

Martial Unity 811

Chapter 811: The Name

He had no proof, but he couldn't help but wonder if this incident was caused by the one who had been dubbed as the 'Voider', as silly of a name he found it to be, was related to this incident.

There were some commonalities, the fact that both incidents had occurred extremely covertly that not a single soul perceived. Furthermore, the taxes for both events had not been paid, though with the unregistered taxing, he didn't even know if that was true or not.

However, he did not care if the two were the same or now, they could be treated as the same, and he could use the infamy to lure them in with the prospect of glory and prestige for killing such a powerful Martial Squire.

Soon enough, his secretary had set up an appointment between Chairman Deacon and the remaining Martial Squires that had taken interest in his offer. He was quite famous in the Shionel Confederation, and outside of a few powerhouses in the Shionel Merchant Guild, he could easily poach Martial Squires with simply far superior contracts with way better terms and conditions. He had even offered to fully pay their severance pay.

The sum was a little too much for them to break the contract lightly, however, for someone as filthy rich as himself, it was not even with thinking about.

Just merely a few days later, his secretary had brought them along to his guest office. This was where he invited people when he wanted to show off a bit.

There were sixteen Martial Squires in total that he had managed to gather using his offers to them. Sixteen was a decent number by his standards, but it was hardly enough in the long run, each floor was as large as a large town, and the Shionel Dungeon itself had the holding capacity of a small country.

Of course, for now, he would have to make do with this amount. He could not gather a hundred Martial Squires in a single day, that would take time.

He wasn't too good at evaluating the combat capabilities of Martial Artists himself and merely relied on the data he had been provided on them. Only one S-rank thus far, and the rest were all A-ranks, barring one B-rank.

"Welcome, adventurers," He told them. "I am Chairman Deacon, and I appreciate all of you taking the time to come all the way to meet me regarding my offer, and patronage."

His voice was heavy and straightforward. He betrayed neither arrogance nor humility, he was willing to give them the respect that Martial Squires deserved, but they were not worthy of him bowing his head down to.

Soon enough, all of them were seated and poised to begin the discussion.

"As you all know," He began. "Recently, there was an event stirred up in the twelfth dungeon multiple times recurringly. Large swathes of esoteric ore deposits have been disappearing without the inland taipans occupying the territories from which they were extracted from being exterminated."

He paused for a moment. "There's a lot that can be said about it in detail, however, those details will be provided to you separately. What I want to get across here is what I'm hiring you to do. The objective is simple. Find the people responsible for extracting the extremely large quantities of esoteric ore deposits in this fashion, and eliminate them."

The Martial Squires raised an eyebrow at that.

"You will possess the full cooperation of the intelligence division of my company that has already begun gathering all the intelligence surrounding the matter. You can even make requests that will be considered by the division and be processed accordingly," He explained, before continuing. "As promised, the remuneration is of no consequence, I'll even double or triple it as long as you bring me the head."

That earned a reaction out of most of the Martial Squires. The terms and conditions were extremely generous, and that was clearly the point. He wanted to buy them over and get them to go all out with generous rewards that were basically no different from bounties.

"Those are some extremely generous conditions, chairman," One of the Martial Squires noted.
"However, how are we supposed to engage in tracking measures inside the dungeon, it is difficult to engage in any kind of intelligence gathering."

"I am aware of that," Chairman Deacon would not have gone out of his way to gather the best of the Martial Squires he could at the moment if this were such a troublesome issue. "Rest assured that you will have full support from my side, and you will be compensated hourly regardless of success or failure."

That relaxed them, they were afraid that their recompense would be withheld if they did fail to track down the one or ones responsible for mysteriously draining a floor of much of its resources. However, if they would get paid even in the event of their failure for their efforts and pains, then there was quite the merit in undertaking this contract.

"Out remuneration will also be relative to our rank, correct?" Squire Fren, the leader of the famous S-rank party Saberstrike asked.

She had been looking to cut her contract with her current patron after she failed to be the one who cleared the second floor, which gave the former even more power to try and exert control over her adventuring abilities.

However, her severance fee was considerable, thus she had been quite interested when she heard of an offer that paid for her severance pay regardless of what it was.

"Of course," Chairman Deacon nodded. "Merit will certainly be the foundation of your remuneration."

"Can we opt for an open-ended contract with an hourly remuneration rate without a bare minimum amount of time spent on fulfilling the objective?" The only B-rank Martial Squire asked.

Chairman Deacon frowned inwardly as he tried recalling the identity of the weakest Martial Squire in the room. "You... what was your name again?"

"Ah. The name's Quarrier. Rui Quarrier,"

Chapter 812: Clarifications

It hadn't been Rui's intention to try and infiltrate a hunt targeting him, however, when he saw the offer in the Merchant Guild as well as agents of Deacon Industries trying to poach Martial Squires to join a hunting team to target the adventurers who had been responsible for the event, he decided to at least check it out spontaneously.

It hadn't been in his plan to work as a spy, for himself that too, but now that had the opportunity to do so, he didn't see any reason why he shouldn't at least check out the Martial Squires assigned to hunt him.

He had expected that Chairman Deacon would take some measure to stop Rui's dominance on the dungeon floors, still, it hadn't clicked that he could infiltrate it and keep tabs on it.

He highly doubted that they had any chance of tracking him, but it was better to be safe than sorry. As long as it did not take much of his time, he did not particularly lose anything.

"Hmph, it sounds as though you're not very committed to this, Squire Quarrier," Chairman Deacon sternly pointed.

"I'm unable to dedicate all of my time to such an operation unfortunately," He scratched his head, laughing awkwardly. "But I am willing to aid the operation if that is not a problem."

"Your remuneration will also be decided by how committed you are, your contributions to intelligence, and the measures you've undertaken to aid with the objective, is that clear? You will stand to gain far less than those who are entirely committed." He coldly clarified.

"I have no problems as long as I get what I worked for," Rui replied with a pleasant smile. "Will I still have access to logistical and intelligence support even if I am not operating on this mission full-time?"

"That will also depend on your merits," Chairman Deacon replied. He could not be bothered by a low-grade Martial Squire in the first place, he was just answering his questions patiently because other Martial Squires might have the same issue or uncertainty.

"I see," Rui nodded. "In that case, I'm more than willing to be a Voidhunter."

Rui found the name to be amusing and ironic, but he didn't let it show.

"The formal terms and conditions of the contract can be laid out in full later on, however, the most important thing is that there's a mutual understanding of what we expect from each other, and also what a lot of your work will entail," He informed them.

"Murder is illegal in the Shionel Confederation, however, it is not illegal or even considered murder in the Shionel Dungeon, which is the most apt location to kill the target or targets," Chairman Deacon informed them.

He actually didn't give a damn about the location where they eliminated them, but he knew that he wouldn't be able to get away with trying to commit murder. For all he knew, one of them would defect to Guildmaster Bradt, and if the latter found out that Chairman Deacon supported unlawful killing, then he could use that to charge the latter with murder conspiracy, which could land him in hot waters if the guildmaster used his executive power to ensure that Chairman Deacon couldn't wiggle his way out of a thorough investigation and would probably find him guilty. That would give Guildmaster Bradt the ground to use authority to cast Chairman Deacon out of the Shionel Merchant Guild.

If there were a time when he had located and identified the ones responsible for cleaning up the Twelfth floor, and the ones responsible for clearing the second floor, and they were outside the dungeon, then he would straightforwardly deploy his own private Martial Artists to kill him rather than relying on hired mercenaries. There was no way he was going to untrust them if he had a choice.

"Assuming that this entity will be engaging in the same activities for other floors, then there will be plenty of opportunities to find and kill him," Chairman Deacon explained. "According to the Analytics Division of my Deacon Industries, covering as much area with as many Martial Squires in a floor that our target will definitely be aiming for at some point has the highest chances of success."

The biggest problem of the Shionel Dungeon was its sensory jamming that greatly limited the surveillance range of the Martial Squires, otherwise, just five competent Martial Squires would be more than enough to surveil an entire floor.

"Grid searching, maintaining surveillance of a large area is our best choice at the moment," Chairman Deacon informed them. "The chances of you coming into someone whose ability to harvest esoteric resources will be much higher, at that time, please record their appearances to the best of your ability with certain instruments we provide you. Of course, these instruments are also highly limited by the same sensory jamming effect of the Shionel Dungeon, but they will still be able to capture a rough appearance of our target, which instantly increases our chances of identifying them outside of the dungeon."

The reason why the search for their target had stalled was because there was absolutely no tangible information on them, that was why there was no headway to be made.

However, once they had an appearance about their target, then suddenly there was a lot that could be done.

Height, weight, sex, body structure, race, and other factors could be gleaned which could drastically cut down on the pool of suspects. With the suspect pool narrowed down, he could use his considerable resources to then dedicate more thorough investigations into each individual suspect and would be able to further narrow down the suspect pool in time.

That was why Chairman Deacon was willing to go big and aggressive right off the bat, the more he invested immediately, the likelier he was to gain some returns that would allow him to considerably increase the chances of finding and killing his target. He didn't think he was likely to fail.

Chapter 813: Issue

"I have another question," Rui raised his hand.

"What is it?" Chairman Deacon couldn't help but furrow his eyebrows in irritation.

"What degree of coordination do you expect from us?" Rui asked. "And also, what level of autonomy do we gain?"

This was a pertinent question in general since it was unreasonable to gather large groups of Martial Artists and expect them to coordinate with each other. Any plan that relied on extensive coordination between the Martial Squires that Chairman Deacon was hiring was bound to fail.

"I do not expect perfect teamwork between all of you, I am well aware that this is an extremely absurd thing to expect out of all of you," He clarified, bringing relief to their faces.

In truth, most of them would definitely have rejected his offer had he insisted on perfect coordination as demand from them for his plans. Most Martial Squires had strong individuality, especially at the higher stage, and it took many years of familiarity and trust for them to develop great coordination with other Martial Squires.

"I do expect very basic things such as non-conflict, and some other rules that would effectively allow you to engage in basic coordination without the need to actually communicate with each other," He explained. "This is possible as long as everyone follows some basic rules and guidelines, which will be thoroughly laid out once the contracts are signed."

He turned back to Rui. "As for autonomy, that can be decided by yourselves, however, your remuneration will be lesser if you wish to retain more autonomy, if you're willing to follow orders, you will be given much greater compensation than those that act entirely independently. Anyone who wishes to act entirely independently will only receive nominal compensation unless their contributions are great. While those that are willing to follow orders will be greatly remunerated regardless of the outcome."

That was quite fair, all things considered. The Martial Artists looked relieved at this, the fact that not only did Chairman Deacon intend not forcing orders on them, but also intended to allow them to choose what level of adherence they wanted to be subject to was quite relieving.

Rui, on the other hand, was not pleased by this.

('He understands how to manage large groups of Martial Squires,') Rui mused. ('Fitting for someone of his position who no doubt has a large number of Martial Squires under him. If he finds out even a sniff of my identity, then I'm screwed.')

That was why Rui was glad that he had joined this meeting. He wanted to understand what he was going against, and he realized that perhaps his position was not as secure as he hoped.

('If they somehow manage to capture an image of Kane and me, even if it's not clear, we're screwed.') He realized.

Them being a pair would remove a lot of the suspects that would otherwise still be in consideration.

('I underestimated how much my success would infuriate Chairman Deacon, and just how far he was willing to go. A hundred Martial Squires just to track one or many completely unknown Martial Squires of whom there is no tangible information surrounding? That's crazy,') He sighed inwardly. ('Crazy, but not completely ineffective.')

This changed how he would need to deal with other Martial Squires lingering in the surroundings. He could not make even a single mistake around them.

The information that he gained from being part of this meeting alone had been worth the trip, but now, he had even more reason to at least stick around.

"We can start with the twelfth floor, the mysterious disappearance of esoteric resources has yet to cease, furthermore, there are still sections of the twelfth floor that remain. Based on the information we have, it is highly likely that the Martial Artist known as the Voider will make an appearance to drain the remaining esoteric resource plunders of the twelfth floor, and aim to clear it," Chairman Deacon explained. "The fact that the floor is being cleared at a large rate leaves only a few districts' worths of esoteric resources on the twelfth floor. That reduces the area over which the sixteen of you need to surveil and keep an eye over."

That was indeed true, that made their job easier, although sixteen of them were nowhere near enough to surveil the entire floor, it was certainly a lot easier if they had to surveil a portion of the entire floor.

The Martial Squires grew more optimistic with this plan. They had initially walked in expecting that there was no chance in hell that they could possibly catch such an evasive person and simply were attracted by the terms and conditions that Deacon Industries had promised them.

Rui also had a pleasant expression, but inwardly, he was frowning as he considered how to deal with this.

('The biggest issue is that Chairman Deacon's analysis is right, I was planning on sweeping up the remaining esoteric resource deposits in the Shionel Dungeon in one fell swoop,') He scratched his head.

It was tempting to simply avoid the twelfth floor now that he knew this. However, Rui knew better than to go for such a simple bone-headed plan. There were problems with this. Firstly, the fact that Chairman Deacon's analysis and predictions were solid meant that any blatant inaccuracies would be suspected.

Why would the Voider not appear when there was strong reason to believe he would? He certainly would finish the job like he did on the second floor. Unless, of course, he had reason not to. If he somehow came to learn of the trap that had been planned.

In that case, that would make all of the Martial Squires in the Voidhunter team at the moment extremely suspicious. Since they would be the likeliest breaches of any information.

While it was possible that some employee of his was an agent, the first avenue for investigation for Chairman Deacon would be all sixteen of them. Rui didn't think he was a bad person, but he wasn't generous enough to reduce the suspect pool to sixteen for his enemy.

Chapter 814: Terms

This was Rui's biggest problem, he could not avoid walking into a trap that he had just learned of, that would make Chairman Deacon too suspicious. Rui did not think this man was not smart enough to come to the conclusion that a potential intelligence leak had occurred through the Martial Squires.

In which case he could not possibly afford to make such a mistake. Such a mistake would only increase the probability that he would suffer tremendously.

That meant that he needed to harvest esoteric mineral and organic esoteric resources with Kane while still partaking in this operation as a Voidhunter.

('This is going to be rough,') Rui grimaced inwardly.

He could make his life easier by not being part of the same operation, but he didn't want to forsake an opportunity to get closer to the investigation.

"What exactly is the strategy by which you hope to catch the Voider?" Rui asked. "You've only outlined a vague plan."

"That is true," Chairman Deacon did not deny this. "However, the issue is that none of you have signed the contract yet. I do not wish to go too deep into the plan before ironing that part out."

That was quite the valid and sound reason. In fact, he was extending quite the bit of good faith and sincerity, and unfortunately for Rui, it seemed as though everyone around him was inclined to go with the offer.

Chairman Deacon glanced at his secretary, nodding. Immediately, the latter procured contracts for each of Martial Artists. They were surprisingly small, but Rui understood why he had done that. He wanted to ensure that the Martial Squires felt comfortable with the contracts rather than submerging them in pages and pages of litigative jargon that they simply were not equipped to understand.

Many of them would not be eager to agree to something that they had no understanding of, and most of them did not have lawyers with them when they migrated to this state, they did not necessarily trust lawyers in a state to proof read a contract from someone with far more power than them.

Chairman Deacon seemed to be well aware of this dynamic, and clearly did not want to push them. Thus each clause was framed using as simple language as could possibly be used without affecting their meaning.

The contract specified an exchange of services and aid with the investigation, intelligence, surveillance, tracking and potentially elimination of the individual or group of individuals that were responsible for the mass harvesting of esoteric mineral and organic deposits in the twelfth floor.

In exchange, the Martial Squires would get remunerated at an hourly rate which was contingent on their rank, willingness to adhere to orders, and actual merits achieved.

The remuneration included an immense amount of wealth, the sheer amount even a Martial Squire of his rank could earn made even his earnings from the Vilun Island mission pale in comparison. These were numbers that he would never be able to earn even if he spent years taking the most lucrative missions from the Martial Union.

This alone was worth the contract in the eyes of most of the Martial Squires. Then there was the fact that there were other benefits promised, such as promotion which would increase the number of private commissions they got, free access to Martial Art techniques and other growth and training resources.

This was also an attractive offer. All Martial Artists cared about Martial Art techniques, because techniques were the foundation of Martial Art. Thus, one could expect that Martial Artists were certainly attracted by the prospects of obtaining these Martial Art techniques.

Even if Martial Squires did not necessarily need existing techniques to progress, and ought not to solely master existing techniques to progress, they were still a useful resource in creating modifications and even new techniques.

That wasn't the only offer that was made, the contract even specified that Deacon Industries would subsidize and foot the bill for all expenses related to the mission, including supplying the necessary gear and equipment and things like healing and rejuvenation potions.

This was also attractive as those expenses piled up over the many months of constant dungeon raiding.

What was especially alluring was the fact that the contract did not try to bond them in anyway, and Martial Squires were allowed to cancel their arrangements with Deacon Industries very easily, all they needed to do was give a formal notice one week ahead of time, and they could collect their remuneration and leave.

They did have to sign a non-disclosure agreement with Deacon Industries surrounding their

These were quite the generous terms and conditions. And this meant that there was no way that the Martial Squires could be worried about being trapped in some kind of slave contract.

Rui noticed that the other Martial Squires had already signed it, he quickly followed suit as he intended to sign it from the very start, and he did not want to draw any attention by being the only one who had yet to sign it.

"Brilliant," He smiled at all of them. "I look forward to our partnership. Now then, all of you are now officially Voidhunters of Deacon Industries. Thus, we can begin with our official planning session."

His secretary handed him an extremely rough and inaccurate pictorial representation of the twelfth floor, with several highlighted sections.

"This map is certainly not a literal and accurate representation of the twelfth floor. As I'm sure you all know by now, no accurate and precise map of the Shionel Dungeon exists. It cannot, due to the sensory jamming of the Shionel Dungeon the Voider cleanly sweeps the floor, section by section. The sections are numbered in the order they were cleared, and dated on the dates they were cleared. "

He tapped on the map. The sections were squares, and each one was back-to-back with each other.

There was a clear pattern, that Rui was starting to regret in hindsight. He had thought deeply about it, but he did not anticipate that Chairman Deacon would somehow manage to get such kind of information.

Chapter 815: Replicate

This meant that Rui had underestimated the kind of information that Chairman Deacon was able to gather. Of course, this wasn't a particularly deep fault on his end, but due to a lack of understanding of how deep the intelligence-gathering capabilities of Deacon industries were. He remembered feeling somewhat similarly about Guildmaster Bradt Patrick, who had also exceeded his expectations. Perhaps he needed to reevaluate how he evaluated other normal human beings.

('At least I can be more careful from here on out,') Rui mused to himself. It was a miscalculation, but fortunately, it was the more benign kind rather than the damning kind. However, now that he saw that Chairman Deacon had access to this kind of information, he could more or less figure out how he had come about such information.

('He must have extensively gathered the descriptive accounts of Martial Squires who have been to the twelfth floor, in a combination with his own personal Martial Squires who must have done some basic scouting and surveillance in the dungeon.') Rui figured.

However, he was once more in a predicament where he could not drastically cause any change in patterns without causing Chairman Deacon to grow suspicious about it.

He would need to purposely fall for their traps to at least a minor extent, meaning he would need to abide by their predictions. He would need to ensure that he didn't get an image of him taken, and certainly ensure that he didn't get captured, that would be game over without any shred of a doubt.

After he passed this ordeal, he would be able to more prudent measures, since this would not be strange given that the Voider would then know that someone was specifically targeting him. Thus any countermeasures that the Voider took after that would not be suspicious given his obvious awareness of some group actively hunting him in the Shionel Dungeon with a clearer understanding of some of his patterns.

Chairman Deacon proceeded to lay out the entire plan before him. The sixteen Martial Squires were assigned particular areas in the remaining section of unharvested esoteric deposits on the twelfth floor of the Shionel Dungeon. Each of them had been instructed to ensure that they did not surveil overlapping areas with their peers in the Shionel Dungeon. In this case, they had to move away and ensure that there were no redundancies in the areas in which they were surveilling. They had to keep their recorders on standby and capture the images of all the Martial Squires who appeared in their vicinity and observe their harvesting. The Voider undoubtedly possessed an unparalleled ability to extract esoteric mineral and organic ore deposits from the Shionel Dungeon, thus any Martial Squire that extracted resources in a strange manner at a rate that far exceeded the standard means could be reasonably assumed to be the Voider. Their identity was to be captured and was to be recorded before the Martial Squire engaged with them.

The reason for this was that any Martial Squire that would get into a fight with the Voider had a high chance of dying. The sheer combat ability demonstrated by them when they soloed the second floor was immense. Thus they were suspected to be an S-rank veteran Martial Squire with decades of experience, who was just on the very cusp of becoming a Martial Senior. Thus it was too dangerous to try and provoke such a Martial Squire alone.

After all, if they died in the process of picking a fight with them, then the data that they had recorded would also be lost. Since communications were also highly jammed in the Shionel Dungeon, any recording from recording devices could not be remotely transmitted. Thus, if they died in a fight, their bodies would be consumed by a taipan, and the recording device on their body was as good as gone.

Chairman Deacon was more anxious about getting his hands on direct and tangible evidence and information on the Voider. There were a whole plethora of measures that could be undertaken when he had this information, and it was more important than gambling trying to take down a dangerous ability unprepared around his abilities. If the opportunity to fight and kill him presented itself in the very first operation, then it probably was the case that they would run into opportunities in the future where they would be more prepared.

Thus at the moment, Chairman Deacon had stressed the importance of gathering as much information on the Voider than fighting them.

"In fact," Chairman Deacon said. "I would rather you simply watch them even if they're standing right in front of you with their back turned to you."

That showed that Chairman Deacon valued information on the Voider more than just killing the Voider, at least at the moment.

('I see, he intends to try and replicate the means that I'm using to extract the esoteric resources of the Shionel Dungeon as fast and as easily as I do,') Rui quickly realized this when he analyzed Chairman Deacon's intentions.

This was understandable. If he could somehow replicate Rui's methods, then he would be able to achieve a level of dominance in the supplier market that would be absolutely unimpeachable. He would achieve a level of growth that would put his already high growth up till now to shame.

If he managed to replicate Rui's methods, then beating Guildmaster Bradt would certainly be very much a realistic probability based on the sheer amount of economic and commercial capital that he would have that would allow him to sway many constituents of the Shionel merchant Guild and allow him to buy their votes.

('Too bad for him that he cannot replicate my means,') He shook his head inwardly. Even if he managed to capture Rui alive and tortured the methods out of him, he would not be able to replicate the means whatsoever. The circumstances and factors that came together to allow such a thing to happen were simply beyond his ability to replicate.

Chapter 816: Counter-Op

"Huff..." Guildmaster Bradt heaved a sigh as he leaned back on his chair. Ever since he had forged an agreement and a partnership with Rui, he had been tremendously busy with diplomatic and management work. Although it was true that the Voider was the fundamental reason for the large sales that Esosale Suppliers had made, it was also true that the services that he and his company provided to Esosale Suppliers were considerable, they had almost become part of the company itself while still maintaining themselves as separate partners.

That was why Rui did not even try bargaining for more than fifty percent, it would be an insult to the Bradt Distribution Services, and more importantly, it would reveal that he didn't think highly of them.

However, that also meant that Guildmaster Bradt had received an abrupt increase in workload. He had quickly set up an entirely new department in his company dedicated to Esosale Suppliers. This was a privilege that only a limited number of companies had, these companies needed to be big enough and deeply partnered enough for the company to assign an entire division tasked to manage the affairs related to one company.

Guildmaster Bradt had actively put this company in that category immediately since he knew that this company had the same merits as the ones that had their own divisions as well. He quickly found competent staff and assigned an experienced manager who would be able to handle the rush hour that he knew would be coming to Esosale Suppliers soon enough.

And he was right, the moment he promoted Esosale Suppliers through the brand of his own Distribution Services, many customers immediately placed orders for supplies from Esosale Suppliers despite the fact that it was completely unknown and a clearly a shell company to anyone who had eyes and looked into it.

Yet people still flocked to it and placed orders for supplies of esoteric resources, even going as far as to pay advances. All of this came from the Bradt Distribution Services' credibility. People believed that the Bradt Distribution Services which had a truly stellar reputation for credibility and reliability would not aggressively promote a scam. That would ruin their reputation forever.

Of course, Guildmaster Bradt did not make promises that he could not be sure of, he may have had a working partnership with each other, however, neither side trusted the other, and both sides were aware of this.

Guildmaster Bradt only made single-sale transactions with customers and expressed refusal to sign any long-term supplier contracts on behalf of Esosale Suppliers. After all, how could he be sure that Rui would continue supplying at a steady rate regularly? He could not.

The Voider could very well abandon their partnership at any given time and vanish into thin air and Guildmaster Bradt most likely would not be able to do anything about it. After all, he neither knew his identity nor his location nor did he hold any major leverage over Rui barring perhaps his income. However, that was not much leverage since Guildmaster Bradt did not want to sully his reputation, which would affect the reputation of his company which was known for being credible and reliable.

Thus he could not leverage it by blatantly blackmailing Rui with money that he lawfully owned. If Rui decided to go public, everything that Guildmaster Bradt had spent his life building would collapse in a day.

The revenue that Esosale Suppliers was not worth that, not even close.

Thus he kept his distance and did not promise anything, all sales were made after Rui restocked the inventory by giving them the esoteric supplies that Rui had harvested, using the method that they discussed.

Still, even with the reduced capital, his work load had increased, a lot causing a lot of his days to grow even more densely packed with matter he needed to handle.

"Sir, there's an urgent report from the intelligence department," His secretary informed him.

"Hm?" Guildmaster Bradt turned to face her with narrowed eyes. "What is it?"

"It's related to Chairman Deacon and his recent measures, sir," She replied, placing the documents on the table.

Guildmaster Bradt immediately grabbed them and began reading through them, before making a preliminary analysis.

"So... he's already charted out an operation to gather information on the twelfth floor," Guildmaster Bradt mused. "Once the Voider gets past the twelfth floor, and moves onto a newer frontier, it will be a long time before Chairman Deacon gets a hold on his position because due to the fact that there is only one target left," Guildmaster Bradt mused. "Sixteen Martial Squires are not bad, but there is only one S-rank, fourteen A-ranks, and even a B-rank, who is no doubt going to be entirely useless to them."

He already had verified the sense of danger that the Voider gave off to his direct subordinate Martial Squires was correlated to the upper ends of what an S-rank martial Squire was capable of. That meant that only the sole S-rank hunter-class Martial Squire of the Voidhunters at the moment had a chance of defeating the Voider, the way he saw it.

And she probably didn't stand a real chance was his prediction.

Still, it was quite likely in his eyes that the Voider was unaware of these plans, and the two of them had decided that direct communication was to be used as sparingly as possible, Guildmaster Bradt could not simply choose to ignore this. He needed to find a way to ensure that this operation did not get the best of the Voider, therefore he could not avoid leaving this alone.

"Draft up a new operation," He ordered his secretary.

"Would you like me to register it in the books of the Bradt Distribution Services, sir?"

"No, keep it unofficial, I don't want word of this leaking out to that bastard Deacon."

"Yes sir, as for the operation..."

Guildmaster Bradt considered his words for a moment. "The objective will be to annihilate the Voidhunters before the predicted time of the Voider.

Chapter 817: Measures

"So you're telling me the super powerful merchant guy that we pissed off is forming a literal hunting team to gather information on us so that he can eventually take us out?" Kane frowned.

"Right," Rui nodded.

He had informed Kane about everything he had learned. After all, he couldn't withhold such information that had an impact on Kane.

"Alright, so what are we gonna do?" Kane asked.

Rui smiled back wordlessly. He had entertained the possibility of Kane quitting which would not be unreasonable. But he appreciated his friend's loyalty and commitment.

"You don't have to do this if you don't want to," Rui reminded him, just to make sure. "You can just leave it to me if this becomes too much at any given point."

Although things would become far harder for him, Rui did not want to use this as a justification to pressure his best friend to tag along with him in crazy circumstances.

"Don't worry about it, I intend to see this through to the end," he lightly said. "So what is it that we are going to do about this predicament?"

"We cannot avoid it," Rui explained. "At least, now that I've joined the Voidhunters, any indications that the Voider learned of the plans to gather as much information on him as possible will put the sixteen Voidhunters in suspicion. That's far too much suspicion on me, and I cannot allow that to happen."

"So we're going to continue with our plans to harvest the twelfth floor... in the midst of sixteen Martial Squires that are literally there only to track us?" Kane scratched his head.

"Don't worry about it, they don't stand a chance of detecting us with your Void Step, however, we need to be more careful about how we use it from here on out," He explained. "From here on out, you indicate your time limit warning three minutes ahead of time, then I will locate a place where we can safely reach and dismount. Preferably even in tunnels and stuff like that. Going to such degrees is worth it, I don't care if we're slower, it's better to be safe than sorry."

"How will you even harvest esoteric resources if you're part of the Voidhunter team though?" Kane scratched his head, confused. "Won't they immediately realize since you wouldn't be part of the team?"

Rui shook his head. "There is no close-knit team, we need to surveil a large area, thus we're spread out, there is absolutely no benefit to grouping in dense areas. Thus none of the Voidhunters will actually be sensing me, since we're supposed to cover as much area as we can with no overlaps, which requires being outside of each other's sensory ranges. Although we have a general idea where each of us is supposed to be, they would not notice me gone."

"I see," Kane furrowed his eyebrows as he considered the matter and all the issues surrounding it. "That makes sense."

He turned towards Rui. "So you intend on successfully harvesting all of the esoteric deposits from right under their nose? That's something else entirely."

He laughed. It was such a diabolical plan, but it fit Rui.

The two of them worked out the details of how they would handle this particular extraction mission, they had worked out a really good system prior and had even practiced, thus any changes to it needed to be made carefully and prudently.

In the end, Rui increased the safety measures including the forewarning time, as well as the minimum distance that they maintained from every Martial Squire they came across.

With these measures, he reduced the probability that something that bad would happen. He needed to find a way to ensure that he didn't screw up matters for himself. These measures aided in that and ensured that the probability of something going wrong was low.

The downside was that their harvest was not going to be as great. Since they would be spending less time on mining the deposits from the land of the twelfth floor, but would also be reducing the net area over which that they would be mining over.

That was more than just an acceptable trade to Rui, he was more than willing to allow that to ensure that there was no way that he could possibly be overwhelmed by these circumstances and that nothing went wrong.

With that established, they had more or less made all the preparations that they needed to make as far as planning went.

Rui, however, still wasn't done. He was not one to be satisfied with basic half-assed measures as opposed to very concrete ways to improve their probability of success.

"What's this?" Kane frowned as Rui handed him a tiny vial of a strange black liquid.

"It's Festerine Venom," Rui explained. "It's a powerful Squire-grade poison, that paralyzes a target extremely quickly and costs an absurd sum of money for just half a milligram of it. We're going to equip you with a poisoned blade with this coated on it. You'll get a few uses to poison a Martial Squire and paralyze them and drop them on the spot."

Kane's eyes twinkled at the mention of that. This allowed his lethality to be relevant against the likes of Martial Squires, despite being a low-grade Martial Squire.

"Poison isn't really in-line with my Martial Path though," Kane murmured.

This was true, his Martial Path was centered around evasive maneuvering, which was exclusive of a field like poison arts.

"It's not a Martial Art technique," Rui told him. "Just a temporary measure, there's no saying what can happen in the circumstances that we're going to be entering now, just take it for now, and use it if needed, you'll thank me if you need to."

"Well, that does make sense," Kane shrugged. "I suppose that is true, at the very least. Better safe than sorry."

Now that the several preparations that they had made had been completed, they were both ready to ensure that this operation ended in success.

Chapter 818: Joint

Rui's own preparations were not necessarily done though, his prior measures were related to their coordination and to their work. Now he had his own preparations to make.

('I need to gather information on the other Voidhunters,') he noted to himself.

His Martial Path was adaptive evolution. He gathered all kinds of information on his opponents through all means, including extra-combat means. He did not necessarily need to fight them to be able to develop an adapted anti-fighting style to take them down. As long as he had enough information, it was possible.

As for how he was going to procure all that information?

"I'd like to purchase all the combat information on all fifteen of these Martial Squires," Rui stated to an employee in the information transaction section as he handed her a list of names

He simply was going to buy it straightforwardly as Rui Quarrier. He didn't need to use subterfuge, since learning about the people that he was going to be working on a dangerous mission and going to be trusting to a certain extent was perfectly reasonable, if uncommon. But there was no room for there to be any suspicion of him being the Voider based on this alone.

Thus, he needed to own it and go ahead with making such a purchase. After all, in the eyes of others, if he was the Voider, would he truly be so crude in his attempt to learn more about his enemies? It was quite unlikely.

"There you go sir, it will cost you about five thousand gold,"

Rui winced slightly as he paid up.

He lifted the large box of documents, carrying it home before studying it privately, opening the first document.

[Squire Fren Burenha]

"Hmmm..." Rui's eyes narrowed.

Squire Fren was an S-rank adventurer and was the leader of the S-rank party who had discovered that the second floor of the Shionel Dungeon had been cleared. Now she had joined the Voidhunters to hunt him down. He wondered if she held a grudge against him for clearing the second floor when it was clear from that incident that she had wanted to be the one to claim that fame.

Regardless, she was extremely strong. Rui had felt it even though she tried restraining her aura.

It was heavy.

It possessed a weight that simply could not be hidden. When he looked at her, he felt just the tiniest spark of what he sensed from the Martial Seniors when they fought on Vilun Island.

('I can't beat her as I am now,') Rui shook his head.

Her Martial Art, the Double Fist Binding Serpent Style was a grappling Martial Art meant to subjugate extremely powerful beings and beasts. Her Martial Path was Joint Submission. A Martial Path that focused on immobilizing their targets by putting them in positions where resisting would stress and hurt their own joints.

Joints were almost universally the weakest points of animals and monsters possessing joints. Thus any position where a person was forced to apply force in a way that stressed their own joints would cause them to experience strain in their joints, and be unable to resist at all without dislocating it.

"Interesting," He mused as he went through the intelligence on her quite thoroughly.

Although joint-hold submissions were a very universal form of submissions back on Earth being featured in Aikido, Judo, Sambo, and even Shoot Wrestling, she had a very distinct full-body type submission joint-holds that reminded Rui of one style in particular.

"Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu," He murmured.

He could even understand why her Martial Art seemed to feature a whole lot of full-body holds.

"She can't put large beasts into submission with just an arm or two, she needs to apply her whole body," Rui realized.

She specialized in subjugating powerful Squire-level beasts that simply could not be subjugated through any other means. He could see why she had chosen to enter the dungeon with a party rather than by herself.

"She's not suited having to take on a large number of monsters that need to be killed rather than subjugated," He concluded.

Of course, that did not mean she was useless, far from it. She was still more valuable than any grade-eight and most grade-nine Martial Squires. With her party, they could easily take down Squire-level monsters, and even beasts that surpassed the limits of the Squire Realm as far as physical parameters went!

While she alone could not win, with her party Saberstrike, she could definitely be able to kill one as long as she was careful.

('I can't beat her as I am now,') Rui sighed, shaking his head. He held confidence in himself, but even he was not arrogant enough to believe that his Flowing Void Style could take down a grade-ten Martial Squire. There was far too much of a gap between them. If she was just one grade, maybe even two grades above him, he would be a lot more confident with good preparation, but now if she was literally four grades above him.

He shook his head, putting the matter aside, as he quickly inputted her data into his Mind Palace, rapidly creating an incomplete predictive model regardless.

The goal of this was not to fight her but to be able to predict her movements. He had already memorized as much data on all fifteen of them when they gathered to meet Chairman Deacon and storing it in his Mind Palace, that in conjunction with this allowed him to create quite the imperfect and rough predictive models, but at the very least he would see any abrupt changes coming ahead of time and not be caught off-guard by any strange movements that could potentially ruin his plans.

He did the same for the others while also studying their Martial Art and adding all details surrounding it to his Mind Palace. These Martial Squires, while not as impressive as Squire Fren, were still highly relevant threats that he needed to keep an eye on as well when he entered the dungeon.

Chapter 819: Remind

Soon enough, the date and time had come.

"Alright, I'll meet you on the twelfth floor," Rui bade him goodbye.

"Good luck, see you there," Kane replied, seeing him off.

The two of them could not enter the dungeon together. Rui had to join the dungeon along with the Voidhunters, after all, to partake in their operation of finding and catching... himself.

He merrily made his way to Deacon Industries putting on a facade of casual calmness, when in reality he was quite tense on the inside. He needed to play this perfectly, otherwise, there could be irreparable damage done to his plan.

STEP

He landed outside the gate to the main branch of Deacon Industries, greeted by two Martial Squire guards. They were quite strong from his senses, although Rui was confident he could beat them one-on-

one. He wasn't using Mind Mask at the moment, and the strength that he was portraying was very much the real deal, thus he could not act like he was a grade-ten Martial Squire

"Squire Quarrier, the master has been expecting you," They addressed him, before letting him passage.

"Rich bugger," He muttered to himself as he beheld the ostentatious main branch office of Deacon Industries. If wealth had to have a face, then this would be a good candidate for it. It was closer to a castle than an office.

"Squire Quarrier," A man greeted Rui as he approached the main building. "Chairman Deacon awaits, among some of your other peers."

Rui recognized him as the secretary of Chairman Deacon, his right-hand man

"Oh dear," Rui sighed. "Am I late?"

"Not at all," The man offered a courteous smile. "You are on time, please come this way,"

Rui nodded as he spotted even more Voidhunters arriving. They all eventually bunched together as they headed towards the Chairman's office.

"Hmph, so you decided to come after all, little B-rank?" He heard a voice from behind him.

"Hm?" He glanced behind him with raised eyebrows as he beheld the gargantuan man who had insulted him. He recognized the man instantly, no, he already knew who he was.

A-rank Adventurer Squire Darbun of Party Saberstrike.

"Did you expect me not to? After I signed the contract?" He turned away from the man with a disinterested look.

"Hah," He snorted. "A weak Martial Squire like you does not belong here. I'd suggest you leave and get the hell out before you die. Know your limits, weakling."

Rui's turned back and studied him with the strange kind of interest he would have if he came across a pre-historic caveman.

"Darbun," A soft yet domineering voice spoke up, intervening. "Stop that, he is a member of our team and has chosen to be part of the Voidhunters voluntarily. There's no need to respect him."

The red-haired Martial Squire glanced at Rui. "I apologize for my party member's rudeness."

"Fren, there's no need for you to apologize to someone like him!" Squire Darbun barked.

"Enough," She glared at him, quietening him down, and turning back to Rui.

"There's no need to apologize for someone else's rudeness, Squire Fren," He smiled.

"I am the captain of Team Saberstrike, thus I am obligated to take responsibility," She replied simply.

She did not need to act extravagant. Rui felt a burden on his shoulder just being near her even when she was restraining her aura. She possessed a gravitas to her, unlike anything he'd sensed from a Martial Squire.

Soon enough, they arrived at the dispatch facility of Deacon Industries

"Welcome," He said, spreading his arms. "I appreciate your punctuality. The dispatch time is upon us soon enough. You will be taken to the Shionel Dungeon in one of our most luxurious motorized carriages."

This was strange, but they chalked it up to the hyper-consumerist lifestyle and culture of the Shionel Confederation. It was strange being taken to a dungeon in such a matter. However, Chairman Deacon

had a brand to maintain, after all, as one of the richest and most powerful men in the Shionel Confederation.

Soon enough, it was time.

A large carriage, big enough to host all of them comfortably in it arrived. They quickly boarded it, admiring the quality. Such a means of transport was seldom seen in their respective nations. The Shionel Confederation was more than just a little extra when it came to how ridiculous its luxury standards were.

Regardless they'd already forgotten about it by the time they reached.

They drew a lot of attention from everyone around them, not just because they were a large group of Martial Squires, but because a lot of their equipment was provided by Deacon Industries and because of the extravagant carriage bearing the emblem of the company.

"Let's get going," Squire Fren told everyone, unperturbed by the attention she received. All Martial Squires were treated differently, and while this was greater than what they were accustomed to, it was well within what they were comfortable with.

Although she was not the official leader, everyone deferred to her as she was the strongest out of all of them without any question whatsoever.

They sped through the security measures before quickly heading towards the inner gate of Adventurer Ring town.

The air grew more tense and serious, and it only grew heavier when they reached the Shionel Dungeon.

"Remember," She turned towards all of them with a solemn expression. "Anything can happen in a dungeon. It doesn't matter how strong you are. It doesn't matter how experienced you are, or how talented you are. All of that doesn't matter in the dungeon. Just a single moment of carelessness, just the slightest mistake, and you could be ambushed from the shadows by a monster you never saw coming. Life is vulnerable in the dungeon, and we are no exceptions. Do not let down your guard for even a second, it may very well be the last thing you do."

Rui had to remind himself that he was the only one who saw the Shionel Dungeon as a safe space.

Chapter 820: Intercept

He actually felt less tense the moment they entered the dungeon, but he couldn't show that on his face, he needed to maintain a severe expression. His spatial senses swept across the dungeons as he noted the location of a few monsters in the general vicinity. A katoblepas, a bloodfury rabbit that appeared to have survived from the second floor, and even an inland Shionel Taipan.

Rui had no problem with these monsters attacking their group, in fact, he welcomed it. It would be a good way to end this operation quickly if one of the members of this group were taken down early due to a surprise monster attack.

In that case, he would be able to finish the twelfth floor without any issues whatsoever, and he would be just fine.

Of course, he highly doubted that something like that would happen. The Martial Squires that had been gathered for the Voidhunter team were not amateurs, they were all Martial Artists who were nominally more powerful than himself. Most of them would not succumb to a surprise attack, even in circumstances like the Shionel Dungeon where their senses were hampered.

They followed the scouted paths that were confirmed to lead to a particular floor. These paths were marked and indicated by the Shionel Adventurer Guild. Doing this ensured that Martial Artists could enter lower floors without getting lost, ensuring that Martial Artists didn't have to try and scour the extensive maze of tunnels inside the dungeon. Every time a new floor was discovered, the Shionel Dungeon went through an effort of finding large enough tunnels that connected existing floors to new ones that adventurers could use.

Despite having a secured route, there was still a deep tension as they traveled through them.

"Alright, we've reached the first floor, be sure to stay together while we go down to the second floor. Do not get lost, and do not break away from the group or from the scouted paths. Getting lost in this maze of a dungeon is suicide," She warned them once more.

Rui suppressed a laugh. Being with a group of normal adventurers who raided and plundered the dungeon like normal adventurers did was so strange. He was starting to see the concerns and problems that normal Martial Artists had to face in a dungeon such as the Shionel Dungeon.

Still, he couldn't help but frown mildly at their sheer vigilance so early on in their entry into the Shionel Dungeon.

Being so wary before even crossing the first floor? The uppermost layers of the Shionel Dungeon were basically no different from a relaxing hiding spot for Rui.

Soon enough, they reached the second floor, when Squire Fren turned around and did a headcount. "Good, we're all here. Let's continue downwards."

This was also a strange thing to Rui, he hadn't realized that ordinary Martial Squires had to go through the effort of making sure that all the Martial Squires were there, from time to time.

('Imagine entering this dungeon without having some counter to the sensory jamming property of the Shionel Dungeon despite knowing of it ahead of time,') He shook his head inwardly. ('Could not be me.')

Finally, they reached the twelfth floor. For ordinary Martial Squires, just getting to the twelfth floor was an ordeal while Rui may as well skip down the tunnels humming given how casual he was.

"Alright, we've reached the twelfth floor," Squire Fren stated. "It's unclear what direction the last remaining section of the floor is, but we'll just have to reach the center, split up in all directions and locate the last remaining section of the floor, and meet up back here in five minutes, one of us will have definitely have found it. It's unfortunate, but without a map, we cannot even navigate this floor without using such means otherwise, we'll get lost."

This was why a map was so incredibly valuable, yet so incredibly difficult to obtain. Even Martial Squires found it difficult to navigate the Shionel Dungeon even with marked routes, how on Earth would normal humans and merchants commercialize such a place to other normal humans without at least a map?

Witnessing how serious and difficult this matter was even to a grade-ten Martial Squire convinced him of the value of his map even more. No wonder Guildmaster Bradt immediately passed a bill that affected the entire country on Rui's demand once he verified that the maps Rui produced were actually very accurate and precise.

Rui had long located the remaining section of the Shionel Dungeon with his Riemannian Echo sense, but he had to play dumb and go along with this tedious plan, he couldn't just point them in the right direction, that would make him instantly suspicious.

Soon enough, they split up in different directions after reaching what should have been close to the center of the floor. They wouldn't be able to return quickly since the sixteen of them had to search across a large area, about as large as a city.

Thus Rui decided to simply go visit Kane, who had already reached the dungeon and was waiting in a tunnel just outside it where he had shifted around using Void Step to stay imperceptible. Rui had sensed him the moment he had entered the dungeon.

STEP

"Kane, you're here," He smiled once he reached the tunnel, talking to apparently nobody.

Kane appeared out of thin air, sighing. "It's so stressful entering this dungeon without you. Is this how it's always going to be from now on out?"

"Relax," Rui shook his head. "It's not going to be like this from here on out or anything like that. This will be the last time, I promise you."

"That's great to hear," He nodded. "Alright, what now?"

"Come along with me, but make sure you're using Void Step from the get-go, once we split up, we'll immediately start harvesting this entire place, right under and around their noses. They're going to be shocked to realize that despite their best, they couldn't catch a glimpse of us,"