

Martial Unity 801

Chapter 801: Evaluation

Guildmaster Bradt narrowed his eyes. He understood what Rui meant. Rui did not need an objective set of standards laid out because he was confident in the legitimacy of his map, and confident that the guildmaster would willingly and voluntarily come to an agreement with him regarding all of these matters.

He had to admit that Rui was actually right. As long as the map was legitimate, he had every incentive to cooperate.

"Agreed," He stated.

"I'm glad we could come to an agreement regarding this matter," Rui smiled underneath the full-body attire.

"Only if your map is legitimate enough," The guildmaster snorted. "I have high standards. I need to, for my trade."

The intent to fully cooperate had been established, which was a good development according to Rui. The two of them went on to iron out the chinks in their agreement and lay out all the terms and conditions for everything.

It was best not to let anything be undefined or unclear. Rui specifically needed to make sure that he specified all the services that he was demanding from the Bradt Distribution Services, and he needed to make sure that he didn't miss anything that could be used as grounds to screw him over.

Thankfully, he had been quite prepared for this and had spent quite some time studying and researching the Bradt Distribution Services as well as the supplier market of the Shionel Confederation when he was planning everything out back in the Kandrian Empire.

"Well then," Guildmaster Bradt eventually said. "Seems like we've come to an agreement."

"Indeed," Rui nodded.

"I'll initiate our agreement when I've verified the veracity of these maps," He stated.

The two of them had come agreed that guildmaster Bradt had seven days to verify the legitimacy of the map and initiate the agreement by passing the bill that Rui had demanded him to. The bill that would allow Rui to operate anonymously while still being entirely legitimate. Once that was done, Rui could interpret that as the final seal of the deal and the approval of the maps, and the terms of contract would continue as specified.

According to the terms and conditions of the contract, Rui would be responsible for burying his harvest in a specified location and providing the Bradt Distribution Services of the location of the harvests via a marked letter, as well as the specifications of how he wanted the esoteric harvests to be sold.

The Bradt Distribution Services would dig it up and execute his instructions, ensuring that the esoteric resources that he harvested would be distributed in the manner that he specified.

Another issue that needed to be resolved was how the money earned from Rui's sales would be returned to Rui. Ultimately, an amendment was added to the condition surrounding the bill that Rui got Guildmaster Bradt to agree to, which allowed for the creation of anonymously registered financial accounts where Rui could access his funds anonymously. It was the only leverage that Guildmaster Bradt had over Rui that ensured that Rui would not attempt to screw him in some way.

One thing that the two of them fought over a bit was Rui revealing his true identity, which he refused in a heartbeat. His anonymity was the only reason that the Guildmaster did not have powerful leverage over him. He could not afford to simply give it up with no problems. It would give the guildmaster far too much power, and would slide the power dynamics to his favor.

Guildmaster Bradt pushed for it, yet Rui was willing to not have the deal altogether if he was adamant about this condition.

Inwardly, Guildmaster Bradt approved, he would have to reconsider dealing with Rui if he gave up his true identity so easily.

Eventually, two copies of a contract were drafted that both of them signed, Rui signed with his alias, of course. And finally, the deal was officiated.

"I'll be watching the news very carefully this week," Rui informed him as he left the guild branch. "I look forward to hearing news about the bill. I look forward to doing business with you."

He quickly disappeared into the Shionel Dungeon.

"Fuuu..." Guildmaster Bradt switched off the projection as he exhaled lightly.

"Hm," A small smile emerged on his face.

Although the outcome was not as perfectly ideally in his favor, it was still an extremely good outcome. He could not complain. He found a way to kill two of his biggest problems at once.

('And he knew that,') Guildmaster Bradt's eyes narrowed. ('He knew exactly what he was doing long before he walked into this. He must have long known that he had the potential to disrupt the supplier market, and had also correctly evaluated that rashly doing so was a bad idea. He must have extensively researched the political landscape of the Shionel Confederation before finding the perfect candidate to cooperate with; me.')

His opinion of this individual had risen greatly during their time together. He had come well-prepared. He even had the perfect counter for any threat of capture, with his little trick. It was another show of power, and it was him revealing that he had leverage that he would use if Bradt tried pulling some schemes that would push him too far.

Now, Guildmaster Bradt was far more restrained if he wanted to try and exploit Rui in any way. He always had to know that Rui could ruin the blessing that the dungeon was, and turn into a curse if he wanted.

That threat alone was enough to make Guildmaster Bradt forget any schemes that could potentially push Rui too far.

('It didn't feel like I was talking to a Martial Artist,') He noted.

This was true, he did not treat Rui like he would treat a Martial Artist, he instead treated him as an opponent who was worthy of competing with him, and earning his respect.

This was the first time he had met a Martial Artist whose combat prowess was not the most significant trait about them.

Chapter 802: Outcome

"Phew..." Rui exhaled deeply with relief when he entered the depths of the Shionel Dungeon. It was quite a strange reaction since most Martial Squires had the exact opposite reaction. Yet Rui felt quite secure in the dungeon, oddly enough.

Because he knew that every other creature in the dungeon was extremely insecure about their safety. He was the predator in the dungeon.

He considered the discussion that he'd just had with Guildmaster Bradt.

('A good outcome, for sure,') Rui nodded. Thankfully, it more or less went as he predicted, though he felt as though he had perhaps underestimated how much Guildmaster Bradt would look into his identity.

This was rough, he shouldn't have walked legitimately into the dungeon when he first cleared the second floor.

('Tsk, made a bit of a mistake,') Rui tutted. Still, it was far from a blunder, just a sub-optimal decision that reduced the solidity of his plan from as high as he'd ideally have wanted it to be.

He would need to take more precautions when it came to entering the dungeon, for one, he could not enter the dungeon normally on the same day that he planned on performing an extreme feat like clearing the dungeon. That would simply further narrow him down as a suspect. He needed to frequently raid the dungeon normally, and he could not do anything extreme on those days.

He also needed to make use of his regular accounts in the Adventurer Guild, and basically act the way the average Martial Squire did. He did not want to go too crazy.

He would save that for when he covertly entered the Shionel Dungeon with the help of Kane's Void Step. Thus no one would be able to tie him clearing floors to his true identity.

Furthermore, he could get rid of any attempt of trying to track him via who enters the dungeon and when this way, thereby clearing removing any potential issues of him for coincidentally entering the dungeon when he first cleared it.

Of course, new Martial Squires were pouring in every day, so it was frankly a meaningless coincidence and did not increase the probability that he would be found by any meaningful degree.

Still, he did not want to take any chances.

However, ultimately, he was quite satisfied with how this meeting turned out to be.

"You're finally here, Kane," He said abruptly said to seemingly no one.

"Look," Kane appeared out of thin air. "I understand you can sense me, and I understand you can sense in the dungeon. But how do you do both simultaneously? Shouldn't the difficulty of sensing me in the dungeon be astronomically higher? How do you still have no problem."

Rui chuckled at the outburst. "It's because I'm not directly sensing you. I'm sensing something inanimate that is reacting to you."

"Huh?"

Rui considered his words for a moment. "It would be like if you were walking on a very marshy plain, leaving behind footprints while using Void Step. A normal person could not possibly sense you, but they can still pay attention to the marsh and the mud, and notice your footprints. Thus, they can track your location even if they cannot directly sense you. I'm basically doing the same thing but with space itself, rather than a marsh."

"I have a technique with which I can walk without leaving footprints behind, though,"

Rui furrowed his eyebrows as he gave Kane a pointed look.

"Alright fine, that does make sense," Kane sighed. "So, how did your little meeting go?"

"A success," Rui replied calmly, getting up to his feet. "We'll get the affirmation before the weekends."

"Good to hear, but what's taking so long?"

"Well, he can't just take me at my word regarding the map," Rui replied. "He'll verify it, then we'll get the message."

"What message?"

"A new amendment to the existing rules and regulations of the Adventurer Guild," Rui smirked.

"That's one hell of a message,"

"Indeed,"

The two of them walked out of the Shionel Dungeon freely with Void Step in effect. Rui did his part by suppressing his power to that of a normal human with the help of his Mind Mask.

Later that week, his prediction came to be. He joined the large crowd at the center of the town where a giant equivalent of a press hearing was being held by Guildmaster Bradt on behalf of the Shionel Merchant Guild announcing the revisions and amendments to existing policy surrounding the necessity of identity verification and registration to start companies and financial guild accounts.

A huge uproar rippled across the nation at the seemingly abrupt change in policy as the Shionel merchant Guild surprisingly laxed its registration protocols, despite having set those in the first place, for seemingly no reason.

A lot of speculation emerged around this as many theorized that the Shionel Merchant Guild was unable to withstand the pressure from foreign companies regarding the high level of requirements needed to operate comfortably in the Shionel Confederation in regard to any venture of the Shionel Dungeon. After all, this certainly benefited foreign Martial Squires more than any other group.

Many speculated that this was an initiative to allow for an even greater influx from those Martial Artists whose identities were quite tricky. After all, the Shionel Merchant Guild has signed extensive extradition treaties with all foreign nations in the geographic vicinity, it was the bare minimum that was required, and they were required by law to hand over any criminals who were fugitives from other nations.

This new amendment made it a lot easier for people with less than clean backgrounds and histories to enter the nation and partake in the raid and plunder of the Shionel Dungeon and even operate in the markets legally thanks to the new anonymous registration policies.

However, there was no genuine official reason barring meaningless diplomatic blubber, and there were only two people in the world who understand the reason for the significant and important event.

"I accept your deal," Rui voiced out loud as he read the message that Guildmaster Bradt was conveying to him, and nobody else.

Chapter 803: Passed

"All in favor of the proposed motion?" Guildmaster Bradt looked around the Guild Forum.

A few members of the Shionel Merchant Guild raised their hands, while most did not.

"All against the proposed motion?"

This time, most members of the Shionel Merchant Guild raised their arms tall and straight.

Guildmaster Bradt nodded. "The motion is firmly rejected by the forum with a majority of seventy-eight votes against twenty, with a voter turnout of ninety-eight votes out of a hundred. Are there any objections to this outcome?"

He was greeted by silence before he proceeded with the meeting.

"Then the motion to instate amendment C-16 into the constitution is hereby firmly rejected," He paused for a second, before continuing. "With the power vested me in as the Guildmaster of the Shionel Merchant Guild, I hereby choose to exercise my veto authority and my decision vote for the instation of amendment C-16."

This sent ripples of shock across the Guild Forum. The current ongoing meeting was the legislative process of the Shionel Merchant Guild, where the one-hundred cabinet merchants of the Shionel Merchant Guild gathered to decide policy and address agendas for the day.

Policy was addressed in the form of amendment or addition proposals backed by at least ten members of the forum, which would be presented and argued by the proponents of the amendment in an open moderated caucus, and an unmoderated caucus, both of which were forms of discourse that occurred in legislative bodies such as the Shionel Merchant Guild. Once extensive discussion and debate surrounding the policy proposal were conducted, the matter would come to a vote.

Any proposal needed more than sixty percent of the votes of the Guild Forum in order to be passed. Guildmaster Bradt's policy proposal, which only had twenty, fell far below the necessary bar to be passed.

That was why it was quite surprising to everyone in the forum to see the good guildmaster fully exert the veto authority and the decision vote that undid the outcome of the votes and returned the proposal back to the discussion stage, and the deciding vote which of the Guildmaster which counted for sixty-one votes.

The latter was a privilege that could be used a limited number of times and excluded matters such as the electoral process. It was also limited to being used only once per Guild Forum atop all of that to ensure that it couldn't be abused. Still, this particular policy proposal was one where it could be and was used.

The fact that it was a limited ability meant that it was quite precious to the Guildmaster and was generally reserved for their most important and significant policy matters. No one had expected that Guildmaster Bradt would use one of his decision votes randomly in favor of an absurd policy like drastically relaxing the identity verification and registration requirements.

Guildmaster Bradt had never expressed any support for this kind of policy change in the past, he had not engaged in even a shred of political lobbying or campaigning to gather support from the constituents of the Guild Forum, which was an extremely basic and standard norm that all of them necessarily engaged in.

What was especially surprising was that he was willing to go as far as to use his decision vote to overrule the votes of basically most of the Shionel merchant Guild for what was clearly his own self-interest.

This was generally frowned upon and most guildmasters tended to avoid doing this as it would lose the support of these same constituents and voters when the next election came around. These were the checks and balances that every guildmaster faced to ensure that they did not go too far with tyrannically using their veto privilege and their limited decision votes to blatantly overrule the entire Merchant Guild on matters.

Guildmaster Bradt Patrick himself was one who abstained from doing this too often and still won most political conflicts through excellent lobbying and campaigning. He was powerful, and extremely shrewd, and even without his authority, he was more than capable of coming out on top.

Yet, this time he had diverged from that pattern and straightforwardly used both his privileges at once. The many cabinet merchants of the Shionel Merchant Guild could not help but be extremely surprised about this turn of events, they could not help but wonder what exactly was going on. Clearly, something had happened that had made Guildmaster Bradt impatient and extremely adamant on this matter.

"Motion for an open-forum unmoderated caucus on the topic of Bill C-16 for a duration of ten minutes," Chairman Deacon loudly declared with a stern expression, drawing the attention of the entire forum to him.

Guildmaster Bradt glanced at him, nodding, before turning back. "All in favor?"

Every single hand went up.

"Motion is granted in light of unanimous voter support," Guildmaster Bradt declared

An unmoderated and open-forum caucus was an informal meeting where the constituents of the forum did not need to abide by any norms while engaging in discussion with each other barring a few basic rules.

"What is the meaning of this?" Chairman Deacon coldly demanded, speaking as soon as the motion was granted. He glared at Guildmaster Patrick with burning eyes. Of all the people in the Merchant Guild, he was the one who had been the most vehemently opposed to this policy.

The first reason was that he naturally opposed the policy itself. It would cause nothing but problems for the Shionel Confederation down the line, and even when judged purely on its merits, he could only evaluate it to be poor, at best.

The second reason he opposed it was that it was against his own personal interests. It meant that if a person somehow disrupted the Shionel supplier market, he would have a far harder time tracking that person down and identifying them. This was something he was especially sensitive to, given that someone recently had singlehandedly shown the ability to disrupt the market. He could not help but feel that the guildmaster was partly passing the policy to hinder his own growth.

Chapter 804: Debate

The final reason was that the policy came from his largest political opponent, and he was almost obliged to push back on the matter unless it was truly something that he ought not to oppose.

"What do you mean?" Guildmaster Bradt replied blankly.

"Don't play dumb!" Chairman Deacon barked back. "What is the meaning of this policy? How could you force a policy that is ripe for exploitation from the underworld and criminals of all kinds? You'll turn the Shionel Confederation into a breeding ground for criminals all across the continent!"

"Criminals who are mostly criminals in other legalities," Guildmaster Bradt corrected. "Furthermore, these criminals will immediately be captured and deported to other nations where we have extradition

treaties as per our international protocols, correct? At worst, they will be denied entry into our nation because the new policy that has just been passed laxes identity verification registration only for legal and passed migrants after they have already joined the nation. It does not apply to immigration protocols, do not pretend as if you do not know this."

Chairman Deacon gritted his teeth. Technically, he was not wrong. After all, it was true that any wanted fugitive would get deported, or at the very least denied entry into the country, however, that did not mean they could be stopped from entering the nation.

"Those immigration protocols only prevent them from entering the nation legally," Chairman Deacon pointed out. "They do not stop them from infiltrating the nation. The borders of the nation are simply too far and vast to prevent all Martial Artists from entering them."

"That's an issue that has to do with border security and surveillance than anything to do with the internal policies of the Shionel Adventurer Guild," Guidmaster Patrick frowned. "Why do you bring that up?"

"Because the new policy allows for illegal immigrants to register with the guild anonymously and set up businesses anonymously," Chairman Deacon retorted coldly. "That used to not be the case, as only those who entered the country legally were allowed to register with the guild, this allows illegal immigrants to freely enter the Shionel Dungeon and register with the Adventurer Guild."

This was a valid point that could not be denied.

"That is true," Guildmaster Bradt nodded. He had already anticipated that somebody would bring this up. Denying such a thing with pedantic arguments would only reflect bad on him. "However, the solution to our inadequate security cannot be to mold every other law to account for that. We should instead strive to secure our borders as much as possible. Even without this new policy, it is still possible for illegally immigrated Martial Squires to engage in work surrounding the Shionel Dungeon due to fake identities and backgrounds that can be obtained from the underworld. We need to develop a far more rigorous and secure system that can ensure that we do not need to bow down to those who exploit the holes in our system. Your suggestion reeks of cowardice and fear, I instead aim to show the world that our country's security is not a joke that can be treated lightly. That is why I intend to bring forth a motion to explore a higher budget and a greater allocation of resources to the Shionel Border Force that will allow our protectors to fulfill their duties better."

This earned some approval from the cabinet ministers, Guildmaster Bradt had cleverly relied on a nationalistic sentiment to deflect Chairman Deacon's criticisms of the policy that he had passed being harmful to the nation.

"And if it doesn't work out, are you willing to take full responsibility?" Chairman Deacon narrowed his eyes.

"I have always taken responsibility for my decisions and actions," Guildmaster Bradt remarked, giving Chairman Deacon a knowing look that the latter did not understand. "In time, you will understand the true wisdom behind my actions."

Those were cryptic words, but people did not doubt them immediately when they considered the man uttering them.

Who was Bradt Patrick? A man who came from truly nothing. He had risen to the very peak of the economy of the Shionel Confederation through his deeply shrewd and ruthless analytical insight and decision-making, before sizing.

His credibility was extremely high, and it became clear to everyone that there were deeper considerations to this policy change that they did not quite understand yet.

Chairman Deacon only grew more alarmed at that realization. It brought him deep anxiety at not understanding his opponent's actions and decisions. There was no doubt that this policy was in the interests of the guildmaster more than anyone else, which meant that it was naturally against his own interests.

He didn't know what to think about the matter, but he intended to get to the bottom of it.

If he didn't keep up, he would have the rug pulled out from under his feet, and he will have squandered the one opportunity that had presented itself in the form of the Shionel Dungeon to usurp his formidable rival. The Shionel Dungeon truly benefited him more than it did anybody else given the sector that his company operated in was almost made for it.

The previously hopeless gap between him and the guildmaster of the Shionel Merchant Guild had been shortening at a steady pace. The massive capital that he had gained as a result allowed him to sway more support from many of the cabinet merchants of the Shionel Merchant Guild, steadily building his political capital. His faction was slowly catching up to that of Guildmaster Bradt, and he predicted that there was a realistic chance of him winning when the next election, which was in over a year, came.

That was why he was particularly paranoid about the timing of this policy change. A single policy change could cause a ripple effect that could snowball in that time and ruin his plans. He didn't like that he was unable to understand the full depth of his opponent's plan, though he knew that it was by no means as innocent as it seemed on the surface.

Chapter 805: Show Off

"Is that everything?" Rui asked from under a mask.

"No, just a few more signatures here and here," A support staff member of the Shionel Merchant Guild replied, pointing to where he needed to sign. Rui quickly nodded, following through.

"And that's everything, Mr. Falken," She replied with a smile. "Congratulations, you are now officially a merchant of the Shionel Merchant Guild."

"Thank you," Rui replied, smiling.

"Here is the guild-issued key that will allow you to identify yourself as the owner of your new company," She handed him a key. "Be sure to never lose it, otherwise your identity can be usurped and your company could potentially be taken."

"I understand," Rui nodded. "I do appreciate the warning."

About three days had passed since Bill C-16 had been passed in the Shionel Confederation. A rush to anonymously create a company in the Shionel Confederation without the need for identity registration had formed. It was clear that, for whatever reasons, a lot of people had compunctions about registering their real identity in the Shionel Merchant Guild, thus this new amendment was quite welcome to all these people.

Rui walked out, before running towards the inner ring of the Adventurer Town. He didn't want to take any chances, in case Guildmaster Bradt managed to track his location, being near the dungeon increased his security since he could use it as a threat, and quite the effective one at that.

"You're here," Kane noted. "Is it done?"

"Yep, I'm officially a merchant now," Rui grinned wryly.

"A Martial Artist merchant," Kane scoffed.

"They're not even unheard of in this nation, quite strange, isn't it?" Rui noted.

"What's going to happen to your new company when we leave though?" Kane asked.

"It's going to die, of course," Rui snorted. "It will serve its use while I'm here, but I have no care for it once we leave the Shionel Confederation."

The two of them disappeared into thin air before returning back to their inn in the outer ring of the Shionel Confederation.

The dungeon served as a good gateway to lose any trackers or surveillants since no Martial Squire could possibly track them with the Void Step and the Riemannian Echo, that Kane and Rui possessed, and Martial Seniors couldn't go anywhere near the Shionel Dungeon without destroying it advertently.

Thus, they could be relatively certain that nobody knew that they were associated with the identity of the Voider.

"So, what now?"

"Now, we finally go all out and begin doing what we originally came here for," Rui explained. "We have the cover for our identity as well as sufficient backing. We have the means of selling our harvests without anybody interfering, while Bradt Patrick handles all the distribution and sales on behalf of us."

"What's the name of the company, again?" Kane asked.

"Esosale Suppliers," Rui replied, earning a frown from Kane. "That's surprisingly down to Earth, I thought you would call it the 'Void Supplies Company,' or something like that. Your naming sense genuinely sucks, after all."

"Naming it Void is stupid, that would be a very direct association with the Voider and would fulfill the standards of probable cause for investigation, not even the guildmaster will be able to protect us in that case without being charged with obstruction of justice," Rui replied calmly. "Being lowkey is better in this case. Although some people will still figure it out, it won't mean much since there is no avenue for starting an official investigation."

"So that means that they are completely unable to do anything to us?" Kane grinned.

"It's not that simple," Rui explained calmly. "They may be unable to use the resources of the guild and the state to track us, but they can still engage in their own investigations, the people who will be pissed off by us are not incompetent and incapable. Each of the hundred cabinet ministers of the Shionel Merchant Guild is a chairman or president of the top hundred companies of the Shionel Confederation across all industries and sectors. Including distribution, suppliers, manufacturers, firms, media companies, brokers, weapons contractors, Martial contractors, etc. These people possess a great amount of power and influence and usually have established investigative or intelligence departments or divisions inside their companies. Do not underestimate them, if we slip up, we'll be caught."

"Damn, and here I thought we could relax," Kane sighed dramatically.

"That's not true," Rui raised an eyebrow. "You knew that this would be far from a fun little trip."

The two of them immediately began preparing for their next dungeon raid after they reached home. The time for politics was over, and the time for plundering the Shionel Dungeon in earnest had arrived. Even their previous dungeon raid could be considered to be a part of the preparations.

But now, all preparations were done.

"Ready?" Rui asked him when they were nearly done. He had equipped himself with his sword and his air pipe, as well as his dimensional storage ring.

"Yep," Kane adjusted his attire, nodding. "Let's head out."

He put his arm on Rui's shoulder, before inhaling deeply.

The two of them vanished into thin air as they left their inn, heading for the Shionel Dungeon.

No one knew that the two of them were inside the dungeon at this point in time, and thus no one could possibly suspect their true identities as the collective identity for the Voider, this was another safety measure that Rui had come up with, since he was officially always with Kane and the Voider was probably strongly suspected to be acting individually by Guildmaster Bradt. This way their real identities as registered in the Shionel Adventurer Guild would probably be removed from the suspect pool quite quickly by Guildmaster Bradt.

"We've arrived," Rui noted as they crossed the inner barrier. "Let's get to work immediately."

"You said you didn't want to go for the third floor, right?" Kane carefully asked.

"That's right," Rui replied. "We're going to have to show off a bit more this time."

Chapter 806: Venom

"The twelfth floor is the current frontier of floors," Rui told him. "We're going to clear it."

"If it's the current frontier of floors, then that probably means that it's going to take quite some time to harvest all those organic and mineral ores, right?" Kane asked.

"Right," Rui nodded. "Your stealth is going to be quite necessary to keep our identities hidden."

The two of them navigated through the many tunnels in the dungeon. Kane mostly followed Rui who confidently plodded through them without any hesitation.

Suddenly, he drew his sword, swinging to his side.

SPLAT

Kane's eyes widened as a decapitated serpent collapsed to the ground, still slithering while its head rolled away.

"Careful, stay away from the head, it's still alive and will bite anything that goes near it," Rui warned him, while carefully avoiding the snake. "The head can survive for days after its decapitation, and its venom is still extremely potent. Neither of us will survive a single bite."

"Woah..." Kane murmured as he kept a healthy distance away from the head. "Is that a snake native to one of the floors of the dungeon?"

Rui nodded in response. "It's known as the Inland Shionel Taipan. A highly venomous species of serpent."

"What floor is this from?" Kane asked.

"The twelfth floor, of course," Rui replied before he sheathed his Bellhorn Steel blade.

"Which is our destination, correct?" Kane glanced at him with a wry smile.

"Correct," Rui nodded. "Let's get going, we're not that far."

Because Rui had the ability to focus his Riemannian Sense in one particular direction, he could fully explore tunnels while also committing the tunnels to memory in his Mind Palace, for later use in creating the map.

Thus he did not need to go down a tunnel in order to see what was at the end of the tunnel. That was something that no other Martial Squire could do, it would save him time when he would begin exploring and discovering new floors all by himself.

STEP

He paused, gesturing for Kane to stop and signaling for him to use Void Step.

PAT

"We're here?" Kane asked as his eyes narrowed as they started walking to ensure the Void Step technique stayed active.

"That's right, look," Rui gestured as they entered the floor. "We're in a really special place."

Kane's eyes widened as he beheld the environment they had just stepped into.

"I... I thought we were underground?" Kane looked up high.

"We are underground," Rui replied as he too looked up with raised eyebrows.

"Then... You wanna explain why we're looking at the sky?"

Where the dark ceiling of the dungeon was supposed to be was a clear blue sky, for some reason. It was an extremely bizarre sight that made them question their sanity for a second. Perhaps they were dreaming this all up.

Rui had gathered intelligence on this before, thus he wasn't too caught off-guard. "The reason is unclear, however, it is not the sky. The ceiling of the floor still exists, it's just giving off a light that matches the sky, for some reason. Nobody has been able to study since only Martial Squire can enter here.

"That's really novel," Kane murmured.

"It is, but it isn't what we should be focusing on," Rui gestured around. "There are countless Inland Shionel Taipans infesting this area outside of eyesight.

That drew Kane's attention and he immediately began paying attention to his surroundings. The snake they killed earlier freaked him out a lot, thus he couldn't help but be very much on guard even if he did trust Rui's senses and alertness.

Their environment was tall grasslands with grass that exceeded their height. It obstructed his vision and made it harder for him to sense things that could be a threat to him.

Rui glanced in a certain direction, before quickly pacing over to a certain location, dragging Kane with him.

"This floor is the frontier as well, so, monsters aren't the only thing we'll run into," Rui said as he slowed down, gesturing ahead of them.

There was a Martial Squire a few meters ahead of them lying on the ground unconscious. Her skin had completely turned purple, and in the immediate vicinity was the corpse of another big taipan.

"Is she...?" Kane asked grimly.

"She's alive," Rui replied calmly. "But she won't survive even if we did everything in our power to bring her back out of the dungeon, she's going to die soon."

Rui glanced around at the shattered landscape in the vicinity, indicating a fierce battle.

"From the looks of it, she's actually a high-tier Martial Squire," He noted. "The battle seems pretty onesided. She must have crushed the serpent swiftly, before making the mistake of turning her back on it thinking it was dead because of the severed body, and the still-alive serpent must have caught her off-guard with a single strike from behind, sinking its fangs into her chest, instantly injecting her entire chest cavity with its potent venom into all of her vital organs. Hence, it explains why the serpent's body is so battered and wounded all over from being overwhelmed by her lethal attacks, and why she only has a single wound. I'm surprised she's even alive, even if barely. She must have undergone poison resistance training, but that has merely prolonged her suffering all this time, even if she probably only has a few minutes left."

He pointed at the two deep black necrotic fang wounds visible above her chest.

"So there's nothing we can do, huh?" Kane sighed.

"That's not quite right," Rui replied, as he drew his sword.

SPLAT

Faster than the eye could see, the blade effortlessly decapitated her. Rui swung his sword, ridding it of blood before sheathing it. Kane didn't begrudge his decision. If there was no saving her, then ending her suffering was the least that could be done for her.

"She overestimated herself and underestimated the dungeon," Rui replied with a solemn expression. "We should learn from her example. Always stay alert. Don't let your guard down just because we have a powerful strategy."

Chapter 807: Gathering

The two of them left the corpse of the Martial Squire behind, Rui had no intention of lugging the corpse back to the surface in order to return it to her dependents or friends. It seemed that she had entered the dungeon alone too, as opposed to being part of a party.

"Alright, what do we do?" Kane asked, turning to Rui.

"Our goal is to harvest all the esoteric ores of this floor," Rui explained. "The biggest threat on this floor is the bite from the taipan which would kill us. The simplest way to avoid them is by sky-walking, however, if we do that, we cannot get at the esoteric ores that are on and beneath the ground."

Rui calmly analyzed the situation that they were in. "I would rather avoid combat with the serpents. This is different from the second floor where the rabbits, while very dangerous, were not extremely lethal. Here, even if I chop up all of the taipans, there is still the chance that I would get bitten by a surviving head hiding under the pile of corpses and flesh that I would leave behind. My Riemannian Sense is different from Primordial Instinct in the sense that its affinity for combat is not too great."

Primordial instinct was simply his danger sense and risk evaluation sense highly trained to detect and counter threats based on the sensory data that he naturally gathered from all of his senses. The latter was hampered, thus Primordial Instinct was also naturally hampered.

However, that did not mean that the Riemannian Sense could replace Primordial instinct. It was not an instinctual sense and was actually closer to reading a language than it was sensing his surroundings.

"That makes sense," Kane nodded. "So it's a simple plan of harvesting the esoteric ores on the ground when we're in stealth, and then moving back to the air when I time out, right?" Kane asked.

"It's a simple plan but entirely effective," Rui replied. "However, we cannot go too high, I don't want to be spotted by others even if their senses are hampered and it wouldn't really matter."

"Wouldn't that mean that we're within their striking range?" Kane asked.

"Yes, but I am more confident of ensuring that I can't be caught off-guard if I'm sky-walking. Because their decapitated heads would fall back to the ground and won't be able to hurt me from the ground. Furthermore, all the attacks would come from only one direction, down. Dealing with attacks coming from one direction is vastly easier than dealing with directions coming from all directions, which is liable to be the case if you time out on land and we're in a snake-infested pit."

Rui was confident that as long as he could turn his back up to the ceiling of the floor without fearing an attack on his back, he could handle even a barrage of snake attacks.

"Let's begin," He told Kane, who promptly nodded, putting his arm on Rui's back before the two of them descended into the grasslands.

Rui could see why this kind of environment was great for the snakes, the lack of visibility as well as the sensory jamming meant that it was difficult for many Martial Squires to safely identify all of the snakes ahead of time. They would need to react after an attack was initiated, which wasn't easy, albeit not impossible.

Rui, on the other hand, not only knew the locations of all the snakes within a few kilometers of radius around him but also verified that they could not sense him thanks to Void Step. Thus the two of them were confident that as long as they were in any level of meaningful motion, they could avoid being detected.

Rui was more than fast enough, by virtue of being a Martial Squire, to set up the instruments, apply them to extract both the mineral and organic ores from the land and from the roots of the dungeon and the grass, and put them in a bag, all before he walked a single step.

There were even moments when he extracted mineral and organic ores right in front of the faces of a bunch of taipans, and they did not even so much as budge!

('What a remarkable technique,') Rui grinned to himself

PAT PAT PAT

Kane quickly tapped him twice, indicating that he was about a minute away from his limit. Even though one minute was no different to a Martial Squire than an hour, Rui did not want to take any risks whatsoever. One minute was not worth risking their lives by accidentally not being prepared for the time-out in time.

If it just so happened that they timed out when Rui was just digging, even he would not be able to draw his weapons and kill all of them before at least one of them gets a bite in, which would be game over for him.

"Phew..." Kane elevated himself a meter higher than Rui.

SHING

Rui drew his sword from his scabbard before the technique was deactivated.

Instantly, three snakes shot up from the ground, lunging meters high into the air.

"SSSSK!"

Their lunges were so extraordinarily fast that the atmosphere itself recoiled in a sonic boom as they shot forth with enough power to destroy an entire building.

Yet, the second they reached Rui, the world suddenly went dark for them. They lost all sight, awareness, and even consciousness.

SPLAT

A single arc from his Hellborn Stell blade cleaved past their skulls, splitting their eyes in half. Rui specifically make sure that he destroyed the brain, to ensure that the head did not retain consciousness where it could hurt unsuspecting Martial Squires.

The two halves of their skull blasted away from each other so faster that it was almost as though they were magically parting way for the blade.

SHING

He immediately sheathed his blade to ensure it reached maximum coldness once more. The only disadvantage that the blade had was that it needed to be cooled, which meant he needed to periodically sheath his blade in order to maintain its effectiveness over time.

Chapter 808: Harvest

Several more taipans gathered before lunging at them from the ground, yet all of them split apart like butter to a warm knife. Although the sheer quantity of taipans on the floor was not something that could be underestimated, each individual monster was not that strong, most of them were more or less between grade one and grade three, depending on their size.

Every once in a while he would run into one with the speed and power of a grade-four Martial Squire, yet, it did not matter.

"FUUUU..." Rui blasted a snake with cracklingly hot air, paralyzing the snake the second the air hit its skin.

SPLAT!

A full-body swing of his blade split it apart so forcefully that it launched the two portions flying away from each other.

Rui glanced at the greenish-black blood on his blade.

('The monsterified snakes have undergone a change in the color of their blood due to ingesting food in the dungeon,') Rui noted as he swung his sword, cleaning it of all blood., before sheathing it to cool it down.

"Alright, great job," Kane told him. "I'm ready for another round."

Rui nodded. "Let's begin immediately."

The two of them went through the same process multiple times, as they scoured the grasslands. Rui made sure to take routes that avoided coming in contact with other Martial Squires, though that wasn't always easy.

Many a time, they ran into parties of Martial Squires, in which case they would take a detour to return to later, or they would continue extracting resources if Kane indicated he had enough stamina to ensure

that they wouldn't have to reveal themselves by being forced to deactivate his Void Step while in their vicinity.

"Argh!" Rui heard from a distance. "Who mined all the ores without killing the snakes first?! How is that even possible?!"

"Did the snakes eat all the ores?! Where did they go?"

It seemed as though a party of Martial Squires had just come across the area that Rui had finished mining from. He laughed to himself as he continued extracting all the esoteric ores that he came along by on his way.

They continued scouring entire districts with a huge area before large chunks of the floor had been completely plundered despite the taipans seemingly intact.

A general wave of confusion spread across the Martial Squires in the dungeon, this didn't make any sense, after all. The Martial Squires began growing increasingly frustrated that despite fighting so many taipans and killing all of them in the vicinity, they ended up digging through only to find that the soil had already been dug up and ores had clearly already been extracted.

Many had even had their comrades die due to a venom bite that killed them before they were able to get them to safety. And at the end of it all, they found that the sacrifice had been in vain. It was unbelievable.

Everyone realized something was very wrong. This had never happened to date from the day that the Shionel Dungeon had been opened. In order to get past the monsters, you needed to kill them.

Yet here there was someone who was able to bypass these rules!

Half a day passed before Rui had reached his storage limit.

"Damn, we had a good haul," Rui stretched his arms. The two of them inspected their goods before Rui quickly stored them in his dimensional storage.

The two of them had stripped the floor of a considerable proportion of its esoteric ores. Even if the floor was as wide as a large town, two Martial Squires could get a lot of work done across half a day!

They had worked extremely hard until they physically could not work harder.

"Let's get going, we can come back tomorrow," Rui told Kane. "Assuming the rest aren't finished."

He considered the fact that a lot of monsters had been left while the esoteric ores in their areas had been mined. What would that mean for the monsters?

In time, he suspected Martial Squires would leave them alone at increasingly high rates. There were very few people that would be willing to fight and kill the monsters for no reward.

That would probably slow down Guildmaster Patrick's ambitions of commercializing the dungeon and dominating it with the fact that he would be the only one who had a map on it and would be able to maintain stable operations in the Shionel Dungeon.

However, if the dungeon was still infested with monsters that hadn't been killed, then that would be quite problematic for him.

Thankfully, Rui had not divulged the ways in which he intended to extract ores. Still, this would hurt his political opponent even more since getting people to extract ores would become harder now that the difficulty was also starting to rise now that Rui intended to go full throttle with his abilities.

This meant that his remarkable growth climb would also be hindered by that fact. That was extremely desirable to the guildmaster, thus Rui was certain that he would be pleased by this outcome. On the other hand, the number of esoteric ores in weight being mined and extracted from the dungeon would not decrease with Rui and Kane sweeping up the floors of the Shionel Dungeon, and thus there were little to no ways in which the distribution of these esoteric resources would negatively impact his own business endeavors.

In fact, if Rui and Kane happened to work even faster, then Guildmaster Bradt would actually experience a boost in growth himself, even before he used the map to dominate the commercialization of the Shionel Dungeon after all of it was completely emptied and erased.

"Still, there's going to be a storm way bigger than last time, that's for sure," Rui murmured with a resigned smile. The mystery of the missing ores would become prime gossip in the Shionel Confederation and he knew that there was no way that he could possibly avoid inevitably becoming the center of attention even if nobody knew who he was.

Chapter 809: Aftermath

"Damn it! He got me!" Chairman Deacon slammed the table with his fist with gritted teeth.

An outrage had erupted in the Shionel Dungeon with many Martial Squires suddenly reporting that esoteric mineral and organic ore deposits and extracts from the twelfth floor of the Shionel Dungeon had begun disappearing in large droves without any evident cause for their disappearance.

They were clearly dug and extracted, however, for some reason, this had happened despite the taipans, of the area over which they had been extracted, still being alive. It was as though the ghost had walked in and harvested all the esoteric ores and simply disappeared.

That wasn't all.

The net yield that was predicted for the day from all of the Martial Squires was far less than the norm. The Shionel Adventurer Guild published the daily amount of esoteric ores harvested and mined from the Shionel Dungeon. Since it was still early into the exploration of the twelfth floor, the industry experts had predicted a great increase in the supply of esoteric ore deposits, yet the opposite had happened, due to this strange phenomenon. The Martial Squires reported a stark absence of the presence of the esoteric ore deposits on the twelfth at an increasing rate as the day passed. As though someone was magically sucking them up without anybody else noticing.

However, what followed was even more surprising, a brand-new supplier company that nobody had ever heard about called Esosale Suppliers came out of nowhere and suddenly began selling quantities of esoteric resources to many large-scale manufacturers in the consumer market.

What was even more puzzling was that the company appeared to be in a heavy partnership with Bradt Distribution Services. The Bradt Distribution Services thoroughly and wholly liaised as a representative for any third party that wished to purchase supplies of esoteric resources from Esosale Suppliers.

The only way to contact Esosale Suppliers was through the Bradt Distribution Services. Many purchasers scoured the nation looking for some sort of main branch or even a small office for Esosale Suppliers, yet not a single person could find any trace of this company. This company did not have any presence in the economy in the form of employees, contracts and partnerships, a face for the company, any sort of establishment, or any interaction with any of the sectors and industries that an esoteric resource supplier company would inevitably get involved with. There was nothing out there in the nation for anybody interested in the company to tangibly interact with. Nothing.

In other words, it was what was commonly referred to as a shell company, a company that only existed in name, registered in the ownership of an anonymous merchant whose identity was unknown thanks to the policy amendment that the Guildmaster Bradt had passed with nothing else to it besides from a bank account, also anonymously registered.

This was a strange but ultimately inscrutable oddity to the market, and consumers quickly flocked to the Bradt Distribution Services to purchase substantial quantities of esoteric resource deposits from Esosale Suppliers, and the small imbalance that was caused between momentary lack of supply was stabilized.

People could not help but venture to wonder where this ghost of a company was getting a large sum of money from. After all, it was an inescapable fact that a large number of Martial Squires were required to harvest esoteric resource deposits from the Shionel Dungeon. Where were these Martial Squires coming from? It would be impossible to hide dozens of Martial Squires working for a company since every Martial Squire that entered the Shionel Dungeon was registered to the Shionel Adventurer Guild, and it was possible to track the general affiliations and patrons of the various Martial Squires attempting to clear out the Shionel Adventurer Guild.

Not a single Martial Squire registered with the Shionel Adventurer Guild was verifiably associated with Esosale Suppliers. Furthermore, there was no way they could enter the Shionel Dungeon without being registered to the Adventurer Guild anyways. So where exactly was the company getting such a large supply of esoteric resource deposits?

Furthermore, the timing of this was suspicious to many people who possessed greater information and insight. It seemed quite clear that it was highly likely that there was some connection between Esosale Suppliers and the missing esoteric ore deposits in the Shionel Dungeon on the twelfth floor.

"It's that bastard," Chairman Deacon's expression crumpled with anger. "It has to be him."

Chairman Deacon was not incompetent, the fact that Esosale was completely represented and even managed by the Bradt Distribution Services was a clear indication to him that Esosale Suppliers was an empty shell meant to draw attention away from Guildmaster Bradt. He was relatively certain that Guildmaster Bradt was the one who created Esosale Suppliers anonymously, and he was the one pretending it was another third party.

"That may have been why he passed that policy in the first place. No, it must be related at the very least," He murmured with a grim expression.

The only question was what the precise reason that he needed to hide the registered owner of the company was. Guildmaster Bradt had gone as far as to use his limited and precious decision vote to do so.

He could have just straightforwardly created a public esoteric supplies division in his company, or started a new company without having to rely on such deception. In fact, it would probably bring him even more prestige which yields him more political capital. Yet he went out of his way to change policies to allow the creation and registration of a company to be anonymous, specifically, the Esosale Supplier Company.

"The reason he didn't do that... is because he couldn't? But if this was his idea, and he created the plan and is also managing it then no one could stop him," He frowned, before his eyes widened. "Unless it wasn't his plan or his achievement in the first place..."

He felt as though he had come close to hitting the truth of the matter.

Chapter 810: Voidhunters

The idea of some unknown entity conspiring with Guildmaster Bradt send a chill down his spine. However, his deductions were not without merit. If Guildmaster Bradt truly was the sole mastermind and the sole cause for the strange disappearances of the esoteric ore deposits as well as for Esosale Suppliers, then he would have had plenty of reasons and incentives to be more straightforward, open, and even flashy about it.

Yet he didn't, even if it was very much for his interests. That means that he probably was not the sole mastermind responsible for everything related to these recent events, if there was another entity that was also responsible for this with differing interests, then it would explain why Guildmaster Bradt has not acted on his interests alone. He has a partner who is aiding him with this. Maybe even more than one!

('But what exactly is that serpent gaining from this supposed partner or partners?') He furrowed his eyebrows as he thought long and hard about it. Passing the anonymous registration policy amendment was not something that was to his benefit since being famous was better for garnering greater prestige and influence than being shady, thus the passing of the anonymous-registration policy amendment may have been for someone else.

('But wait, that hypothesis doesn't make sense either,') The man gritted his teeth as he grew engrossed deep in thought. ('Why would Bradt use his limited and precious decision votes to pass a bill for someone else, even if that person is a potential partner? Are the profits from the monopoly of esoteric supplies really worth it?')

Of course, Guildmaster Bradt would also gain the advantage of hampering his opponent, but just those two conditions alone couldn't be worth passing the bill.

('There has to be something else,') He couldn't help but feel quite certain about this evaluation. There was just far too much that was off here. He couldn't quite put his finger on it.

('No,') He shook his head. ('It doesn't matter. Regardless, what I must do wouldn't change. I need to find the way that he is acquiring all those esoteric supplies through, and then destroy it, or at the very least render it obsolete.')

Regardless of what had happened behind the scenes, what he needed to do had not changed. He could not allow the one and only chance that he had to break away from the guildmaster's stronghold over political power to be taken away from him.

The appearance of the Shionel Dungeon was truly a blessing from fate, he intended to protect it at all costs.

('There's only one way to gain access to a huge supply of esoteric resource deposits,') He noted to himself. ('Martial Artists,')

He was relatively certain that the guildmaster had not found a way to get around this limitation.

('Which means he's using Martial Squires for sure, furthermore, they're based here in the Shionel Confederation,')

This meant that he could find them. As long as they were inside the country, they were within his primary domain of influence and power.

('It's unlikely that the guildmaster managed to gain all those esoteric resources using a large quantity of Martial Squires. That would have been noticed by now and is far too conspicuous to hide.') He shrewdly noticed. ('Furthermore, even with the sense-jamming properties of the Shionel Dungeon, there is no way a larger group of Martial Squires would have gone unnoticed on the twelfth floor.')

This strongly suggested that the guildmaster was compensating for a lack of quantity with sheer quality.

('That means the number of Martial Artists he actually has is probably few, probably lesser than five if I had to take a guess,') He tutted with a grim expression.

The smaller the quantity of Martial Artists made it harder to find them, as opposed to a small battalion of Martial Artists that was far easier to find.

('It's not going to be easy...') His eyes narrowed. ('There's really only two ways to go about this, from what I can see. I need either need to track their identity by narrowing down the possible list of suspects by eliminating Martial Artists who can't possibly be them, or directly target them by catching them in the act.

Both ways were going to be difficult. He could tell who were this or these Martial Artists were, they were either extremely powerful or possessed some powerful techniques that were extremely well suited to the Shionel Dungeon.

Or both.

In which case, simply deploying some Martial Squire to keep an eye on the floors of the dungeon wasn't going to be enough in and of itself.

('Damn it all, that fucking snake,') He gritted his teeth.

This new development posed a big problem that would require a lot of resources and manpower to succeed. This would hinder his growth since he would need to invest a lot of capital into killing those pesky Martial Squires who were working with Bradt Patrick.

He was not worried about the legality of killing Martial Squires, he was far too powerful as far as his resources and political power to be perturbed by such a thing. Furthermore, killing Martial Squires inside the dungeon was not criminalized, thus if he assassinated them inside the dungeon, he could even brag about it.

('I need to get to work, otherwise, those Martial Squires will steal what is rightfully mine,') His eyes became bloodshot with anger.

"Maynar," he turned to his secretary standing before his table in his office.

"Yes sir," The man bowed lightly. "Put together a team of veteran hunters together. I want the best of the best. All the S-rank and A-rank hunters. Promise them twice as much as their current contract and give them generous terms and conditions to join our hunting team."

"Immediately sir, any details for the team?" He asked.

"I'm going to call it..." He considered the matter for a second. "The Voidhunters. That sounds fitting for a group of hunter-class Martial Squires that are going to be dispatched to take down a couple of their own kind."