

Martial Unity 821

Chapter 821: Target

He and Kane casually chatted while they returned back to where Rui was to scout, looking for the final remaining section of the twelfth floor. Rui was glad that they had decided to split up, this operation would have been a lot harder if everyone stuck to each other like glue. Even though Rui was clever enough to still think of ways, it would be truly difficult, even for him.

Thankfully, the sensory jamming and the loss of the natural sense of direction in the Shionel Dungeon made his job easier, since he could even say 'Oh, I completely lost my sense of direction and got lost' and it would be extremely believable.

Such a thing was a very regular occurrence in the Shionel Dungeon, after all. Furthermore, it would be very believable considering Rui was only a young B-rank Martial Squire who had spent only under four years in the Squire Realm, thus his natural senses would undoubtedly be weaker than that of the others.

Most animals relied on the magnetic field of the planet to gain some basic foundation for a sense of direction. This phenomenon was known as magnetoreception and was a very well-documented phenomenon back on Earth. It was by this very sense that animals were able to migrate accurately across the entire world without ever losing their direction, following the same migration routes year after year.

Normal humans did not possess magnetoreception to any meaningful degree, but the same could not be said for Martial Artists.

However, in the Shionel Dungeon, even this magnetoreception sense was completely jammed. It was why the monsters in the dungeon lost their way and ended up getting lost in the maze of tunnels of the Shionel Dungeon. It was why many Martial Squires had gone missing since entering the Shionel Dungeon despite their being pre-established paths that were marked. Their sense of direction had been completely sabotaged, causing them to take completely different paths than the specified directions, or diverge largely in large broad tunnels where their sabotaged sense of direction made them make just one error in the choice of tunnels they chose to go.

Eventually, it was time to get back to the group.

"Be sure to keep the Void Step active at all times, without fail, got it?" Rui stressed the importance of this.

If Kane just randomly revealed himself out of the blue, it would ruin everything!

"Yeah yeah, I know, don't baby me Rui," He grumbled.

"Sorry about that, it's just particularly important," He replied apologetically.

He was not afraid that the Martial Squires would be able to sense Kane. Sensing Kane was something only a small proportion of Martial Squires could do outside of the Shionel Dungeon, but it would be absolutely impossible for almost anybody barring Rui to detect him inside the Shionel Dungeon.

That was why he stressed the importance of not making any mistakes since that was the only way his presence could possibly be revealed inside the dungeon.

"You're late, Squire Quarrier," Squire Fren blankly stated.

"Ah, sorry, I got a little lost on this floor," Rui meekly replied. He deliberately wanted to paint himself as a little clumsy. Once Chairman Deacon read the report, his evaluation of Rui as a threat would most likely be lowered a bit.

And that was exactly what Rui was hoping for. He did not want to stand out a lot.

"Hmph," Squire Darbun snorted, sneering at Rui. "This is why an incompetent weakling like you should not have joined the Voidhunters."

Rui was about to respond when he suddenly froze. Something had happened.

Squire Fren was sharp enough to have caught that.

"What happened?" She asked, peering at him with her eyes.

"Nothing at all," Rui managed to squeeze out. But his attention was diverted elsewhere.

('Is that big group of Martial Squires heading towards us?') Rui frowned as his Riemannian Echo had just picked up a large group of Martial Squires, with fifty percent more Martial Squires than their own group moving toward their group specifically, despite just having entered the dungeon.

This kind of trajectory was either a large coincidence or...

('Or they're specifically moving towards us,') Rui grew increasingly tense.

He was not a fool, no group of Martial Squires moved in this manner towards another intentionally if their intentions were not malicious.

Rui tracked the group of Martial Squires moving towards them with a growing tingling sensation across his nerves. Even his suppressed Primordial instinct was sensing grave danger.

('Damn it is an attack,') He cursed.

But who? Why would anyone randomly attack a group of sixteen Martial Squires? How were they aware of their location? Did they have an excellent grade-ten sensory Martial Squire who could at the very least sense their presence partially? Or...

('They had intelligence on us ahead of time,') Rui cursed. ('That would explain it, that means there is an actual data leak to someone who really does not like Chairman Deacon and is opposed to them, and has the power to dispatch twenty-four Martial Squires on short notice.

There was one name at the top of the suspect list that stood out to him.

('Could it be Gui- No wait! The identity doesn't matter right now! I need to fucking survive,')

There was about half a minute's worth of time before the two groups collided. Normally this would be far too little time to make a decision. Martial Squires did not possess accelerated conscious thought outside of combat-related cognition and thought processes. Yet Rui's mind far surpassed human limits even without the evolution that came with being a Martial Squire.

His pupils dilated as his mind furiously began processing his circumstances.

('The primary objective is Kane's and my survival,') Rui instantly established. ('The secondary objective is to ensure our identities are not revealed.')

Against twenty-four Martial Squires, Rui had absolutely no grand ambitions of fighting them head-on and winning. As long as he survived and their identities were not revealed, he would consider it a big win.

Chapter 822: First Blood

The first thing he did was cough thrice into the back of his hand. "Man, this place sure smells weird, it's itching my throat."

"Hmph, the air is completely normal," Squire Darbun snorted. "You can't even breathe normally, are you even a Martial Squire?"

He could not be bothered to give the slightest bit of a damn about the overzealous insecure juvenile with a crush on his team leader. The three coughs were a signal to Kane that an unexpected danger was due.

Since he knew he would not be able to directly communicate with Kane, he had devised many actions that were coded signals. Scratching his head indicated that Kane needed to leave immediately and hide in some tunnel leading to the floor. A yawn meant that Kane needed to leave the dungeon. He had even devised fifteen separate coded signals that each told Kane which Martial Squire he needed to kill with his knife in some emergency.

Kane immediately stiffened as he became even more vigilant of his surroundings even as maneuvered around the group to maintain Void Step actively.

('Fifteen more seconds,') Rui cursed inwardly. "I don't want to waste any more time, so I'm going head to my assigned location. The rules have already been laid clearly, and remember, we don't need to coordinate from here on out. Cough cough cough."

Rui immediately sky-walked away from the direction that the intruders were coming at a rapid pace without trying to seem too suspicious, in a moment he had already moved a hundred meters away from them.

Two more seconds!

"Hey," Squire Darbun growled. "Where-!"

BAM!

A powerful Martial Squire shot into their sensory range, startling them as they bull-rushed into him hard. A huge swarm of Martial Squires immediately rushed the entire group.

"!!!" The fifteen Voidhunters shook as they immediately entered battle mode at the sudden ambush.

BAM BAM BAM!

They had engaged in battle as a clash of fists between the two groups had immediately ensued! Thankfully, Rui had already moved to the edge of their sensory range thanks to hurriedly moving away from the group under the guise of wanting to begin their operation. This gave him great plausible deniability for the timing since no one could possibly chalk it up to him having known in advance that they were going to attack and thus moving away from the target group at the right time.

He glanced at the battle even as he rushed away from it.

Squire Fren was surrounded by a few Martial Squires who did not let her escape. The sheer amount of pressure that emerged from that battle made even Rui stiffen just a little.

BAM BAM BAM!!!

A grade-ten Martial Squire pummeled her guard with heavy blows. He twisted his body with each attack, generating remarkable power that shook the entirety of the atmosphere violently on the twelfth floor. Each motion he made tore past the sound barrier as they left several sonic booms in their wake

Rui did not think that he would be able to take more than several blows of that caliber even with his Flux Earther technique before he was effectively as good as dead.

He was outclassed. There were simply no other words for it.

BAM!!!

Squire Fren grimaced as she withstood the blow with her guard, yet she had not come out unscathed. Her arms were bruising heavily, even swelling visibly, yet they seemed to mend and subside quickly as her high-grade healing factor kicked in. It was clearly much faster than Rui's and was healing wounds very rapidly.

"RARGH!" the Martial Squire threw a powerful blow, at her face, aiming for a knockout.

WHOOSH

The blow hit empty air. Her body coiled around that of her opponent as she began strangling him hard. Her arms locked his arm around himself in a way that strained his shoulder joint extremely hard.

CRACK CRACK CRACK!

The man screamed in pain as her knee borrowed itself into the back of his ribcage from behind cracking it as she tightened her grip.

SPLAT

"ARGH!" She grimaced, gritting her teeth as her back was exposed to a blade attack.

She had no choice but to let go, but she didn't intend to let him go free.

Her legs uncoiled from around him, yet her arms tightened as she spun about using sky-walking before hurling him down in a wrestling-style throw. She employed several gripping techniques, torque techniques and several supplementary technique to throw her opponent down with as much power as she could.

BOOM!

A shockwave the size of a small district rippled across the atmosphere as her opponent shot down towards the ground faster than a bullet!

Normally, this would not be a particularly lethal attack for a grade-ten Martial Squire like him. Yet they were not in normal circumstances at all.

Not at all.

"SSSK!"

Several serpents lashed out, camouflaged below the ground Their mouths opened as their fangs emerged. Yet despite being rushed at with many Squire-level threats, the Martial Squire simply grunted.

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM!!!

Seven strikes.

Each with titanic power that blasted literal holes in the bodies of the serpents.

A veteran grade-ten Martial Squire whose Martial Path was centered around offensive rapid-fire could not be overwhelmed this easily.

Yet, neither could the tenacious ability of the taipans to survive without a body. Just when he turned back up to return to his assassination target.

SPLAT!

"RGH!" He grimaced as the bodyless head of the serpent still midair, managed to land a single fang into the fleshy muscle above the collar bone.

"AAAAARGH!" He screeched violently in pain unlike anything he had ever felt since the evolution apotheosis to the Squire Realm.

BAM!!!

The head of the serpent almost blasted into fleshy confetti from just a single strike, yet the damage had already been done. The man lost strength in his muscles as the world went dark.

Squire Fren had a vindictive expression in place of her normally detached expression as she watched the man succumb to a potent poison.

Chapter 823: Turntables

Rui didn't have time to spectate the fights of others as he ran away, yet it appeared that he had moved a second too late.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH

A Martial Squire chased after him rapidly.

"Tsk," Rui tutted.

He was faster than Rui. Rui ran away at top speed, using Outer Convergence to funnel muscular power from all of his muscle groups into acceleration. He even used his newly created Gale Force Breathing, which made him more than twice as fast as before. Yet even that was not enough to outpace his opponent.

BAM!

Rui was forced to turn around and block a powerful attack with his guard. The two of them came to just a momentary standstill as the assassin succeeded in his goal of preventing Rui from running away while Rui failed in his goal of getting away.

The two of them faced off against each other. Neither of them got a glimpse of the other's appearance since they were both masked, but considering that the enemies had information on them, he probably knew Rui's identity as well. That was probably why he himself had targeted Rui thinking he was only an ordinary B-rank Martial Artist.

They both radiated massive pressure brimming with hostility as they stared at each other, sizing each other up.

It was just a moment in real-time, but to them, it was more than enough.

"Go help the others. Make sure some survive," Rui said out loud. "I'll be fine. GO!"

His opponent didn't respond but was incredibly confused. Was he insinuating that his fellow assassins were in need of help because the Voidhunters were so strong? But why did he say 'I'll be fine'? What did he mean by 'Make sure some survive?'

He didn't know, but he didn't linger on the matter for more than a moment, before rushing in aggressively.

He threw a swift palm jab lunging right for Rui's throat.

A lethal attack aiming for a vital.

Rui reacted immediately, raising an arm to intercept the attack and nullify it with Flux Earth while preparing his right fist for a follow-up attack. Yet;

THWACK!

The palm jab twisted and curved around his interception with inhuman fluidity and flexibility, before dashing forward and striking his throat regardless! It simply walked around Rui's block and rushed forward uncaring the block that it made look stupid.

"ACK!" Rui coughed some blood as he felt the wound on his throat bleeding. The surprise and shock did not help him gain his bearing either.

The man did not give Rui a moment of respite as he rushed forward with a barrage of palm jabs. Rui guarded against them once more, with maximum vigilance as he observed the incoming attacks.

The man's bones seemed to detach from their joints as they avoid obstacles and barriers blocking their way in a wave-like motion.

"RGH!" Rui grimaced as all of the attacks once more bypassed his guard like they didn't even exist!

flesh wounds had already begun bleeding steadily across his body, yet he wasn't too concerned by them at the moment. His healing factor was good enough to ensure that they would be healed over the span of the fight, even if not immediately. The wounds would certainly not burden him.

Instead, the confirmation of his opponent's combat style and Martial Art were worth it!

('This... His Martial Path must be centered around homing jabs. He takes an uncommon Tai Chi-like stance that is entirely centered around his palms.') He swiftly analyzed. ('His Martial Art must have a paramount focus on granting lethality with each palm jab, while also granting him the ability to bypass

any active defense with remarkable trajectory manipulation through sharp muscle control and flexibility.')

The man rushed in with even greater victory at the sight of the successful damage inflicted with his previous barrage as he launched another swift barrage of attacks. He had gone with the expectations of taking Rui down swiftly with just two, or at most three barrages of flesh wounds that would deteriorate Rui's combat ability to the point where he could just kill him in an instant with a single attack.

He did not expect to hit empty air.

WHOOSH

Where Rui was a moment ago, he no longer was as his image faded in the face of the assassin's attacks.

BOOM!!!

CRACK!

A devastating knee blow landed on his ribs, cracking them. He rushed backward in shock and in pain as he witnessed Rui chasing him with a strange stance that was different from before. His elbows and knees flexed and raised, resembling a Muay Thai stance from Earth.

Rui rushed after him without any moment's delay, refusing to let him even a moment of respite.

BAM BAM BAM!

Each attack came from only half a meter away from their target's body. The distance between them had shrunk to such a degree that a mere swing of the elbows and knees landed square on the body!

('Sucks, doesn't it?') Rui continued pummeling him as he never once ceased focusing on his opponent, watching him incur more damage with each blow. ('This martial art from Earth is suited to taking you down.')

That was what he had concluded as he analyzed his opponent's Martial Art with the VOID algorithm.

He had already observed that every palm attack that his opponent had launched, had struck when his opponent's arm was fully extended and stretched out. Even when Rui shifted forward, he would shift back half a step to ensure that his arm would still be fully stretched when his attack reached Rui. He would even adjust the alignment of his body for each strike to ensure they were just perfectly stretched out when it hit the target. His arm needed to be stretched out, and thus at a particular distance.

That was a pattern.

And the VOID algorithm loved patterns. The pattern recognition protocols gobbled it up as it formed the prediction model, which when Rui analyzed with the adaptive evolution protocols resulted in a combat style that deeply resembled two of his favorite martial arts!

('The super close range of Muay Thai and Silat from Earth is perfect for countering your Martial Art!')

Chapter 824: Part

The assassin coughed blood as Rui pummeled him with close-quarter attacks with his knees and elbows. He struggled to get away but Rui did not let up even a moment of respite. Even as he did his best to block Rui's attacks, he couldn't help but wonder how he had even reached this level.

His initial two sets of attacks were effective, and they bypassed his guard and landed on his vitals, piercing his flesh. Things had been proceeding according to plan, when suddenly, the target of his attacks had disappeared in the face of his attacks in an illusion, appearing right in front of him!

Rui had used his trusty Phantom Step technique to feint a step back when instead dove forward with a flying knee kick. Phantom Step was a technique whose effectiveness also depended on its application. When the feints of the technique were used to show the opponent what they wanted to see and what they expected to see, then the technique was more than thrice as effective as normal!

The resulting outcome was a drastic shift in reality that entirely caught the assassin off-guard on top of the titanic damage that had been inflicted by a powerful attack striking his solar plexus. The fact that he

had not seen even a shadow of the attack incoming meant that he had not defended against it passively or actively. He took that attack purely with his raw durability, causing massive damage internally that left him reeling.

Even though Rui had endured several bleeding flesh wounds, his movements didn't indicate any sluggishness as his healing factor had already staved off the most debilitating parts of the wounds and was already on its way to recovering most of the damage he had sustained.

On the other hand, despite having endured only a single attack, the damage was far more debilitating than anything Rui had endured. The fact that Rui's opponent had not defended passively or actively means that he was basically withstanding the might of multiple Squire-level techniques with his body alone.

Furthermore, his Martial body's configuration did not place too much weight on toughness and durability, as opposed to speed and flexibility. Thus, the damage it had withstood was tremendous. The biggest problem was the fact that Rui had struck his solar plexus with that attack, directly striking his diaphragm and shocking it so hard with damage that it had become paralyzed for precious several seconds. The assassin was literally unable to breathe at all for that duration, let alone activate a breathing technique to use in combat.

Although it only lasted several seconds, that was a world of difference for Martial Squires. It was more than five minutes in the perspectives of both Martial Squires!

By the end of those five minutes, the assassin was battered with bruises and wounds that had already begun to swell up even as Rui whaled waves of elbows and knees down on his opponent.

"ENOUGH!" The man bellowed once he was able to activate his breathing techniques to outspeed Rui again. "My Curving Lance style will not be belittled! My attacks are as nimble as the winds, yet as sharp as lightning!"

He rushed forward with far greater speed and power than before as he did not dare hold back. A dreadful amount of menacing pressure rose from him as he channeled his rage and fury from being pummeled like a punching bag for five minutes into his attacks. They were so fast they almost disappeared in the eyes of Rui!

Yet that alone was not enough.

CRACK CRACK CRACK!

"Huh?" The assassin's eyes widened before he even realized what had happened before he could even feel pain.

An expression of horror rose onto his face as he glanced at his fingers, which had been broken and twisted in a grotesque figure after clashing with Rui's elbow, getting crushed in the process.

BAM BAM BAM!

Rui exploited the moment of shock

('Your Martial body does not lend itself well to toughness conditioning. Your fingers are not too tough, and that is why you keep targeting vitals and softer fleshy regions of the body. If you hit a bone, your fingers will be severely damaged getting crushed by the power of your own attack,') Rui mused as he relentlessly attacked his opponent.

He had noticed that his opponent only struck softer parts of the body that were not reinforced by bone or tough muscles. This wouldn't be done unless he had no choice, since it only restricted the number of striking targets he could strike, making him even easier to predict. The VOID algorithm greedily consumed this pattern with its pattern recognition processing protocols, creating a more fleshed-out prediction model.

Rui didn't need to avoid his attacks. He needed to use his opponent's speed against him by shifting at the very last second to cause his opponent's attack to crash into hard bone instead of a fleshy weak point.

This was one of the counters and adaptations to his Martial Art that Rui had come up with. The adaptive evolution model was something that Rui himself had created and was nothing short of a crystallization of his expertise in understanding what worked against what styles, and how it could be used against them. While he had formally laid out an official adaptive evolution model for other fighters who were

training in the VOID algorithm, it was for the sake of others. He himself did not need it. He was the adaptive evolution model, in a sense.

He himself was part of the VOID algorithm himself.

Rui's eyes widened as he felt he came across a profound realization and epiphany.

('I am... part of my Martial Art?') The thought thundered across his mind.

For a moment, the fight faded away from his mind as he immersed himself in his Martial Path.

The boundless path extended seemingly eternally into the distance, yet he felt as though he had just taken a step forward deeper than he ever had before!

Chapter 825: Epiphany

The pattern recognition system of the VOID algorithm functioned with two models working side by side. The predictive model inputted any and all data on his opponent before outputting a statistical predictive model on said, opponent. Followed by the adaptive evolution model, which inputted the newly created predictive model to create a fighting style that was adapted and evolved to counter that opponent.

He had spent many years creating the adaptive evolution model of the pattern recognition system. It had taken him years upon years, almost two decades' worth of rigorous empirical research into all existing martial arts and unarmed combat styles. He had come to gain a level of understanding that very few humans in the history of planet Earth had ever come to possess.

Despite not being a fighter himself, John Falken had come to touch the essence of the most ideal form of applying one's mind and body.

The pinnacle of martial arts.

"Be Water, my friend,"

Yet he had created the VOID algorithm for everybody else.

Not himself. Thus, even if he himself had achieved what was nothing short of enlightenment, it was useless.

Project Water was a project that was for everyone else, not for himself. It was to give everyone what he could not have. The ability to practice the greatest martial art that his idol Bruce Lee had come in touch with

How could he pass on his understanding to others? How could he allow others to replicate his thought process, harness his knowledge and understanding that came with a lifetime of learning and exploring?

That thought was what led to the birth of the adaptive evolution model. A rigorous database system that outputted a counter for every input from the predictive model. It was the crystallization of his understanding of how to counter every predicted move in the most optimal manner possible.

It was him, himself, was it not?

He had always subconsciously treated it this way, it was one of the reasons he loved the VOID Algorithm. It contained the fruit that bore the blood, sweat, and tears that he had put into it. It contained nothing short of his very life itself.

Yet, only now had he realized that perhaps this was not just a sentiment.

Perhaps this realization... this accomplishment was a key to the higher Realms!

"I am a part of my Martial Art and my Martial Art is a part of me."

He had felt as though he had been blind his entire life and had truly opened his eyes for the very first time.

At that moment, he felt boundless peace and serenity.

And yet.

He felt boundless energy and power.

BAM!!!

A titanic blow more powerful than any that Rui had ever launched impacted his opponent's gut like a meteorite.

"ARGH!" he vomited blood as his broken ribs pierced into his lungs, that was what he violently spewed when Rui's fist crushed his lungs flat. "I'LL FUCKING KILL YOU!"

His body coiled to an inhuman degree as he accumulated a tremendous amount of potential energy, yet before he could even unleash it.

THWOOM!

An invisible blast of sound crashed into him, sending him tumbling backward in the air. Rui had taken the liberty to launch the Might Roar Flash Blast technique that he had acquired from Vilun Island and blast his opponent before he could execute his flashy move. Because the attack could vastly surpass the speed of sound, he was able to strike his opponent before he executed a time-consuming attack.

Rui immediately rushed after his opponent with Gale Force Breathing, Parallel Walk, and Outer Convergence, unwilling to let him any respite or let him escape. His opponent froze seeing Rui rush after him, before turning away, and running away as fast as he could. He was faster than Rui, thus he had some hope of running away from Rui at top speed.

Yet, what he hadn't taken into account was the difference in their conditions. Rui had taken far less damage than he had and had healed more of his damage than his opponent had. As Rui had expected, that made all of the difference.

CLASP

Rui caught his shoulder, and a second later his fist whaled down on his opponent.

BAM BAM BAM!

"ARGH! Let me go!" He struggled to escape. "Ack!"

He choked when Rui's coiled around his neck as he squeezed down on his carotid arteries that supplied blood to the brain. Martial Squires could hold their breath for a very long time, thus there was no point in shutting his airway down alone. However, all cells required oxygen supplied to them via blood, thus shutting down the arteries was quite effective.

The man struggled desperately to break Rui's grip over his neck, yet Rui refused to yield as he continued to squeeze harder.

Eventually, the man's resistance grew weaker, until eventually his arms dropped. His breathing stopped and his heart slowed down as well.

It was done.

Rui simply let go of the unconscious body, watching it fall down to the ground. Three meters before it reached the ground, two taipans lashed out from beneath the soil before they dug their fangs into the unconscious Martial Squire's body, before wrangling the body from each other.

He would die very soon with all that poison coursing through his body.

He sighed in relief as he relished in his victory. ('He was probably an A-rank Martial Squire.')

That meant that he was at least a grade-seven Martial Squire if not grade eight. However, Rui still managed to win, even if he was on the losing initially. His revelation mid-battle seemed to deepen his journey down his Martial Path as he felt a surge of power that aided him in battle.

He had gotten stronger. He wasn't sure if he would concretely count himself as a grade-seven Martial Squire at the moment, he didn't entirely understand what he had experienced, after all. Still, he was sure that it was a positive outcome.

Of course, the entire battle would have ended instantly had he fought the Martial Squire with Kane, but ultimately he chose not to.

There was a reason why he had gotten Kane to help some of the others.

Chapter 826: Suspicion

('I cannot be the only one to survive this ambush,') He knew this.

Out of the sixteen Martial Squires that were ambushed out of the twenty-four, it would be far too suspicious if he, perceived to be the weakest Martial Squire as a grade-B Martial Squire, was the only survivor.

Such an outcome would be extremely hard to believe, and anyone who hears it will definitely find it very odd, even if they didn't suspect anything immediately. He was sure that Chairman Deacon would be very suspicious. He was also sure that Guildmaster Bradt would be quite suspicious too.

Chairman Deacon's suspicions would be that Rui is either hiding his power or is a spy from the group that ambushed his Voidhunters. Guildmaster Bradt knew that Rui was not colluding with the assassins that he had sent, thus he would suspect that Rui is hiding his true power. Furthermore, Guildmaster Bradt also knew that Rui could project power greater than his actual power, a trick that Rui had been forced to reveal to hold a gun to Guildmaster Bradt's head.

This information was enough for the shrewd old man to grow suspicious of Rui being the true identity of the Voider, and that was something Rui would rather avoid being suspected of at all costs.

Thus he needed at least one other, preferably two other Martial Artists to also survive, and thankfully Kane understood what he meant.

This was purely out of self-interest. Rui did not give a damn about the Voidhunters personally, given that they were actually hunting him. If he could get away with being the sole survivor, he would have no problem doing so and abandoning the Voidhunters behind, but couldn't. He was far too careful to make such a careless and short-sighted move.

He scanned the ongoing battle with Riemannian Echo as he observed it.

('They'll die soon, the only reason they're holding on is that Squire Fren seems to have taken down that grade-ten Martial Squire. Currently, it's twenty-two Martial Squires vs fifteen, and if not for Squire-Fren taking on three grade-nine Martial Squires, they would have been long dead.,') Rui mused.

Kane pranced around the battle intervening in dangerous moments just to ensure that they barely managed to avoid death in an inconspicuous manner. Rui approved of this, killing them with his poisoned blade rashly would be a foolish move and his presence would certainly be realized even if nobody could even remotely close to sensing him.

He considered his course of action from here on out. He was quite confident about surviving and not having their identities revealed. Thus, he focused on his third priority, which was ensuring that his survival was not strange and suspicious.

('Now then,') He considered his options calmly. ('What to do?')

If a larger proportion of Martial Squires survived the improbable attack, it became less likely that they were all spies. This was why he wanted more numbers, but there were other considerations on which targets he ought to have Kane protect.

('I should pick a survivor from each group may be,') He wondered.

That would also reduce the probability that the survivors were all in on a single scheme as opposed to if a single party survived. It was less likely that these parties all just happened to betray each other for the sake of someone like Guildmaster Bradt when many of these parties had been together for a long time before the Shionel Dungeon had even been discovered.

Thus, if there was a survivor from each group, the probability of betrayal was just drastically reduced.

('All in all, four survivors including me, and three others from three other groups will make a lot of sense, and is probably the way to go,') Rui mused as he coldly analyzed and calculated the outcomes and the aftermath of all combinations and permutations of survivors and victims.

('Alright, I've made up my mind,') He decided. ('Squire Fren from party Saberstrike, Squire Cale from party Frontburner, Squire Meenal from party Trionel.')

He chose the strongest Martial Squire and the two weakest Martial Squires, as far as rank went, as the three survivors. This was the objectively best outcome as far as outcomes go.

Rui nodded, having made up his mind before carefully entering the edge of Kane's sensory range while making sure to stay out of the sensory ranges of the others.

"You made it!" Kane heaved a sigh as they both separated from the fight for a second. "I knew you wouldn't lose, even to an A-rank Martial Squire. There's just no way!"

"You're damn right I wouldn't," He smiled goodheartedly before his expression turned more solemn.

"Alright, I've figured out what you need to do. You need to nick the Martial Squire assassins fighting the grade-ten Voidhunter, that Voidhunter, and that one as well with your poisoned blade. Ensure that it's just enough that those three Voidhunters get an edge and win or escape. The remaining Voidhunters, you can poison them and ensure that they die."

This would ensure that the three survivors' Martial Squires would gain the edge that they needed to survive or escape. While the remaining Voidhunters would all die.

He had no problem with the rest of them dying, they were his enemies, after all. Rui didn't think he was a bad person, but showing compassion to people who accepted an assassination contract to kill him?

('That's not even a funny joke,') He snorted, shaking his head.

The Martial Squire battles had all spread out as each of the Voidhunters had tried scattering and escaping when the ambush launched, unfortunately for them, they did not have prior warning, nor did they have a headstart to escape like Rui, thus they were bogged down by their opponents.

The only reason that the Voidhunters had survived even this long was that it was more difficult to kill someone who did everything in their power to escape and survive than someone who resolutely fought head-on even when they were at a disadvantage. That delayed the process of killing them.

Chapter 827: Plan

Rui had no intention of making an appearance in the battle. That was highly unwise on his part. His intentions were to make a highly injured appearance at the Deacon Industries main branch after the other three survivors returned alive, giving off the impression he just barely managed to escape a bloody battle with his life intact.

The only reason he was still waiting around and watching was to jump in and save Kane if anything happened even by mistake. Even though Kane was pretty much impossible to sense in the Shionel Dungeon, that did not make him invulnerable. Kane was so weak that even a single attack from any of these high-grade Martial Squires could kill him. If a single attack from these A-rank Martial Squires fighting all out hit a vital area, the sheer damage might instantly kill him.

He was not a tanky fighter. He was an evasive maneuverer, his fighting style revolved around not being forced to withstand attack by ensuring he avoided being hit by them be it through speed, agility, highly efficient and effective footwork, maneuvering, and supplementary breathing techniques as well as powerful stealth techniques.

Rui watched with a nervous expression as Kane did as he was instructed. Rui was even waiting below the fights happening hundreds of feet in the air with a healing potion in his hand. If Kane got hurt and fell, Rui would immediately catch him and heal him with a high-grade healing potion. He did not intend to let his friend die.

He may not have given a damn about the Voidhunters whose team he was technically and officially on, but most certainly would do everything in his power to save Kane.

Fortunately, Kane was good at what he did, a combination of talent that was in the genius-level territory, as well as a lot of training and experience with covert missions meant that such an operation was well within his capabilities.

FLICK FLICK FLICK

He mildly nicked each of the three assassins fighting Squire Fren with just a minute amount of poison.

He leaped about to find the others that Rui had instructed him to poison, nicking each of them with a minute amount of poison, not enough to instantly paralyze them, but enough to weaken them.

"AAARGH!"

"I.. feel weak,"

"Urgh,"

Each of the battles decisively folded in the outcome that Rui ordained. All thirty-eight Martial Squires fighting in this section of the floor were dancing on the palm of Rui's hand as he guided their battles.

SNAP!

Squire Fren mercilessly snapped the necks of her weakened Martial Squires, killing them on the spot. Though she couldn't help but frown. She had come close to the verge of losing and dying when all three of her opponents suddenly grew weak, allowing her to easily overpower them as they lost a lot of their strength.

Just before she could catch a break, the other assassins returned from their other fights almost simultaneously, almost as though it was timed like clockwork.

"...! She's still alive!" They were shocked. "Tsk, get her!"

She did not even bother trying to fight back as she dashed away at top speed, while the assassins tried their best to catch up to her.

('She'll escape,') Rui nodded. ('She's faster, and careful with her surroundings. Given the intelligence that she displayed earlier, she'll probably realize that she can go into a random obscure tunnel, consume a healing and rejuvenation potion, and regain her full power. She's also smart enough to realize her teammates are dead given that the assassins fighting them returned, and she'll probably focus on surviving this ordeal more than anything.')

It was not her that he was worried about, it was the other two that he was worried about, he quickly reached their locations while keeping a tab on them.

('Tsk, she's going to get caught even though Kane went through such effort of weakening her opponents,') He tutted disapprovingly as he observed Squire Meenal trying to escape from her opponents. ('I'll have to intercept at the right moment.')

He went up high as he waited in the direction that she was frantically running away to, hoping to find a tunnel where she could perhaps escape to.

He predicted the tunnel she would enter based on positioning and size, making sure he was at an elevation far greater where neither of them could sense him, while he prepared himself.

"Fwoooo..." He sucked in a huge amount of air while he waited for the right moment. ('It's been a while since I used this technique, so I definitely need to focus all out here.')

He waited as they reached the right place at the right time before his mind kicked into action and began executing Transverse Resonance: Tier Four. He fired four Mighty Roar Flash Blasts in rapid succession, each slower than the one that came after it flying down at a speed that greatly exceeded sound before combining into a single attack with four times more powerful than each of the individual attacks.

BAM!!!

An attack with power scraping at the peak of the Squire Realm crashed onto the head of the assassin that had almost gotten a hold of Squire Meenal, cracking and crumpling into his head on the spot while blasting his whole body downwards.

"SSSSS!" A large mid-grade Taipan lunged out, swallowing his corpse whole.

('Well, there goes the evidence,') He smirked as he watched Squire Meenal get away safely, very confused but very relieved as well. ('Nice, all three of them escaped.')

"So what now?" Kane appeared out of thin air.

"Let's leave," Rui calmly replied as he gestured towards the tunnels. "The plan was a complete success."

"I can't believe you created a plan that turned something inconvenient into a benefit for yourself," Kane sighed with furrowed eyebrows. "Even an ambush isn't enough to catch you truly off-guard."

The two of them chatted while they reached the upper part of the Shionel Dungeon.

"Alright, now what? We go home? I wanna go home and get something to eat,"

"Now I play the role of a victim who almost died," Rui calmly replied as he summoned his sword out of his dimensional storage ring.

SPLAT SPLAT SPLAT SPLAT SPLAT

He gave himself significant gashes.

"Woah!" Kane frowned. "But why though?"

"To stave off suspicion," Rui calmly replied. "Here, take my utility belt and my dimensional storage ring with you back to the inn."

Chapter 828: Return

"Why do you want me to take them?" Kane frowned.

"I can't have them taking the ring when they inevitably treat my wounds," Rui replied. "And I need a reason to justify why I didn't drink my healing potion despite such wounds when I return back to the main branch office of Deacon Industries."

"Ah, that makes sense, yeah," Kane nodded. "What about the assassins though, once you leave the dungeon, won't you be targeted by them since they'd be on the lookout for the survivors who left? The moment you appear, they'll be on your back to finish the job. Same with the other survivors too."

"No," Rui shook his head. "Their goal was not to kill all the Voidhunter Martial Squires discreetly and covertly, as much as it appears to be so. They also can't kill once we leave the dungeon, it would make them liable and turn the law against them, and everything that comes with it. They were dispatched because someone doesn't want the Voidhunters doing what they were going to do. Someone who has a strong vested interest in preventing the Voider from being caught. They want to discourage other Martial Squires from joining the Voidhunters after word of a targeted attack on the Voidhunters on their very first operation is spread, in addition to stopping the attack itself. Once the four survivors, including myself, inevitably blame the obvious data leak on Deacon Industries and break away from our contract. Nobody will want to join the Voidhunters. Chairman Deacon will have to work ten times harder for the same result. That is the desired outcome that 'he' probably wanted."

"He?" Kane tilted his head.

"The one who planned the attack, of course," Rui replied. "Guildmaster Bradt has every interest and incentive to foil all of Chairman Deacon's efforts to catch, interrogate and kill me. He is the only one who has the intelligence-gathering ability to learn of the Voidhunter operation today, while also calling twenty-four Martial Squires, including a grade-ten Martial Squire, on short notice. There is almost nobody else who has the ability and the motives to pull that off."

"Mhm, yep. That's what I was thinking too," Kane nodded earnestly, lying through his teeth. He felt too embarrassed to admit that he hadn't even considered that the guildmaster was responsible, hell, he hadn't even thought about it. In his mind, there was no way to figure such things out in the middle of a battle, obviously.

But apparently, this was not a restriction that affected Rui at all.

"Makes it all the more solid if we both came to the same conclusion independently," Rui remarked as he handed his belt and ring to Kane. "Alright, I've bled enough. Time to go, bye-bye."

He quickly exited the tunnel, with a pained and exhausted expression as he panted out loud, while Kane disappeared into thin air before leaving the dungeon.

Rui landed on the ground, walking slowly and unsteadily as if he no longer had the strength to sky-walk. He ignored the concerned and odd looks he got as he traveled to the main branch of Deacon Industries. The blood loss was bad, but he had carefully made sure that he wouldn't be over-taxing his healing factor, but at the same time he needed to make sure that his wounds didn't heal either. It took a precise understanding of how good his healing was to make sure to inflict the optimal wounds.

STEP STEP STEP

He reached the front gate of the main branch of the Deacon Industries. The guards immediately pulled out a communication device.

"This is Squire Delmin reporting from the front gate. A masked Squire wearing attire matching one of the Voidhunters has just appeared before the front gates severely injured and bleeding," He hastily reported, listening to the replied instruction before nodding and heading forward to give Rui a hand.

"Hey, you made it, the master has promised that you'll be given the best treatment available, so don't worry," He put one of Rui's arms over his shoulder before sky-walking carrying Rui along with him inside where he was quickly given emergency treatment and supplied all kinds of potions for an absolutely optimal recovery without any flaw on even a cellular level.

Rui rested in a medical room, relaxing peacefully, pretending to be asleep for several hours before finally getting up, acting all groggy.

"Urghh..." He rubbed his eyes, shaking his head slightly as if to orient himself properly.

"Squire Quarrier, you've been asleep for quite some time," A nurse nearby told him. "How are you feeling?"

"...Where am I?" He frowned as if having a hard time remembering.

"You arrived at the main branch of Deacon Industries on the verge of collapsing, having lost a lot of blood. You must have been dizzy with the blood loss, causing you to not remember it all that well."

"I see..." Rui murmured. "...What about Chairman Deacon? I strongly wish to have an extensive discussion with him."

"The Chairman has invited you already, having heard of your awakening already," She replied as she accessed a communication device. "You have been thoroughly treated and healed, and have made a full recovery, so don't worry about your health."

Rui nodded when a woman entered the medical room.

It was Chairman Deacon's secretary. "Squire Quarrier, Chairman Deacon has invited you for a dialogue with the other survivors."

"Other survivors...?" He frowned. "How many died?"

"All but four," She replied straightforwardly.

His eyes widened. "You're telling me that out of all the sixteen Voidhunters that left for the dungeon, only four, including myself, survived?!"

"That's correct, Squire Quarrier," She replied impassively. "Chairman Deacon is willing to accommodate you at any time, given your previous health condition. If you want to postpone the mee-"

"No," Rui shook his head as he got off his bed. "I wish to speak to him immediately."

A steely look of determination rose on his face as the secretary bowed before escorting him to Chairman Deacon's office.

('I'm not a bad actor, even if I do say so myself,') He mused inwardly.

Chapter 829: Compunctions

Rui knew what he had to do. He needed to play the role of the injured and tormented weak Martial Squire that had barely made it out alive. He needed to project righteous anger that anybody in their circumstances would have. In fact, it would be rather strange if he didn't have at least some misgivings about what had happened, and would make him more suspicious.

Soon enough, they reached Chairman Deacon's office.

"The chairman is awaiting you inside," The secretary bowed to him, gesturing inside.

Rui nodded, walking in as he pushed open the doors to the office.

"Squire Quarrier," Chairman Deacon greeted him. "Welcome, I'm pleased to see that you've recovered well."

Inside were Chairman Deacon as well as the only three survivors of the Voidhunters.

Instantly, Rui could read the atmosphere. It was dark. The Martial Squires was furious, yet they were holding back, waiting for Rui to also appear so that all of them could discuss the most important matters together.

Squire Fren in particular seemed to be on the verge of exploding. Her eyes were widened and bloodshot as she glared at Chairman Deacon. She did not bother to hide her aura or her strength in her anger and grief over the loss of her Party Saberstrike. The pressure she exerted on Chairman Deacon was so heavy that his bodyguards needed to guard him against it with their protective auras, shielding his sense of danger and cooling it down.

Rui had memorized her data, so he was aware that she had been with her party for nearly fifteen years ever since she met them after they had just discovered their Martial Path. Their loss must have been nothing short of traumatizing to her, so he could completely understand her state of mind being what it was.

('Should have stayed from the assassination contract,') He shrugged inwardly. He empathized with her, but he wouldn't change a single thing he would do if he got a chance to redo the entire thing.

He quickly directed his attention back to Chairman Deacon.

"Thank you, Chairman Deacon," Rui coldly replied with a stern tone. "It's frankly a miracle that I survived, in all honesty. When we were ambushed by a force of Martial Squires that outnumbered us significantly, I was shocked. If not for the fact that I had already begun to move into our assigned positions, I would have been locked in and would have certainly died instead of standing before you here today."

"I am pleased to hear that you managed to get away," He nodded with a heavy tone. "If you don't mind, can you give us a more detail-"

"I do mind, Chairman Deacon," Rui coldly interrupted him.

In ordinary circumstances, Chairman Deacon would not have tolerated such blatant disrespect. It did not matter if Rui was a Martial Squire, a mere Martial Squire was nothing to him. He had many Martial Squires and even Martial Seniors under his direct command. No ordinary would even dare interrupt him in the middle of his statement.

Still, these were anything but ordinary circumstances. He could not act heavy-handed when he was liable for the clear data leak that had occurred when a group of assassins greatly outnumbering the Voidhunters, ganged up on them and slaughtered twelve members of the Voidhunters, leaving only four to survive.

In reality, he did not entirely know the point of the information leak. It could have been on his side, however, it could also have been on the side of the surviving Martial Squires. Of course, he did not think that all four of the surviving members were responsible for the leak, that was far too unlikely.

In this situation, he needed to take responsibility regardless. If he didn't, he could forget about trying to salvage what remained of the Voidhunters. That was his biggest issue at the moment.

"We can talk about my story later. That isn't the most important thing at the moment," Rui coldly continued. "Fact of the matter is, someone sold us out, and instead of looking for a single adventurer, we were instead greeted by, like, twice as many assassins as our own group! I actually am having trouble believing that everybody else but we died!"

That number was an exaggeration, but Rui didn't want to appear perfect with the information he had. That would make him suspicious without a doubt, to Chairman Deacon at least.

"I understand your anger," Chairman Deacon tried to say in a disarming tone.

"No, you don't," Squire Fren growled. "I lost the four most important people to me. SOMEONE SOLD THEM OUT."

The other two Martial Squires that also survived nodded with stern expressions. "Those Martial Squires knew exactly when and where we would be. That's not a coincidence. Someone supplied information to them about us."

"I understand your complaints and concerns," Chairman Deacon raised his hands. "I have already launched a thorough investigation looking into the data leak and the perpetrator. And I will make them pay the second I found out who they are."

This was a lie. Chairman Deacon was already aware of who the perpetrator was. There was no one else it could be besides from Guildmaster Bradt. Rui wasn't the only one who could come to this conclusion.

Rui was pretty certain that Chairman Deacon had not only figured out the perpetrator but had also figured out why Guildmaster Bradt had chosen to sabotage this particular operation.

('He wouldn't have become the economic and political powerhouse he is today if he did not have at least that much insight,') Rui mused inwardly. "Chairman Deacon, the past is already the past. The

question I want to know is what measures you're going to undertake to ensure that this never happens again."

Chairman Deacon's eyes lit up as he finally got around to a point that he had been wanting to get around to, yet much to his dismay, he was interrupted once more.

"I don't care about what measures you're going to undertake because you've already shown that you cannot be trusted and that you have powerful enemies that are willing to go to any length to hamper your agents. I'm quitting," Squire Fren got up after declaring coldly, leaving the room.

Chapter 830: Bounty

That declaration came as a bit of a shock, but, in hindsight, it shouldn't have.

('I can see why she wants to leave the place whose negligence and enemies caused the death of the people she cared the most for,') Rui completely understood her decision.

The other two surviving Martial Squires also followed suit when they saw that even the strongest Martial Squire among them refused to continue working under Chairman Deacon.

"I think I too can't afford to continue under this contract,"

"I did not come to the Shionel Confederation to get embroiled in some kind of political conflict,"

The three Martial Squires left the room, leaving only Rui left.

To his credit, Chairman Deacon did not seem fazed by them leaving. He turned towards Rui with a blank expression "What about you?"

Rui considered his next course of action, he had not expected that the three other survivors would exit the equation this quickly, and that was a bit of an unexpected outcome.

At the moment, he could choose to stay or leave. Regardless of which outcome he chose, he did not have much to say.

"I'm not too inclined to leave just yet," Rui replied.

"I'm surprised. You just saw three Martial Squires stronger than you leaving the Voidhunter team," Chairman Deacon commented.

"I didn't say I was going to stay yet," Rui added. "If I don't like what it is to follow, I just very well might decide to leave as well. So, I suppose I am interested in hearing what you have to say. I also do have some conditions."

"Like what?" Chairman Deacon raised an eyebrow with interest.

"I do not wish to partake in official operations such as this anymore, since it's already been made clear that you are unable to keep such things covert from your enemies, whoever they are. I don't mind staying as a part of the Voidhunters if you are willing to grant some guarantees as a bare minimum. For one, I do not wish to partake in any official mission since it's clear that whoever your enemy is, they can access information through your people somehow. In which case, I would rather operate independently without informing anyone of my plans to allow for a potential leak in information," Rui explained.

"That level of independence makes it pointless to even stay," Chairman Deacon snorted.

"Don't you grant independence according to the contract?" Rui raised an eyebrow

"We do, but at the very least, you're registered as a Voidhunter in official documentation," He replied. "With this arrangement, you're no different from a distant mercenary."

"I think that's a more viable way to go about this," Rui replied. "At the very least, I can't be officially paraded around as a Voidhunter anymore after what happened."

"..." Chairman Deacon sighed. "Alright, fine. But your remuneration goes down. And we won't be covering expenses."

"Deal," Rui nodded. "However, I need access to intelligence on the investigation in order to keep up. There's no point in doing this otherwise."

"That's a given, I intend to be more liberal and reduce the level of coordination and partnership anyway, after this incident," He mentioned. "You can look forward to that."

"Reduce the level of coordination?" Rui raised an eyebrow. "What exactly do you mean?"

"To a certain extent, it's similar to what you're proposing, but the Voidhunter idea is a flawed way to go about it," He replied. "A dungeon bounty is a better way to go about it, you might even be interested yourself."

Rui's eyes widened as he understood the man's plans. "You plan to gather more people with a more free and independent engagement. You can gather more people using a bounty, but you have far less control, you still can mobilize a greater amount of Martial resources. Furthermore, the legality is not a problem since it would be a bounty to kill the Voider inside the dungeon. Whoever is after you cannot possibly hamper so many independent agents."

"It's quite shrewd of you to have realized all of that in an instant," Chairman Deacon remarked, giving Rui a look of interest.

Rui cursed himself inwardly as he realized he got carried away with his analysis. It was careless, however, he had been momentarily taken aback, losing his cool.

"But you're correct," Chairman Deacon continued, without giving it much further thought, causing Rui to sigh in relief. "Thus, if you want to work as a bounty hunter, that can be considered as well. It's just that you won't be a Voidhunter anymore. You can choose to go either way."

He got up. "Give it some thought, you can contact my secretary directly and inform them of your choice. For now, we can put a pin in this discussion as I have some other pressing engagements."

"I understand," Rui got up.

"For what it is worth, I am quite sorrowful about what happened," He replied with a hint of emotion flashing across his face for a moment before disappearing.

"Thank you," Rui replied, before leaving the office entirely absorbed in his own thoughts.

('This isn't good. He is handling this more prudently than I had expected,') Rui tutted.

Chairman Deacon quickly realized that the Voidhunter model alone wasn't enough to succeed, seeing as how Guildmaster Bradt had interfered heavily at a crucial juncture. Word of the devastating loss suffered by the Voidhunters would have undoubtedly spread, either naturally or forcefully by Guildmaster Bradt's own doing.

Once that happened, Chairman Deacon could kiss any chance of trying to reel people into the Voidhunters. It was a losing battle.

He too had realized this and had decided to take another road altogether.

By simply placing a gigantic bounty on Rui's head, he could gather a large amount of manpower working to locate and track down Rui. Although these people would not be under their own direct control, which was certainly vexing to someone like Chairman Deacon, at the very least he couldn't be hampered that easily anymore.

('Damn, it was a great move,') Rui sighed. ('No wonder he is considered a rival to Guildmaster Bradt.')