Godspeed technique much more freely than he normally would ever be able to use. This made him far more dangerous than ever before.

('If I'm not careful, he might even be able to defeat me.') Rui realized. He was quite impressed with Kane's newfound prowess.

It was no wonder that he had remained in grade nine even after the Martial Apprentice grading system had gotten updated. It meant that he was very close to the previous grade ten. Rui wouldn't be surprised if he wasn't too far from reaching the current grade ten.

Kane was a bigger impact on the battlefield despite being weaker than Rui in general simply because he was far more compatible with their current circumstances than Rui was. Rui was at his best when facing off against a single opponent, whereas Kane was best suited in chaotic circumstances with distracted targets.

The two of them began sweeping through the battlefield, taking one Martial Apprentice down after the other. Soon enough, the Sekigahara Confederate couldn't tolerate the losses they were suffering

Rui picked up a new influx of Martial Apprentices heading towards the battlefield from the Sekigahara Confederate base with Seismic Mapping.

('They're sending in their defensive Martial Apprentices as well huh?') Rui mused.

Immediately, his mission tracker beeped a single time.

('Retreat.')

That was what a single beep meant.

Immediately, all the other Kandrian Martial Apprentices merrily retreated from the battleground. None of them wanted to face the influx of reinforcements.

Rui sighed. He begged to differ, but orders were orders. It was just a shame for him since he would rather have continued fighting against the new Martial Apprentices. But of course, he understood why they were being ordered to retreat. They had fulfilled their mission successfully, the Sekigahara Confederate had lost far more Martial Artists than the Kandrian Empire did. Retreating now was for the best.

The Kandrian Martial Apprentices all ran back towards the Kandrian Empire territory as fast as they could.

"Disappointed?" Kane asked him.

"You know me so well." Rui chuckled. "By the way, did anything happen to the others?"

"They're all alive, although Nel got seriously injured at one point," Kane replied.

"Well, as long as they're alive, it's all good." Rui nodded.

He valued the core friends that he had made in the Academy. He would be riddled with grief if this battle had claimed their lives. They were strong, but as this battle had shown him, large-scale conflicts were extremely chaotic and anything could happen. Even if they were strong, they could be outnumbered, run into someone even stronger, or be hit with an attack from their blind spot.

It was no longer a matter of whether they were strong or weak.

Soon, they reached the Kandrian Empire's territory. Most of the Martial Apprentices sighed in relief as they finally reached a safe space. The constant battle in a large and chaotic battlefield under raining cannon balls was more unnerving than anyone had expected it to be.

Chapter 423: Aftermath

One of the perks of the missions in the Serevian Dungeon was the fact that Martial Artists did not need to write reports on their missions like they would normally be required to. The reason for that was the Martial Union and the Kandrian Royal Army were surveilling the battle with the surveilling facilities that had been erected within their territory. The Serevian Dungeon colonization team already had accurate information on exactly how the battle proceeded.

"The mission was a brilliant success." Commissioner Feristen announced with a smile. "Frankly, all of you have exceeded even our most optimistic projections. The Sekigahara Confederate has suffered disproportionately high losses and the military has successfully inflicted significant damage on the fortifications that they had erected. I have been authorized to bonus all of you for your meritorious efforts..."

Rui listened to his words carefully as he scrutinized the man.

('He's painting a very positive spin to this.') Rui noted. ('What about the Martial Apprentices that died?')

Around nine Martial Artists of the Martial Union had died. Not too devastating in the big picture, but not insignificant. Yet their sacrifices didn't seem to be as impactful as he had initially expected.

Each of those Martial Apprentices had fought for the Kandrian Empire and died in the process.

Of course, Rui understood the mindset behind the response of the Martial Union to this. While it certainly was true that Martial Artists dying was a pretty undesirable outcome, it couldn't be avoided.

It was inevitable.

Conflict killed, regardless of whether it was between ordinary humans or Martial Artists.

Martial Art was a field centered around conflict. If conflict was synonymous with death, then it wasn't too much of an exaggeration to say Martial Art was a field centered around death. Every Martial Apprentice that had come here had come of their own free will knowing full well the dangers and potential for death in this mission, especially with the entirely accurate intelligence that the Martial Union had gathered for them.

Furthermore, the Martial Union had beefed up the payments on the mission to a ridiculous degree to justify the difficulty and had also waived off the expenses of potions and other expenditures that the Martial Apprentices would normally need for their missions.

With all of this in mind, Rui couldn't really say the mission was not worth attempting.

It was also not to be forgotten that only under the threat of real death could Martial Apprentices genuinely improve. The most powerful Martial Apprentices in the world almost always ended up being the ones that had persevered through the most. It was physically impossible to nurture truly strong Martial Artists if one only coddled them like they were precious vases.

Soon, they dispersed once commissioner Feristen had finished his address to the Martial Artists.

"Hey, heard you guys were doing alright." Rui nodded as he met up with all his friends.

"It was hella fun!" Nel grinned.

"I heard you got seriously hurt." Rui threw a resigned look at him.

"Whoever told you that lied."

Rui didn't even bother engaging with him any further as he turned to the rest.

"I was made aware of several shortcomings in my combat style in the circumstances of the battlefield," Fae replied. "I've made improvements that have generally focused on one-on-one battles, but I have soon come to realize that my ability to cope under circumstances as chaotic as the battlefield has reduced. I have focused and invested a lot in my vacuum palm techniques that increased the rate at which I successfully connected my attacks on my opponent. But in turn, it's a technique that doesn't work too well against multiple opponents."

Rui nodded. He recalled her demonstrating her vacuum palms during the assault attack on the Squire breakthrough research facility. She used a breathing technique as well as synchronized movements to create a vacuum in the atmosphere between her and her opponent. This created a suction force that pulled her opponents towards her and made it easier for her to land strikes on them.

The problem with the technique was that it forced her to invest too much in a single opponent. If she used this tactic in a scenario against multiple opponents she would be leaving herself wide open to an attack from the other Martial Apprentices. That was why she couldn't operate her tactic in circumstances with more than one opponent with the same amount of efficiency that she could against single opponents.

"You should try investing in some passive defensive Martial Art techniques that will reduce the risk of being hurt in combat," Rui told her. "This way you have more leeway even in scenarios where your active defense is compromised due to focusing on one opponent at a time. I know you're an offensive Martial Apprentice, however, it is impossible for Martial Apprentices to not rely on defensive techniques. That's why it's known as a core field."

Fae nodded, considering her options. "That does indeed sense. I'll consider that option once I'm done gaining enough experience with my current Technique base. I've also considered getting evasive maneuvering skills. Can you help me out with that, Kane?"

"Of course, not. Go figure it out by yourself." Kane scoffed with a sneer, earning her ire.

Rui sighed as the two began bickering.

"They've always been like that, for as long as I remember." Fiona giggled.

"Same here." Rui sighed. "How did you fare in the battle?"

"Oh, it was not nearly as hard as expected, honestly." She shrugged, nonchalantly. "I was quite curious because my dad told me this mission overall was harder than most grade nine and grade ten missions, but I am a bit disappointed."

"Curious, eh?" Rui chuckled. "I have never seen anyone walk into a mission that is ranked as one of the hardest among all because they were curious."

"Well, not anymore I'm not." She replied. "But what I'm curious about is the fact that we won so dominantly. Was that because of you?" She asked with a hint of interest in her eyes.

Chapter 424: Chain Reactions

"Well..." Rui scratched his head. "I can't take full credit for that. Kane actually played a pretty important role as well."

"Really?" Fiona raised an eyebrow at Kane.

"My man doesn't lie." Kane smirked, turning to Fiona. "We haven't met in like, what, three or four years?"

"We would have met a year ago if you'd won the preliminary contest." She retorted.

"Boo. No thanks, I'm good." Kane waved her away.

"Alright alright." Rui intervened. "Let's all go catch some rest. We shouldn't rely on potions when we don't have to because that reduces the probability that we'll be able to use potions when we need to."

It was the norm to have sleep taken care of as soon as a mission was completed since that was the only it could be guaranteed that a sleep cycle wouldn't clash with the deployment of the Martial Apprentices on a mission. Rui had learned to become more aware of his sleep cycles since he could no longer merrily stay awake for extended periods of time.

The rest of them concurred, participating in the war wasn't something that could be considered light work, regardless of one's prowess.

The five of them returned back to their lodges, looking to get as much rest as they could for the day before their next mission.

Which, much to their surprise didn't come too quickly.

The attack launched by the Kandrian Empire was more than just a simple attack. Or at least, it ended up growing to be much more than that.

The Kandrian Empire's attack on the Sekigahara Confederate left it in a position of vulnerability and weakness as far as border security and military assets went. However, this position of vulnerability wouldn't last long and all the countries knew it.

The Britannian Empire, which was also adjacent to the Sekigahara Confederate, had chosen to exploit this moment of weakness created by the Kandrian Empire to launch its own devastating attack on the momentarily exposed territory of the Sekigahara Confederate.

Many Martial Apprentices, potion users, and siege tanks marched toward the Sekigahara Confederate as fast as they could. This was a far more dedicated and invested war effort. It could not even be called an assault team. This was a marching legion. It was an open brazen declaration of war.

The Sekigahara Confederate hastily stopped the reconstruction process that they had begun just a day prior, having been forced to invest even more militaristic capital into mustering a defensive and counter-offensive war effort.

The clash lasted for days. It dwarfed the Kandrian Empire's operation on the Sekigahara Confederate by a large margin.

However, things became even more chaotic when the Republic of Gorteau launched an attack on the Britannian Empire. Something that had not been foreseen by anybody.

Even the Britannian Empire couldn't fight a war on two sides. The army that had been sent to chip away even further at the Sekigahara Confederate had been ordered to retreat immediately and return to the base territory of the Britannian Empire to aid in repelling the attack from the Republic of Gorteau.

However, once the Britannian army returned back to the Britannian territory, the army from the Republic of Gorteau also immediately retreated as soon as the reinforcements arrived.

And finally, there was silence.

The Kandrian Empire simply spectated the chain reaction that its actions had caused with amused intrigue. It took a while for the intelligence departments of all the countries to gather all the information needed to have a good understanding of why what unfolded actually unfolded the way it did.

"The Republic of Gorteau has formed an alliance with the Sekigahara Confederate?" Commissioner Feristen frowned as he read some reports.

"Indeed." Colonel Carnes nodded. "Of course, this is far from a philanthropic move. The strategic department has already established why."

"The Republic of Gorteau stands the most to lose if the Britannian Empire and the Kandrian Empire gang up on the Sekigahara Confederate." Commissioner Feristen noted.

"Indeed." Colonel Carnes affirmed. "The Republic of Gorteau is the furthest away from the Sekigahara Confederate compared to the Britannian Empire and the Kandrian Empire within the Serevian Dungeon, geographically."

The four nations' territories had slowed down at the core of the Serevian Dungeon which was still up for grabs. The Kandrian Empire's territory faced the Britannian Empire's territory which was the most distant to it, and the Sekigahara Confederate faced the Republic of Gorteau, which was also the most distant to it.

The Sekigahara Confederate was adjacent to the Kandrian Empire and the Britannian Empire, the latter two were much closer to the Sekigahara Confederate than the Republic of Gorteau was.

What this ultimately meant was that if the Sekigahara Confederate was forced to yield some territory or halt expansion activities in order to stabilize, then only the Kandrian Empire and the Britannian Empire would monopolize the yielded territory. The Republic of Gorteau would be too far to be able to claim and the Kandrian Empire and the Britannian Empire would not tolerate its claim on the new territory.

Once the two empires gained more territory in the core of the Serevian Dungeons, it was quite likely they would end up being the 'winners' of the Serevian Dungeon while the Republic of Gorteau and the Sekigahara Confederate would end up being the losers.

This was not something that either the Sekigahara Confederate or the Republic of Gorteau were willing to tolerate. An alliance had already formed after the Kandrian Empire's initial attack.

The Republic of Gorteau forced the Britannian Empire to retreat, giving the Sekigahara Confederate respite it needed to restore its border security and replenish its militaristic capital.

There was temporary silence once that particular chain of events ended. However, the ice had already been broken. The four super nations had finally clashed with each other. It was inevitable, but its timing was unclear.

The Sekigahara Confederate and the Republic of Gorteau had predicted the Britannian Empire would draw first, yet to everyone's surprise, it had been the Kandrian Empire.

Chapter 425: Abyss

It was quite uncharacteristic for the Kandrian Empire to be hyper-aggressive and brazen as it did. It was a dangerous decision that somehow managed to work out in their favor.

"How was our interception force routed so soundly?" A man in military garb gritted his teeth as he walked into a crowded room. "Their Martial Apprentices can't possibly be stronger than ours on average!"

"Sergeant Mindow, according to the analyst department, it seemed that the cause of the defeat of the interception force was actually mainly caused by two Martial Apprentices."

"WHAT?!" Sergeant Mindow. "You're telling me two Martial Apprentices caused all of this!?"

"That's correct, sir." The intelligence officer gulped. "The analyst department hasn't yet compiled a report, but even based on partial analysis, it's clear that two particular Martial Apprentices caused the disproportionate losses that our interception force suffered."

"Bring me all the details immediately." The man bellowed in response.

The intelligence agent rushed out of the office, and within an hour, there was a report on the sergeant's table.

The report was more than illuminating.

"An extreme stealth maneuverer that has mastered the pinnacle of evasive misdirection." He spat. "We needed high-grade sensory Martial Apprentices to contain this menace. Ideally, they're going to also need long-range and wide-scale offensive capability, in order to deal with the speed of the Martial Apprentice, codenamed Ghost."

This was a viable and effective solution. By bringing in Martial Apprentices equipped to handle the dangerous elements of the Martial Apprentice that needed to be contained, they could create sound solutions to ensure they would never again suffer such losses against the Kandrian Empire.

Yet, the sergeant's eyes squinted in confusion as he turned the page. "Hm?"

"That's the intelligence on the second Martial Apprentice for the disproportionate losses that our interception team suffered, sir."

"I can see that." He gritted his teeth. "But where's the damn analysis on his Martial Art!? The strengths? Weaknesses? That section is basically empty!"

"Unfortunately, the analyst department was unable to comprehend the nature of the Martial Path of the Martial Apprentice in question." The intelligence agent gulped.

"What? What did you just tell me?"

"The analyst team wasn't able to successfully grasp the core of the Martial Art of the Martial Apprentice in question." He squeezed out.

"INCOMPETENT FOOLS." The sergeant roared as he slammed the document into the ground. "A single Martial Art of a Martial Apprentice confounds the team of analysts that were chosen to be deployed to the Serevian Dungeon?! The height of uselessness!"

"Forgive me for saying so, sir." The intelligence meekly interjected. "But it isn't that the analysts aren't competent, it's that the Martial Art we are dealing with isn't something ordinary, in fact, its traits are something we've frankly never seen before. It's a genuine anomaly."

The sergeant calmed down a bit at those words and frowned at the prospect. "A Martial Art so obtuse and deviant that even analysts can't crack?"

He glanced back at the document, combing through the observations and inferences made by the analyst department.

The Martial Artist, codenamed Abyss, in question didn't seem to have any core style, any affinity towards techniques or fields. This was the biggest stumbling block in trying to accurately and precisely identify the actual combat style of the codename Abyss. His fighting style changed too drastically from opponent to opponent.

It was far different from the all-rounder style that used many fields to relatively equal degrees regardless of the opponent. His style changed from fight to fight, from circumstance to circumstance.

It was formless, almost like it was water.

The analyst department commented that his fighting style did not seem to change at random but in a fashion that seemed extremely efficient and effective against his opponents.

However, that wasn't the most shocking part. The most shocking part about the Martial Apprentice, the main reason why he was incredibly dominant against nearly any Martial Apprentice he ran into was his extraordinary accuracy and precision in so far as the placement and timing of his every move. According to a preliminary analysis conducted by the Martial Consortium of the Sekigahara Confederate, the placements and timings for each of his movements were extremely effective. Allowing him to produce extremely effective results with every movement, far more so than was normally possible.

The Martial Consortium had not yet formulated a viable and sound solution against codename Abyss, although the task was being prioritized.

"Even the Sekigaharan Martial Consortium couldn't tell us how to take him down immediately?" His eyes widened.

The Sekigaharan Martial Consortium was a private organization formed by the Martial Artists of the Sekigahara Confederate. It was similar to the Martial Union, yet there were a few key differences. The Consortium was looser and far more flexible than the Martial Union, yet it also provided far fewer benefits to the members of the Consortium than the Martial Union did.

Kandrian Martial Union was just one of the many Martial Artist organizations that existed on the Panama Continent. There were many shapes and forms such organizations took, in some cases, they didn't at all, Martial Artists were completely dissolved by the state. Though such states were uncommon.

In some cases, the Martial Artist organization took over the state and became the ruling entity, imposing Martial Law and Regime. Though neither the Kandrian Empire nor the Sekigahara Confederate were nearly as extreme as either side.

"For now." The sergeant just gritted his teeth. "Just gather a bunch of strong Martial Apprentices of different kinds of Martial Art the next time we engage in conflict with the Kandrian Empire. That should be enough. They'll see that one Martial Apprentice can never truly be enough to influence a war all by himself."

This was the only option they had for now. If quality was lacking, then the very best they could do was simply compensate with quantity and hope that it did the job well enough

"Yes sir." The intelligence officer bowed before raising his head and scurrying out of the room.

Chapter 426: Bolexeuen Hill

The flames of war that the Kandrian Empire had lit could not be snuffed out. As the four nations began expanding their territory bit by bit. There were all kinds of scuffles that began occurring as a result. The core was the only part of the Serevian Dungeon that was yet to be colonized. However, as the four super nations expanded, not even that was going to remain uncolonized for too much longer.

The scarcity of the remaining resources made them even more valuable. This caused the conflict to become more frequent, causing the Martial Apprentices to be deployed more often than before.

Today was another such day for the Martial Apprentices of the Martial Union. The offensive team, for the first time since the previous clash, would be clashing with the Sekigahara Confederate over a territorial dispute.

"The mission today will not be quite the same as the one nearly a month ago." Commissioner Feristen informed them. "Back then, we attacked the fortified core territory of the Sekigahara Confederate with a powerful assault team to inflict as much damage and force them to stall their expansion endeavors. Of course, they have more than recuperated and have eagerly begun expanding once more to make up for the lost time. This has predictably led to a clash of interests as far as expansion interests go."

Commissioner Feristen pressed a button on a device, projecting the image of a marked map on a screen.

It was a map of the core of the Serevian Dungeon, highlighting certain territories in different colors that were relevant.

"As you can see." Commissioner Feristen continued. "The territories in red are the territories that the Sekigahara Confederate have demonstrated interest in, in the past month. The territories in blue are the territories that the Kandrian Empire aims to colonize. The territories in purple are the territories that both Sekigahara Confederate and the Kandrian Empire have demonstrated interest in."

The way that all of the nations within the Serevian Dungeon expanded wasn't by simply blindly expanding from their core territory outwards in a singular circle. That was wasteful and inefficient because the distribution of esoteric resources was not even, obviously. The net territory of each nation was divided across multiple settlements in the more rich and lush parts of the Serevian Dungeon, including the guaranteed core territories that all of the participating nations had.

"One of the purple territories is actually the Bolexeuen Hills." He said, projecting another image. "A Sekigahara Confederate convoy has been spotted heading towards the Bolexeuen Hill. The intelligence makes it clear that the Sekigahara Confederate intends to colonize the Bolexeuex Hill, based on this and other things. Your mission is not merely to sabotage or damage the colonization endeavors of the Sekigahara Confederate, but to completely drive them away from the Bolexeuen Hill. Even though the defensive measures of a convoy are most certainly not equal to the defensive measures of one of the main territories of the Sekigahara Confederate that the offensive team launched an attack on last month, the actual objective of the mission isn't as easy as it was before."

In short, they were no longer merely going to be fighting over trying to inflict damage to slow their opponents down, the Kandrian Empire wanted to boot the Sekigahara Confederate from one of the prime locations for esoteric resources that they both had had an eye on.

The Kandrian Intelligence Agency and Intelligence department of the Martial Union hadn't been able to gain an accurate understanding of the Martial Artist assets that had been deployed to protect the convoy as it began colonizing the Bolexeuen Hill.

Regardless, dozens of Martial Apprentices had been mobilized to partake in the mission. Among them were, of course, Rui, Kane, Fae, Nel, and Fiona.

And much to Rui's chagrin, Ian.

He shook his head putting him aside for the moment.

Commissioner Feristen continued in greater detail regarding the topographic features while explaining the route that the strategic department had charted out for the operation. He went into several other things before nodding. "Alright, that brings us to the end of the mission breakdown seminar. Be prepared until it is time to commence the mission."

The Martial Apprentices went their ways, needing to prepare for the upcoming battle.

"Do you reckon this is going to be easier or harder than the initial clash with the Sekigahara Confederate?" Kane asked.

"Harder." Rui replied. "In the previous mission, we simply assaulted one of their main territories with the intent of hurting. And more importantly, our win condition was quite shallow and light. We did not need to force our opponents back, this is not true in this case. This time we'll need to overwhelm them completely otherwise we won't be able to displace their convoy from the Bolexeuen Hill. That's a much taller task to impose on us than just inflicting a lot of damage."

"Makes sense." Kane nodded. "Still, if this battle goes anything like it did the first time, dominating them shouldn't be much of an issue."

"That's if it goes as it did in the first attack," Rui replied to him.

"You don't think it will?" Kane raised an eyebrow.

"Hard to say." Rui sighed, shrugging in response. "But it is best to proceed under the assumption that it won't. The Serevian Dungeon is such that the nations can surveil the battles directly in real-time, meaning they have an intimate understanding of why they lost. And part of why they lost is because the two of us took down a disproportionate number of Martial Apprentices. Unless the Sekigahara Confederate is incompetent they will likely have solutions to ensure that at the very least something like that won't happen again."

"But how?" Kane asked, frowning.

"I can't say for sure, but regardless, be wary and careful. Don't just bombard around the battlefield without any caveats or caution." Rui advised.

"I'm an evasive maneuverer." Kane shrugged. "Caution is my last name."

"No, your last name is-

"Shut up."

Chapter 427: New Conflict

The Martial Apprentices quickly prepared themselves for the upcoming conflict that they were going to be participating in. In a few hours, the mission was soon enough ready to commence, and it did. The Martial Apprentices all dispatched as they rushed together towards the Bolexeuen Hill via the recommended path in their mission bills.

The distance was genuinely not all that great for a Martial Apprentice because it was already only a small portion of the core of the Serevian Dungeon which itself was a minority of the Serevian Dungeon. This meant that it didn't take much time for them to run into action from the moment they had left.

The focus of the Martial Apprentices weighed on the atmosphere, growing in weight once the two became aware of each other.

The Sekigahara convoy immediately deployed a few defensive measures, including having their many defensive Martial Apprentices deployed to intercept the incoming assault force and protect the settlement convoy of the Sekigahara Confederate.

When the assault team of the Kandrian Empire reached the general location of Bolexeuen Hill. Many cannonballs had already been fired in their general direction. Yet, the Martial Apprentices competently dealt with them. Some destroyed or overpowered them with attacks, others defended against them, and many simply evaded them.

Although cannon balls weren't slow. The sheer distance that they were coming gave the Martial Apprentices plenty of time to react and deal with them however they felt most comfortable.

Soon, the Martial Apprentices had reached the convoy of the Sekigahara Confederate. The groups of Martial Apprentices immediately clashed.

A large number of attacks were exchanged in the briefest of moments. The Martial Apprentices all began spreading out from each other to ensure that their battles with each other didn't hurt themselves and their comrades.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH

Rui evaded a flurry of sharp jabs from a conditioned piercing attack of the Martial Apprentices that had first attacked him.

His opponent seemed to be someone who had dedicated an immense of conditioning training to his nails. Rui recalled seeing the techniques long ago in the Martial Contest.

WHOOSH

BAM!

He evaded a swing while launching a powerful low-sweeping kick, staggering his opponent into an unstable position.

POW POW POW!

He threw speedy jabs to his opponent's gut, Reverberating Lance permeated the impact deeper, yet the man managed to remain conscious despite the fact that his diaphragm was no doubt immobilized due to the attack to the gut.

He took a moment to build up momentum to launch a powerful Flowing Canon at his opponent. Yet suddenly

WHOOSH

His opponent suddenly moved away from the attack unnaturally, as if being protect from harm's way.

Suddenly, three new powerful Martial Apprentices between him and Rui. The three of them exchanged a word with Rui's previous opponent, as the latter nodded and scurried away.

('They're strong.') Rui could tell. The pressure they exerted was immense. Yet what drew his attention, even more, was that they chose to intervene in his battle, all three of them.

Rui immediately inferred that these three were sent to deal with him. There was no other reason that he would randomly be targeted by three Martial Apprentices.

The atmosphere contorted under the weight of his mind as he grew more serious. The sheer pressure he exuded was not something any Martial Apprentice should have been capable of exuding, and his three opponents could clearly feel it.

Yet, they didn't hesitate.

Two of them dashed backward, and one of them dashed forward toward him. His arm curled backward as he wound up a powerful strike.

WHOOSH

Rui casually evaded the strike with a feint via Phantom Step, entering his space.

POW!

His elbow landed on his opponent's face, staggering him back. Yet when Rui went throw a front kick, he merely ducked, exposing a wind blast attack from behind him.

BAM!

Rui blocked as an immensely powerful and focused wind blast attack slammed into him. He glanced back at the source of the attack.

('So they were ranged experts? And the one before me is a close quarters Martial Artist.') Rui noted. ('So they wanted to create a synergistic team of Martial Apprentices specifically to take me down?')

The close-quarters Martial Artist rushed back at Rui with renewed vigor, throwing a flurry of jabs at Rui. Rui evaded all of them cleanly. He felt a bit impatient, which was uncharacteristic for him. He knew that they were being sent to stall him and ensure he doesn't go off on a rampage like he did last time, which made him not want to allow that to happen, yet he needed to be careful despite that.

WHOOSH

BAM

Rui evaded a strike cleanly and landed a powerful uppercut on his opponent pushing him back, when suddenly;

POW POW!

Two wind bullets slammed into him with a lot of power.

('They only attack me when their teammate isn't in my immediate vicinity.') Rui keenly noted.

There was no point in putting together a team of three Martial Apprentices if they attacked one at a time instead of simultaneously, yet here they were. They were either an incompetent team, or there was some real reason why.

('It's quite likely that their precision isn't high enough to not affect their teammate from such a distance away if we're too close.') He sharply realized.

Rui grinned at that realization.

WHOOSH

He dodged another wind bullet as the close-quarters Martial Apprentice charged back at Rui. Yet this time, instead of cautiously avoiding him, he charged forward as well.

His opponent threw a powerful swing, yet;

WHOOSH

It hit empty air as Rui carried out a lower takedown after having feinted an upper takedown.

This was the Mirage Dive technique.

Rui successfully leveraged his power and momentum to topple his opponent. He expertly used Flow Flux and Shifting Silhouette to gain an advantageous position until he quickly coiled his arm around his opponent's neck from behind.

As Rui had predicted, his opponents did not fire any attacks.

Chapter 428: Envy

The close-quarters Martial Apprentices wrangled in Rui's grip with an immense amount of ferocity and power. Yet Rui stayed strong, refusing to let go. He used Outer Convergence, Flame Breathing, and Helical Breathing to squeeze with as much power as he possibly could.

Thankfully, he didn't need to squeeze for too long.

The human brain would lose consciousness after seven seconds of a lack of oxygen. Rui was squeezing hard on his carotid artery and ensuring that there was no blood flow. Although Martial Apprentice could last longer, they too had a limit.

His resistance rapidly grew weaker and eventually, his body went limp.

He was unconscious.

THUD

Rui tossed his body aside as he immediately turned towards the two distant long-range specialists. They had already begun firing against him. But Rui had no intention of being hit by them at all this time.

WHOOSH WHOOSH

The two attacks hit an illusion of Rui, as Rui misdirected their potent attacks with Phantom Step. He immediately began running toward them with an immense amount of speed and agility. It took just a few moments to reach there as he evaded all their attacks.

They even began retreating panicked, as Rui approached them.

BAM!

Rui launched a powerful Flowing Cannon that launched one of them into the air, while the second had gotten stung.

PEW!

The Stinger burrowed itself in his back as he ran away, triggering a profuse wound.

BANG!

CRACK

A powerful hammer kick on the man cracked his skull.

('It's going to take more than that if you want to suppress me.') Rui mused. He knew that the Sekigahara Confederate would certainly try even harder than before, but that was. He had no intention of backing down or losing. He was curious to see the kinds of things that the Sekigahara Confederate would try to do in order to stop him.

Kane on the other hand wasn't nearly as lucky. His opponent wasn't somebody that he could defeat with casual ease, or even in a small amount of time.

His opponent was the only one on the entire battleground besides from Rui who could sense him quite clearly, a sensory Martial Apprentice. The Sekigahara Confederate had deployed him to be able to deal with Kane so as to ensure that Kane also doesn't go around taking down a large number of Martial Apprentices.

In addition to possessing sensory techniques that were required to be able to sense Kane despite the Void Step technique and a few other stealth techniques Kane had taken to improve his overall stealth prowess, his opponent also possessed incredible speed.

With their speed, it was basically like two speedy cars were running around. Kane tried to get away from him as fast he could, but it was simply too much even for someone with Kane's sheer velocity.

BAM!

THUD

Kane paused in surprise as his opponent just collapsed to the ground unconscious.

"Had some trouble?" Rui asked, chuckling.

"More than just a little." Kane sighed. "This guy was meant to handle me, to ensure that I can't do what I did back then."

"Yeah." Rui nodded. "I went through something quite similar just now."

"How strong was he?" Kane asked in return.

"They, you mean." Rui chuckled. "One of them was a pretty good close-quarters Martial Artists while the others were long-range Martial Artists."

Kane's eyes widened. "They sent three Martial Apprentices to merely keep you at bay?"

"Yep."

"That's hilarious, they have actually significantly underestimated you a lot huh?" Kane laughed out loud. "They're going to need much more than if they want to keep you in check."

"Anyways, enough chitchat," Rui told him. "Let's get back into the battle."

The two of them returned back to the battle and returned to what they were doing in the previous battle against the Sekigahara Battle.

Wreaking havoc.

Now that there wasn't a single enemy Martial Apprentice who could sense him, Kane freely went back to sabotaging his opponent. He zipped through and across the entire battlefield, helping the Kandrian Martial Apprentices and making the life of the Sekigaharan Martial Apprentices miserable in battle was his general modus operandi. This immediately resulted in a visible impact on the state of the conflict.

Martial Apprentices of the Kandrian Empire began winning more often, while Martial Apprentices of the Sekigahara Confederate simply lost, more and more.

Rui on the other hand began taking on the most powerful Martial Apprentices that the Skigahara Confederate had to offer. It wasn't as though the Sekigahara Confederate's Martial Apprentices were incompetent. Not at all.

It was just that Rui was simply far too strong.

He had come to the war hoping to run into people just as strong as he was, yet thus far, he hadn't run into someone who was genuinely as strong as him. Yet that hadn't just yet. He had run into interesting challenges like the wind manipulator Martial Artist that he had fought the very first time that the Kandrian Empire had launched an attack on the Sekigahara Confederate.

Yet he had not yet found something nearly as powerful as he had hoped for. Someone who could force him to use his Flowing Void Style to its absolute most.

Even to this day, he still didn't even know what that looked like.

To a certain extent, he envied all the Martial Apprentices he saw running around and beating each other up. At least they were still in a position where any one of them could be defeated by their peers at the same level as themselves.

He recalled how fulfilling the preliminary Martial Contest had been to him. It was one of the best parts of his time in the Martial Academy. Back then, he still had peers who were genuinely his equals and were more than capable of defeating him. It gave him good experience in using his Martial Art and the VOID algorithm. He'd needed to strategize nearly every fight and would have straight up lost several fights if not for his creativity.

Chapter 429: Outcome

Now that Kane and Rui were freed up, they were unstoppable together, they quickly began taking down Martial Apprentices one by one.

Kane was like a fish in water, abusing his stealth to the most to launch the Godspeed technique that allowed him to take down Martial Apprentices almost with a single attack. Rui took Martial Apprentices the hard way, yet very few managed to last longer than a short amount of time against him. While his physical parameters were certainly extremely impressive, they weren't beyond all fathoming. There were all-rounder Martial Apprentices that, as far as raw technical parameters went, were comparable to him.

But because of the Mindmirror Brain and the VOID algorithm, none of them managed to last more than a brief amount of time against him.

Rui glanced around the battlefield, spotting his friends.

Fiona was holding her own against two Martial Apprentices just fine. Although the level of dominance wasn't anywhere near to that of Kane's despite being of a higher grade than him. Kane just had a ridiculous amount of affinity with the circumstances they were in.

Fiona was fighting against a long-range Martial Apprentices, applying her Vacuum Palm technique to cut down on the distance between them, hoping to strike him with one of her devastating lethal attacks and win the fight on the spot.

Nel was fighting against three Martial Apprentices with a rabid grin> This was despite getting pushed back by all of his opponents.

('Idiot.') Rui sighed. Rui was certain that he had gone out of his way to provoke himself into those circumstances. He immediately headed over to relieve his friend.

Soon the defensive team assigned to the colonizing convoy of the Sekigahara Confederate was slowly getting overwhelmed. The Martial Apprentices slowly retreated until the numbers' disparity had grown so much by this point that they could no longer even cope.

The defensive convoy had long followed suit, leaving the Bolexeuen Hill.

The mission was a success.

The Kandrian Empire had successfully booted out the Sekigahara Confederate convoy from colonizing the most lucrative parts of the land.

He could already sense from a distance that there was a convoy being dispatched by the Kandrian Empire to colonize and build a defended base in this location. They had not yet been instructed to retreat from the Boloxeuen Hill, most likely to serve as additional protection for the convoy of the Kandrian Government.

A few Martial Apprentices on the side of the Kandrian Empire had died away in the middle of that heated battle. Their bodies had already begun being consumed by the roots of the forest that surfaced and began wrapping around their corpses and dragging them deeper into the ground. A process that Rui still found creepy.

Thankfully, his friends were all safe again once more. Though Rui swore that Nel might have even died had Rui not helped him out at that point.

Once the convoy arrived, it immediately began laying down heavy fortifications around the territory to begin securing it. The convoy had been supplied with its own defensive team that had tagged along with for security. With the defensive and offensive teams together, there was a security force protecting the territory until it stabilized.

It took forty-eight hours for the initial fortifications to be built. By then, the base had obtained enough stability for the offensive team to return to their previous territory. Their mission was complete, after all.

They would no doubt receive praise for their strong victory as well as a fat bonus from the Martial Union. On the other hand, the Sekigahara Confederate grew even more frustrated.

"Our defensive measures didn't work! That Martial Apprentice tore past our trio team meant to keep him preoccupied like it was easy. Then he proceeded to free up his comrade from his harasser. The two of them began accumulating damage onto our force until it became too much!"

The analyst department scratched their heads as they took even graver measures to handle them.

"Five high-rank Martial Apprentices." A sergeant said. "That's how much we'll deploy next time against codename Abyss. It doesn't matter how strong he is. No one in the Apprentice Realm can possibly fight high-ranking Martial Apprentices simultaneously. As for the stealth one, double the number of powerful sensory Martial Artists. He was unable to break past one of them all by himself. Two of them will be more than enough to finally take him down once and for all."

Their subordinates immediately bowed before heading out to make the preparations of executing the orders of their superiors.

He sighed. "Where did such a monster come from? Is he really even in the Apprentice Realm at all? They didn't find a way to smuggle inside the territory a Martial Squire, did they?"

That's how impressive Rui was. The predictions he made were high accuracy, furthermore, the counter-adaptive model of the VOID algorithm was abysmal. It was a style that allowed Rui to squeeze out literally drops of water from a stone.

They hadn't yet figured out his actual identity yet, as of this point. They had heard of similar corresponding pieces of information from the small nations that the Kandrian Empire has squared off against; The Republic of Jerefin, the State of Hreefal and the Kingdom of Nochus. Putting together an even more elaborate profile together.

"I found a lead on the identity of codename Abyss." Sekigaharan intelligence officer noted. "The fluidity and lack of uniformity in his fighting styles resemble that of Contest Rui Quarrier of the Martial Contest in the Kandrian Empire."

"What is the likelihood of this being the case?" The head of the intelligence department asked.

"Regardless, continue investigating the Martial Apprentice codename Abyss. We need to look at all possibilities and from the looks of it, this very well might be the case. Gather all of the information on the matter in any way you reasonably can. There's a very good chance we can use it to formulate a way to defeat that monster."

Chapter 430: Plan

There was a limit to the amount of militaristic capital that each of the nations was willing to spend on the expansion endeavors in the Serevian Dungeon. This limit had to do with the loss of the assets

suffered by nations in conflicts with other nations weighed against the profits made by the extraction of the esoteric resources from the territories in the Serevian Dungeon.

Although Martial Apprentices were meant to be deployed in conflicts, no nation was willing to stake too much. The number of Martial Apprentices that were qualified to be deployed in the Serevian Dungeon was not too high. After all, only the Martial Apprentices above grade seven were qualified to be deployed in the Serevian Dungeon. Otherwise, they were simply too weak.

These Martial Apprentices were valuable in and of themselves, after all, it took time, energy, dedication, and resources to train a Martial Apprentice to become grade seven. Each Martial Apprentice was valuable, they certainly weren't disposable or replaceable.

That was why every nation didn't harbor grand plans of trying to dominate the Serevian Dungeon territorially. Not that they didn't want all territory, but the cost of even attempting to fulfill such an extravagant ambition was simply not worth the reward. The losses would far outweigh the gains.

This was why Commissioner Feristen and Colonel Carnes grew shocked when Rui had informed them he knew of a way to defeat a large number of Martial Apprentices and other enemy militaristic assets rather swiftly all by himself without needing their forces to suffer any losses.

They didn't believe him at first.

How could they? It was too ridiculous to believe, even though they knew of Rui's accomplishments. But as Rui began explaining his plan to them, their eyes widened in shock as they realized, he just might be onto something!

"How sure are you of this?" Commissioner Feristen asked with a stern voice.

"Quite," Rui confirmed. "I had confirmed this when I first discovered the Serevian Dungeon in a mission. I have documented it as well using the eco-survey device that the Ministry of Environment and Ecology had given me so you can verify it through that as well."

"Are you able to exert as much control as you profess?" Colonel Carnes asked.

"Yes, I have mastered the technique quite well. I haven't used it in a while, for obvious reasons, but there is no problem in that regard."

"It's extremely risky." Commissioner Feristen told him. "You could die so fast that no potion could possibly save you!"

Rui thought about his words for a moment. "It's not impossible. But I have reason to be confident. Because of my mastery of the Mindmirror Symbiote, my reaction and processing speed greatly surpass what it would normally be. Furthermore, in my initial mission, I applied my Martial Art to become very familiar with them so that I can predict them very well. I am more than equipped to successfully undertake and complete this task."

The two leaders paused at those words, deep in thought. The plan that Rui proposed was bold and risky, yet if succeeded it would allow a single Martial Apprentice to annihilate an entire army!

The best part was that there were no chances that the losses would extend beyond a single Martial Apprentices regardless of whether it succeeded or failed.

"This is a great plan." Colonel Carnes nodded. "I have heard tales of your brilliance, it seems they were not exaggerated. We will, of course, pass this through with the joint strategic department of the Kandrian Empire and the Kandrian Martial Union just to be sure, of course."

Commissioner Feristen was not as enthusiastic.

Their positions were different. The Kandrian Royal Army did not lose anything even if Rui died. He was not a member of the Royal Army, after all.

Commissioner Feristen wasn't in the same situation. The Martial Union valued Rui immensely. They did not want to lose him if possible. He was their most powerful Martial Apprentice and that had become evidently clear even before his current proposal was put forward. Now, the value of him as a Martial Artist in the Serevian Dungeon wars had risen once more.

But the risk of the plan he had proposed was not light.

"...I'll pass on your plan to the higher-ups. If they approve it, then we can deploy it to implement your plan, otherwise, I cannot allow it." He explained.

"I understand." Rui nodded. "It was just an idea that hit me when I tried to think about what I could be doing better, and this is the plan I quickly created in response."

"You have a brilliant mind." Commissioner Feristen sighed. "Not even the strategic department had thought about this despite having access to this information. You're quite the Martial Artist, young man."

"Thank you, commissioner Feristen. But you flatter me." He smiled awkwardly. "Well, I've come to convey what I wanted to. If there's nothing else, I'll get going."

He bade the two men farewell as walked out of the building.

"What do you think?" Commissioner Feristen asked colonel Carnes.

"It seems like a viable plan." Colonel Carnes nodded, revealing a hint of eagerness. "If executed well, it could allow us to demolish all three of the other nations and monopolize all of the remaining territories. The Serevian Dungeon will soon be fully colonized for the most part. Only the core is left uncolonized, but not for long. This could allow us to win the scramble for the Serevian Dungeon."

"He's going to be facing the three armies of the three nations all by himself." Commissioner Feristen replied. "The risk is too high."

"His accomplishments are high. We've both gone through his file. He's accomplished things that would be dismissed as a fairy tale if he hadn't brought back irrefutable proof."

Commissioner Feristen remained silent. The body of the Martial Squire Caella Freelia had raised waves of shock as they absolutely corroborated the testimonies surrounding that mission. Testimonies at the center of which was Apprentice Rui Quarrier.