

## Martial Unity 851

### Chapter 851: Information

"Should I just knock one of the teams out and toss them into the fourteenth floor?" He asked himself, amused.

The idea wasn't exactly without merit, even if it was an amusingly crude way of going about it.

However, it definitely also had its demerits.

('If they get knocked out only to wake up and find themselves on a brand-new floor of the dungeon, that's definitely going into the report,') Rui sighed. ('In that case, it's quite likely that Chairman Deacon will be suspicious nonetheless.')

Although he would be suspicious to a lesser extent than if Rui tried communicating to him the existence and location of the fourteenth floor, it was still too iffy for Rui. What he needed was a concrete way to ensure that Chairman Deacon would greedily try to monopolize and clear it himself. This way, the only one suffering would be Chairman Deacon. He had absolutely no problems with that.

('Alright, now, I just need to plan exactly how I'm going to get an exploration team of Deacon Industries to stumble into the fourteenth floor,') Rui sighed as he considered all the available options at hand.

('The most organic way would be them naturally finding the fourteenth floor without any intervention from me,')

The problem was that this was too unlikely and Rui couldn't afford to wait around for the many days and weeks it would take for an event that may not even ever happen> he couldn't afford to waste so much time waiting for them to stumble onto the fourteenth floor naturally.

Furthermore, if the fourteenth floor came to be discovered by a non-Deacon Industries Martial Squire, then they would most likely disclose its existence to the Shionel Merchant Guild which would immediately mean that all the adventurers in the Shionel Confederation would come to learn of it as well.

That would defeat the whole point of avoiding the floors that the entire public had come to learn of. After all, he went looking out for new floors because he wanted to avoid the huge number of bounty hunters that existed among the normies. There were too many points of failure and the risk was too great to conduct his operations in their presence.

('I can't sit around waiting for them to naturally discover it,') Rui shook his head, sighing. ('I definitely need to intervene.')

He had already ruled out knocking them out and leaving them on the fourteenth floor unconscious.

Thus, he needed a new way to guide them to the fourteenth floor.

('I basically need them to willingly choose the path that would lead them to the fourteenth floor,') Rui considered the line of thought. ('What could get them to choose one path over the other?')

He could think of several possibilities.

('Unfavorable physical conditions,') Rui mused. ('Maybe a path that poses an increased risk to their life as opposed to a plain path. Paths that are detrimental to their primary risks such as their life, safety, and health as well as their objectives to explore a bare minimum amount of distance.')

Rui's mind flashed through a number of plans as he considered all of them. He could poison alternative paths to the paths that led to the fourteenth floor in an overt manner, causing the team to avoid those other paths and go right along the one that Rui wanted them to.

He could leave signs of the presence of monsters that usually meant that one was getting close to a floor.

He could fill the entrances to alternative paths preventing them from taking that path, leaving them with only one path to follow.

('That's actually a good idea,') Rui considered. ('Still, even if I do choose to that, that doesn't mean that it will succeed. Hell, before I can even flesh out the plan, I need to learn more about the exploration department of Deacon Industries.')

Depending on how Deacon Industries went about their exploration and what methodologies they followed, Rui's objectives could be anywhere between easy and difficult to execute.

('The problem is gaining all the information necessary,') Rui tutted.

He had no information on them to work on. Thus he needed to secure a reliable intelligence channel on all of it.

Fortunately, he was not without options.

('Kane has a good amount of experience as a spy,') Rui recalled. ('He should have the ability to infiltrate Deacon industries and gather information on their exploration department.')

He could definitely be of aid in getting Rui the information that he needed. Still, Rui was quite apprehensive about sending Kane on such a mission, since he knew that Chairman Deacon had contracted Martial Seniors. If Kane happened to infiltrate at the wrong time and place, even with Void Step, he would be doomed, for he had no way of defying a Martial Senior.

('Besides, Kane is good, but there is a more secure and less risky way of obtaining more holistic information,') Rui glanced back at the letter before him.

He was absolutely certain that Guildmaster Bradt had an enormous amount of information about Chairman Deacon's operations. The two of them no doubt engaged in a large covert intelligence war that went on in the shadows.

Not only would he be able to give Rui more information than Kane could get his hands on, but it was also a lot less risky. The only downside was that it obviously gave away Rui's interests in Deacon Industries to Guildmaster Bradt. With that and future events, he would most likely be able to piece together what happened.

('Still, that's not such a big deal, honestly,') Rui shrugged.

He was not friends with Chairman Deacon, but the fact that they were working partners with plenty of incentives to cooperate meant that Rui didn't need to fear him gleaning insights into Rui's general intentions and concerns.

He quickly resumed writing the letter as he specified with an information request, adding that Guildmaster Bradt could cut the costs of purchasing the information out of Rui's shares from the profits of Esosale Suppliers.

#### Chapter 852: Trap

He quickly finished the letter, handing it to Kane. Kane had done this many times, so he didn't need any explanations at all.

The next morning Kane waited at the post office with Void Step active. The system that the two of them come up with involved putting the envelope meant for Guildmaster Bradt at the of the letter stack of the postman's carriage.

This way they didn't need to register. Rui was not foolish enough to send letters following the systematic protocols in place. That would give him away pretty easily. Guildmaster Bradt merely needed to identify the individual who posted a letter on the same day that he got a letter from the Voider, and he would have a small and manageable list of suspects for the Voider's identity.

Once he saw Kane or Rui on the list, it would mostly be game over since the two of them would probably be the only Martial Squires on the list.

This way, there was simply no trace of the letter entering the system. Given that Guildmaster Bradt had no idea at what point the letter entered the system, it instantly became too impractical to pursue the avenue as a way to figure out who the Voider was.

Rui simply needed to wait. He had already told Guildmaster Bradt to send him the information through their regular method.

"He's probably already deposited the information," Rui remarked, turning towards Kane. "Drop me to the Shionel Dungeon."

"What for?" Kane frowned.

"I purchased information from Guildmaster Bradt," Rui explained. "On Chairman Deacon."

"Is this related to your plan of getting somebody else to do all the hard work on the fourteenth floor?"

"Yep," Rui nodded. "I'll tell you about it once I get all of the information."

"Alright, let's go."

Kane and Rui quickly headed towards the Shionel Dungeon completely undetected under the influence of Kane's Void Step. They quickly headed to the first floor.

"Sense it yet?" Kane asked, turning to Rui.

"Yep," Rui nodded. He could clearly sense a box of documents buried at a remote edge of the first floor.

This was the method that Rui had given to Guildmaster Bradt to communicate with him. Every time Rui entered the dungeon with Kane with Void Step, he scanned the first floor at least once for any potential message from Guildmaster Bradt.

Although this method was somewhat pointlessly elaborate, tedious, and crude, it gave Rui the home-court advantage. He simply did not trust himself to not be tricked by Guildmaster Bradt if they were to exchange transactions through normal means. Rui was incredibly intelligent and shrewd, but it wasn't as though Guildmaster Bradt was a fool, worlds away from it. Rui did not think it was wise to tangle him in an arena that the old man had a lifetime of experience in winning in.

That was why Rui chose a method of transaction where he had a dominant upper hand. The fact that he was undetectable in the Shionel Dungeon, and could sense everything when no one else could, was an advantage that he didn't think Guildmaster Bradt could beat.

"Here it is," Rui told Kane.

"Alright, let's dig it up," Kane cracked his knuckles.

"Wait," Rui told him. "I have some preparations to make."

"For digging something up?" Kane frowned. "Do you need a shovel?"

"No, I need this," Rui pulled a full-body suit from his dimensional storage before donning it from head to toe.

"What on Earth is that for?" Kane frowned.

"It's because I don't trust Guildmaster Bradt," Rui remarked. "You should get away from here."

Kane had no idea why Rui was being so paranoid, but he shook his head, following his instructions. Rui quickly dug up the box, pulling it out, and opening it up.

"Hm?" His eyes widened as he the second he opened the box as he detected something strange.

His normal senses only saw a bunch of documents, but his Riemannian Echo detected a gas with a far lower density being released from the box, curving space less, thus allowing him to sense it when he shouldn't have been able to. If not for his Riemannian Echo, he probably would not have even realized something was wrong.

('This is either a kind of sleeping gas that would have knocked me out had I inhaled it,') Rui realized. ('Or it would have served some way for him to locate me outside of the Shionel Dungeon.')

He suspected it was probably something like the latter. Guildmaster Bradt had probably thought there was a good chance that Rui would have fallen for it without realizing it, allowing him to finally figure out Rui's true identity.

"Fucking bastard," Rui cursed, yet he smirked. The full-body suit he had on ensured that he was not touched by it, and he had sent Kane away, so he successfully foiled the trap.

He put the box into his dimensional storage, before moving a hundred meters away from the area, and then putting his suit back into the dimensional storage.

"Are you done?" Kane sighed. "Let's go already."

"No, wait," Rui shook his head. "I was right, Guildmaster Bradt did try pulling some trick, even though I'm not sure what the trick was."

"What?" Kane's eyes widened. "What do we do?"

"I've got it covered," Rui put his thumbs up. "We cannot take the box outside of the Shionel Dungeon."

"Why not?" Kane frowned.

"There's a good chance that we'll be caught if we do," Rui simply replied as his mind sharply analyzed his circumstances and came up with several solutions, before quickly identifying the best one. "Here's what we're going to do. I'll read all the documents here in the Shionel Dungeon, and memorize all the data from start to. Then I'll thoroughly destroy the box and the documents, and then we'll leave after that."

This way, if the box had some way to be tracked, then it wouldn't matter, since it could not be tracked in the Shionel Dungeon due to the jamming trait of the Shionel Dungeon.

Chapter 853: Winner

Rui did not want to read the documents on the populated first floor where they could be run into by a random adventurer at any given point in time. He did not want to use read all the documents with Void Step because that was just a pain in the ass to do.

Instead, the two of them went to the fourteenth floor where they were isolated from the others.

Rui gave Kane a suit this time as well since it would take some time. Soon enough, both of them had completed their preparations.

"Alright, I'll begin," Rui quickly opened the box of documents, beginning to go through with them.

The first one detailed the basic background of the Exploration Department of Deacon Industries. According to Guildmaster Bradt, Chairman Deacon had created the department within twenty-four hours of the discovery of the Shionel Dungeon. The moment he had gotten the news, he immediately realized that this would probably change the supplier-consumer markets of esoteric substances forever.

As the most dominant force in the international market of many large esoteric supply industries and sectors, he needed to make sure that he did not lose the ensuing war that he had predicted would occur.

Rui expected nothing less of Chairman Deacon, although the economic and political capital accrued by this man was not on par with Guildmaster Bradt, he was still unquestionably the most powerful individual in the Shionel Confederation, and that was true for a reason.

The following documents went deeper into the operations and protocols of the exploration department of Deacon Industries. Rui was impressed with the sheer complexity and sophistication of the system that Chairman Deacon had come up with.

The man did not simply go for a bone-headed strategy where he simply dumped a large sum of money and resources into exploring every nook and cranny of the Shionel Dungeon mindlessly. No, the system that he had set up in place worked heavily in tandem with the Dungeon Division of the Intelligence Department.

This division was focused on gathering any and all information about the dungeon by gathering reports from contracted and partnered Martial Squire adventurers, as well as other Martial Squire adventurers that were involved with Deacon Industries. The division gathered a gigantic reservoir of information before conducting thorough data analyses on the stated reports, even managing to create highly rudimentary and imprecise maps of certain sections of the dungeon and timelines of certain events based on reports.



The frequency and density of monster sightings were correlated with the presence of a floor and proximity to it.

Based on this, the Dungeon Division of the Intelligence Department evaluated the avenues of exploration with the highest probability of being near an undiscovered floor. The Exploration Department would begin by evaluating the difficulty of each of the avenues of exploration, and sort out which avenues would receive how much of the large, but ultimately limited, explorative capital that Deacon Industries had.

With that out of the way, the explorative operations would be devised by the department and the teams would set out to execute the operations. The results of the initial explorations would have the Exploration Department re-evaluate the allocation of capital before further exploration endeavors were conducted. This was a permanent cycle.

What Rui was interested in was the actual methodologies of exploration that the dispatched teams of Martial Squires used. After all, that was what he needed to know if he was to manipulate them into stumbling into the fourteenth floor.

"Oh...? Interesting..." Rui murmured as he read through the documents. "Quite unique."

Apparently, the exploration teams of the Exploration Department of Deacon Industries use markers based on extremely potent esoteric substances that allow them to track the exact paths that they already explored previously.

"If the markers can be tracked even in the dungeon then they must be extremely potent to even partially resist the jamming effect of the Shionel Dungeon," Rui murmured.

He raised an eyebrow as an interesting idea entered his head.

"If the only bearings they have on what routes they were exploring are the markers, then this can be exploited," Rui smirked.

The fact that the Shionel Dungeon completely jammed the magnetic field of the planet meant that the natural internal compass that many species evolved to have was completely shot. On top of that the highly restricted senses and the uniformity of the dungeon meant that it was extremely easy to completely get lost in the dungeon very easily, one could think one was traversing a path that they normally traversed, but in reality, they could be traveling in the exact opposite direction and they would never realize it.

That was why the Exploration Department used cutting-edge path-tracking esoteric technology that would remain at least a little effective even despite the jamming nature of the Shionel Dungeon.

"...It would be a real shame if someone relocated those markers to manipulate the direction that the exploration team set out on, wouldn't it?" A mischievous smile rose on Rui's face. He didn't think he would find his winning strategy to have the exploration team stumble on the fourteenth team so soon. As long as he got all the details right, he could easily manipulate the exploration team to stumble on the fourteenth floor by removing the markers embedded into the land and placing them along a route that would lead to the fourteenth floor, or as close to it as he could.

"They will naturally come to discover the location as long as I get them close enough," Rui noted. "Though I probably shouldn't change the locations of the markers too drastically, that may evoke suspicion from the analysts of the Exploration Department of the Shionel Dungeon."

A combination of making the other paths undesirable to explore and relocating certain key markers, he ought to be able to cleanly redirect one of the exploration teams to the fourteenth floor.

"After that, we just have to kick back and watch as Chairman Deacon does all the back-breaking hard work for us," Rui smirked.

Chapter 854: Failed

"Are you done?" Kane asked once Rui finished the final document at the bottom of the box.

"Yep," Rui nodded. "Just finished memorizing all this data. Now time to destroy the box."

"Are you going to hack it to bits?" Kane asked. "That feels a bit pointless."

"It would be pointless," Rui nodded. "But I intend to hack it and then burn it."

He summoned his sword from the dimensional storage ring, swinging a hundred times in less than a second.

Instantly, the box and the documents were reduced to pieces. Immediately, he pulled out his hot air windpipe, before inhaling deeply and exhaling a huge amount of air that was cracklingly hot, immediately setting the box and the documents on fire and incinerating them to the ground.

"Can we take these annoying suits off now?" Kane asked impatiently.

"Sure, let's put some good distance between us and it first though," Rui replied. With a single step, the two of them were instantly hundreds of meters away from where they were before. They quickly removed the full-body suits before Rui put them into his dimensional storage.

Rui had taken all the precautions he could to ensure that there was essentially no direct contact between him and the box.

"We should very much be in the clear, let's head back now," Rui told Kane, as the two of them left the fourteenth floor, and eventually returned home. Rui spent the rest of the day fleshing out his plan as he revised all of the intelligence that he had stored in his Mind Palace.

Meanwhile, Guildmaster Bradt later that day was notified of the disappearance of the documents that Rui had purchased from him.

"Have you completely verified this result? Is there truly no trail of Cenexeun Sawdust?" Guildmaster Bradt asked sternly.

"Unfortunately not, sir," The man replied. "Senior Vellean has reported that there is no overt trail of the potent Cenexeun Sawdust emerging anywhere from the Shionel Dungeon nor anywhere else from across the Adventurer Ring town."

"Hmmm..." the man stroked his beard. ('So he has either not yet left the dungeon, or has found a way to avoid my little trap.')

Guildmaster Bradt found the first option to be very unlikely, it had been nearly half a day since the documents had been noticed to be extracted. Why would The Voider spend half a day in the dungeon if his main task had been completed?

('Alternatively, it is possible he realized he fell for my trap and refuses to leave the dungeon out of paranoia,') Guildmaster Bradt narrowed his eyes.

He did not discount this possibility, this was the worst possibility. Since the Voider would refuse to leave the dungeon, and thus the supplies for Esosale Suppliers would never reach him. Still, this was particularly unlikely.

However, it was the latter possibility that drew Guildmaster Bradt's attention. If this was the case, then he would have to update his evaluation of the Voider's competence, caution, and protective measures. This was a good thing in his opinion. If the Voider managed to foil this trap, then it would give Guildmaster Bradt an even greater degree of confidence in his mysterious working partner.

However, if the Voider failed to detect and evade the trap, then the potent Cenexeun Dust that could be tracked by special animals and some Martial Seniors would allow him to eventually discover the identity of the Voider, giving him a lot of control.

This was a trap that had positive outcomes regardless of whether it succeeded or failed. Guildmaster Bradt simply could not lose. Though he wasn't sure which outcome had unfolded at the moment, he would definitely get confirmation over time.

More importantly, he was quite curious as to why Rui had requested the information that he had requested from Guildmaster Bradt. He wasn't entirely sure what Rui was going for here.

However, there were several deductions and hypotheses he had in mind.

('There's a direct clash of interests between the Voider and Deacon as they are the two most powerful forces in the supplier market and the two of them are going head-to-head,') Guildmaster considered the

information he had at hand. ('Given that he wants information on Deacon's exploratory information on the dungeons, it is almost guaranteed that the reason he wants it has to do with a clash of interests between him and Deacon related to the dungeon. Most likely, with the prospect of newer floors, and the fact that Chairman Deacon monopolizes new floors that his team comes across.')

Guildmaster Bradt thought it was likely that Rui wanted to prevent Chairman Deacon from monopolizing floors that he came across in his exploration endeavors.

Unfortunately, he simply lacked the information to know how wrong that hypothesis was. In fact, it was the exact opposite of the reason why Rui wanted the information, but he couldn't possibly come to that conclusion unless he learned about the problem of the fourteenth floor.

Regardless, Guildmaster Bradt predicted that all of this would lead to a series of events that would certainly cause Chairman Deacon a lot of pain in the coming future. He looked forward to kicking back and watching the Voider and Chairman Deacon going at it. He would simply do what he did best and exploit both of them to his benefit and come out on top as he had done his entire life.

In that regard, he was happy to see the Voider take a proactive interest in learning more about Chairman Deacon for no doubt reasons that Chairman Deacon would curse him for. He had to admit, he was quite curious to see what all of this would lead up to.

('Hohoho...') He laughed inwardly. ('What exciting times, indeed.')

The chaos and uncertainty that had been plaguing the political landscape of the Shionel Confederation reminded him of his younger days when he fought tooth and nail to enter the Shionel Merchant Cabinet and eventually become the guildmaster.

A large number of plans were unfolding in the background, unbeknownst to almost everybody else.

Chapter 855: Unexpected

"Alright, prep up, both of you.," A man announced to two others in a dispatch facility. "We're continuing yesterday's exploration operation in route twenty-eight."

The others nodded with steely expressions. Had one been in their presence, one would have realized that they were all Martial Artists, that too particularly strong ones.

"Sigh, another day of exploring that dark and scary dungeon?" One of them sighed. "Can I quit?"

"Tsk, as cowardly as always Suran," The man tutted. "Honestly, how on Earth did someone like you become a Martial Squire? It's embarrassing to me that I'm in the same Martial Realm as someone as shamefully fearful of danger as you."

"It's because I'm so shamefully fearful of danger that I managed to climb up to the Squire Realm, boss," Squire Suran replied shrugging his shoulder.

"How can you not want to explore the dungeon?!" Another chimed in. "It's so exciting and otherworldly! You don't see these kind of esoteric phenomena anywhere else in the Human Realm at least!"

"Tsk, get away from me you adventure junkie," Squire Suran tutted with a look of disdain on his face. "It's idiots like you that die first."

"I'd rather die in an adventure than live like a coward!"

"That's enough, Suran, Crill," The team leader sternly ordered, putting an end to their bickering. "I said get prepped, both of you."

Soon enough, the three of them had equipped themselves with all the gear and equipment that they needed for their exploration operation.

"Let's head out," The team leader instructed as they sky-walked to the Shionel Dungeon, before quickly entering it from a specific location.

"We've reached the starting point of route twenty-eight," The team leader spoke into a device. "Time of entering the dungeon is precisely eight hundred hours."

With that, the three of them entered the Shionel Dungeon through the tunnel. The team leader unfolded a portal device that extended downwards with a plate attached to the bottom end of it. He waved it over the ground a bit before it glowed up in response.

"Alright, the first marked checkpoint detected, let's get going," The team leader announced.

The mood among the three of them had grown a lot more serious and solemn. Even the excited Squire Crill who enjoyed exploring the dungeon maintained a highly alert state of mind. Although he loved adventures, he also loved his life, despite what he said. The Shionel Dungeon was simply too dangerous to go around walking without paying attention to where one was going, and to what was around one. Many Martial Squires had gotten lost in the dungeon without any idea or clue as to where they were. While plenty had succumbed to their deaths.

It was a rare environment where even Martial Squires were in immediate danger. This was why the Exploration Department had assigned three Martial Squires to the team instead of one.

The team leader would engage in the actual exploration while the remaining two were bodyguards of sorts. It was too dangerous for any Martial Squire, even S-rank adventurers, to be preoccupied with other matters when traveling the dungeon. The other two Martial Squires were there to cover the team leader while he engaged in the main exploration operation.

The three of them traveled deeper while the team leader made sure that they were on the same path as before through the marked checkpoints. The markers were small spheres that were embedded into the ground and were the only way for the team leader to verify that they were on the same path as the last time that they scouted this route.

Without them, the team leader would have absolutely no fathoming of any sort whatsoever whether they were anywhere near their old path. He only recognized the entrances and the starting ten meters. Beyond that, his senses were too hampered, his sense of direction of whirling around and the tunnels were all too similar for him to possibly distinguish between all of them.

He had tried memorizing them using a sequence of numbers that told him which tunnel pathways to choose and which to avoid. However, he gave trying to remember all of them after the first fifteen numbers. There were simply far too many junctions in their way for each of which he would need a number. He was not capable of memorizing a hundred numbers in order, nor did he think any Martial Squire could possibly be capable of that.

"SSSSKK!"

BAM!!

The team leader shook, startled when an Inland Shionel Taipan lashed out at the ground from one of the tunnels beside them. Although he had been unable to react, Squire Suran intercepted the attack with a swift and powerful kick to the head that cracked its skull, killing it on the spot.

"Huff... Good job Suran, I would have died if it weren't for you," The team leader sighed.

"It's just part of the job," Squire Suran shook his head. "Let's get going and finish this operation as quickly as possible. I want to leave the dungeon as soon as possible today."

"I agree," The team leader nodded. "We have already reached the end of the previously explored routes. Now we need to follow through and cover the prescribed amount of distance before we can head back."

The team leader pressed a device that was hanging at his waist, a recording device that was just barely able to capture some data of their immediate surroundings under the oppressive jamming state of the Shionel Dungeon.

The team leader truly did not expect to run into remarkable and special today, as always. He just wanted to finish his job and then get out of the dungeon as fast as he could. He, like Squire Suran, was not a fan of spending much time in the dungeon, especially when he needed to lower his guard when focusing on his operations and trust life in the hands of a coward and an adventure junkie.

That was why he was speechless when he came across what was undeniably a new unexplored floor.

Chapter 856: Aftermath

"Nice, they finally found it," Rui grinned from a kilometer away from their position. He had been waiting patiently for quite some time for these three to stumble upon the fourteenth floor.



While the intelligence that Guildmaster Bradt possessed detailed the hows, whys, and whats of the exploration process, it did not give Rui precise data on what paths the Exploration Department of Deacon Industries was exploring. He needed to spend about three days finding the closest team that he could redirect to the fourteenth floor of the Shionel Dungeon.

Then, with a combination of sealing off alternative paths, and redirecting the path a bit by changing the location of the markers beyond a certain point to point them straight towards the fourteenth floor.

And like clockwork, they walked right into the fourteenth floor. At the moment they were convinced that they had come about this by natural coincidence, however, they would not be able to begin to conceive the fact that they were dancing in the palm of the Voider.

His job was done, now he just needed to sit back and wait, and bide his time until the moment was just right.

Soon after, the team hurriedly returned back to Deacon Industries alive as they informed Chairman Deacon of their discovery.

"A new floor eh? Brilliant," Chairman Deacon smiled. "Finally, fate is starting to smile upon me. Immediately begin standard floor securing protocols and measures. Make sure not a single damn foreign adventurer discovers that thing and gets away alive. I don't even want the public to ever learn of the existence of this new floor, the fourteenth floor."

"Yes sir," His secretary bowed, leaving his office to fulfill his new orders.

"Hm," Chairman Deacon could not help but smile, pleased at this turn of events. It seemed that finally, he was having a stroke of good luck. The recent events surrounding the Shionel Dungeon had been extremely unpleasant and had left a bad taste in his mouth. So much so that he couldn't help but wonder if he had been infected with bad luck or something.

"Of course not,"

He was not a superstitious man.

"With the esoteric resource deposits of this floor, I should be able to regain momentum in the supplier market, overthrowing Esosale Suppliers," He smirked. "It's a shame I won't be able to see the look on the Volder's face when they realize that they missed an entire floor to explore."

Unbeknownst to him, Rui had been watching the movements of Deacon Industries carefully. He watched as Deacon Industries dispatched nearly a hundred Martial Squires immediately after the report had been processed!

As always, Rui was highly impressed with the sheer number of Martial Squires that were employed under Deacon Industries. He knew that they were not messing around and were going to take full charge of the Shionel Dungeon, killing any Martial Squire that was inevitably going to discover it, by monitoring all the tunnels leading into the Shionel Dungeon.

Of course, this was not enough to stop Rui. But he did not intend on entering the dungeon until it was time to steal the prize of the dungeon.

('I'm going to have to spend a lot of time in the dungeon just monitoring the progress of the Deacon Industries. If I'm even a split second too late, I can kiss any chance of stealing the giant ore deposit at the center of the dungeon beneath the tree goodbye.') Rui narrowed his eyes.

He had a very short window to act upon, otherwise, the nature of his operation risked being exposed far too much.

('Ideally, I need to make it so that they never even have a chance to witness the esoteric ore deposit at the center of the dungeon beneath the tree,') Rui noted. This was a rough condition for him. But, if they never came in to direct contact with the ore deposited, then they could never know that something that big was stolen and disappeared right before their very eyes. This way, they would never realize the nature of Rui's and Kane's esoteric ore extraction operation.

This would require extremely accurate timing from Rui's end. But he was confident that he would be able to accomplish it.

('This is especially so since I'll have plenty of time to build predictive models on all of the Martial Squires from Deacon Industries that will be partaking in the clearing of this dungeon floor,') Rui mused.

One good thing about sitting back and observing was that Rui could gather huge amounts of data from observing all of the Martial Squires of Deacon Industries slashing and attacking the branches. This could allow him to develop predictive models for all the Martial Squires partaking in the clearing of the fourteenth floor of the Shionel Dungeon.

Thus, at the crucial moment of leaping in and stealing the prize of the fourteenth floor, he could operate with a very deep understanding of how those Martial Squires were going to act, and how they were going to react. With this, he could minimize the probability of something highly unexpected unfolding in the stealing of the giant esoteric ore deposit at the center of the fourteenth floor, throwing him off his plans.

('At the later stage of their clearing of the Shionel Dungeon, Kane and I will probably have to camp out here in order to make sure that we're here for the right moment. Hell, we'll probably have to follow them right behind their backs as they're finishing the final set of branch attacks,')

There was effectively no other way to make sure that they would be able to time the heist just right. He could not possibly rush from within the tunnels leading right to the fourteenth floor all the way to the center of the floor before they managed to secure it.

('Hm, I should give this more thought and flesh it out. Better safe than sorry. If Chairman Deacon gets a hold of me, death will end up looking pleasant.

## Chapter 857: Approach

Deacon Industries immediately began aggressively clearing the Shionel Dungeon as fast as it possibly could. It ceased all other exploratory endeavors and gathered as much Martial capital as it possibly could to the fourteenth floor. More than a hundred Martial Squires were cutting down the branches at any given moment, allowing them to make progress at a rate that was quite impressive to Rui.

('As expected, Kane and I could never hold a candle to this kind of progress,') Rui sighed.

In fact, in hindsight, he found that it was a good thing that Rui decisively made the choice to avoid trying to clear the dungeon floor all by themselves. If they made too much progress before deciding to reveal its existence to Chairman Deacon, then the exploratory teams clearing the dungeon would have noticed the progress and would have reported it to Chairman Deacon, who would most likely make some realizations.

Progress made by a lone adventurer who did not bother trying to reveal the evidence of the floor to the Shionel Adventurer Guild, but also tried clearing it on his own before Deacon Industries happened to stumble upon the floor clearly reminded everybody of a particular adventurer; the Voider.

However, this way, they did not suspect anything and truly were of the belief that Deacon Industries were the first to discover the fourteenth floor. That was what Rui was counting on to get them to drop their guard at the crucial moments.

"Still, they sure are working hard and smart," Rui admitted as he observed them from the edge of the fourteenth floor. He had to admit that their efficiency and effectiveness were worthy of a company that stood at the top of dungeon exploration success rates prior to the arrival of Rui and Kane to the Shionel Dungeon.

Deacon Industries had chosen to focus their Martial capital as much as possible in one particular direction and portion of the perimeter of the tree's striking range. Rather than distributing all of their Martial Squires across the circle, they were able to make deeper and quicker progress to the center of the dungeon floor.

Close-range defensive and offensive Martial Squires formed the first line of interception and defended against and destroyed them as much as they could. The long-range Martial Squires from behind launched volleys of long-range attacks that also destroyed and weakened the branch attacks. This way, the entire squad was able to make decently-paced progress steadily without faltering even once.

The branch attacks were harder to defend the closer they got to the core of the gigantic tree, as the number of branches also increased as they entered the trigger range of a new set of branches with every step that they took towards the trunk of the titanic tree. This would make it quite strenuous for the Martial Squires during the later stages of the dungeon clearance.

('It should take them no more than a week at most at this rate,') Rui sighed. Although he and Kane made up for their lack of quantity with their highly effective strategies and techniques, there was a limit to that.

Quantity had a quality of its own that no number of tricks could substitute or compensate for. That was a hard reality that Rui was faced with. After all, this whole plan emerged from the fact that it was too impractical for two Martial Squires to solo clear the fourteenth floor.

If not for this plan, Rui might even have thrown his hands up and moved onto another floor rather than wasting time on this floor. That was a much more practical and even more interesting outcome.

However, what if there were other floors that required a large number of Martial Squires to clear them as well? Was Rui going to spend his time redoing the same strategy over and over again? Let others do all the hard work and steal it from them just when they were about to claim the fruits of their effort?

That did not sit well with Rui, even though it could potentially be interesting as a challenge. He had come to the Shionel Confederation for a sense of adventure, freedom, and earnest challenge, not to be a highly effective and notorious thief.

('Forget it, I have no idea what the rest of the floors are like, they could be cleared by us two alone or they may not,') He sighed. ('That doesn't matter for now.')

He spent a close eye on the clearing team of Deacon Industries over the span of the week. Because the number of Martial Squires piercing through the volley of branches at any given time was constant, the Martial Squires were in rotations of contributing to the attack and getting off work.

This meant that Rui could not truly stay away from the fourteenth floor for extended periods of time, if he was even slightly wrong, then he would miss a lot of crucial moments. He did not want to steal the ore deposit after Deacon Industries had secured it and transported it away. That was just plain theft and robbery.

"We're going to have to take shifts, Kane," Rui sighed, informing his partner and best friend. "Thankfully, both of us possess the means to observe them well."

Rui could simply stay perched at a safe distance and observe everything with Riemannian Echo, while Kane could go a lot closer without being detected.

"I already figured as much," Kane replied, yawning. "We need to make sure that we're prepped for whenever we estimate that they'll be done at least an hour ahead of time."

"True," Rui nodded. "Not to mention, we need to make sure that the other parts of the plan are also in place. Specifically our escape routes. Because things might get ugly if that is also compromised somehow."

The two of them had already analyzed efficient ways to escape. Kane's high affinity for evasion, as well as his experience with covert missions that required infiltration and escape, meant that his insights were just as valuable as Rui's.

#### Chapter 858: Broke

Soon enough, the raiding team of Deacon Industries came close to reaching the center of the fourteenth floor. The clashes between the defensive countermeasures of the tree and the martial Squires grew even more intense. At this stage, there were a few that were wounded extremely lethally and succumbed to their wounds before they could be fed any healing potions.

However, most Martial Squires possessed a natural healing factor that allowed them to survive such wounds that were becoming increasingly common. However, while the loss of every Martial Squire was a regrettable loss of a powerful combat asset, the individual losses, especially of the lower-grade martial Squires were not that burdensome to Chairman Deacon.

Squire-level conflicts inevitably led to casualties among Martial Squires. This applied not just to Martial Squires, but also to any Realm of conflict.

Soon enough, the time for Rui and Kane to act drew closer. The two of them were already completely prepped and geared with everything that they could possibly need for the infiltration and extraction operation that they were about to embark on.

The plan they had ended up coming up with was simple. Moments before the last set of branches were destroyed, the two of them would sabotage the senses of the Martial Squires raiding the floor with some special items that they had acquired, courtesy of Guildmaster Bradt.

Rui had procured several smoke-screen bombs that would give them enough of a momentary distraction and obscuration of their senses.

During this short moment, the two of them would rush in, store the gigantic boulder in the dimensional storage ring and then simply leave through the closest tunnel.

It sounded simple, but it really wasn't.

('The problem is that the energy consumption of the energy ring is going to be exponentially stronger than normal due to the fact that we're carrying a mass far greater than we normally do,') Rui narrowed his eyes.

The dimension storage of the ring was far from limitless. The more mass that one wanted to store, the exponentially greater the energy required to store the mass. What that meant was that the esoteric energy cells that Rui frequently changed would burn through exponentially faster.

What that meant was that with the limited energy reserve that Rui could carry at any given point in time. They could not afford to be bogged down too much, he could not afford to store too many of them in the ring itself because they took up too much space that needed to be freed for the building of an ore boulder that they would be storing in it.

Rui had even located a site that he had already dug to bury the ore deposit for Guildmaster Bradt to find ahead of time. So that the two of them could quickly dump the ore deposit the second they reached the site.

In fact, Rui had given the ring to Kane, because he was the fastest. It was his duty to rush to the site after they had left the dungeon and ensure that he reached it before they timed up.

Although they didn't have an extremely restrictive schedule, they most certainly did not have a ton of free time either.

('Still, it's manageable,') Rui sighed.

Soon, it was time.

BAM BAM BAM!

Martial Squires furiously clashed against the final layers of branches of the tree, which now appeared to be as though it was dead. They were very close, just a few minutes away.

Rui and Kane immediately followed up and stuck behind the squad, using them as a protective shield to ensure that they didn't hit by the branch attacks that were capable of detecting them despite the Void Step technique.

Soon, it was time.

BAM!!!

A grade-ten Martial Squire of Deacon Industries launched a devastating attack that destroyed the final remaining branches that attacked them.

"Yes! We've succeeded!"

"Time to harvest the eso-!"

BANG!

Rui and Kane maneuvered over them as Rui dropped several special explosives that temporarily created a potent smokescreen that obscured the vision of even lower Realm Martial Artists. Although the smoke was extremely dense and heavy, and thus did not longer midair for very long, even the few seconds that it brought Rui and Kane were plenty sufficient.

The two of them shot over to the esoteric ore deposit while the Martial Squires of Deacon Industries and Kane immediately put the rock in contact with the ore, activating the ring instantly.



The esoteric ore deposit disappeared without an issue, instantly putting even more pressure on Rui and Kane as they were aware that they were now on a time clock before their existing cell was being consumed furiously by the ring.

The two of them dashed toward the closest exit that Rui was able to manage. Rui was the limiting speed of their two-man group since Kane could easily outspeed him, but obviously didn't because it would leave Rui exposed. Rui was aware of this, as he ran through the air at top speed with Gale Force Breathing, Outer Convergence, and Parallel Walking.

Yet just as they crossed the final Martial Squire, reaching for a tunnel, something happened.

They ran into another time limit.

"RARGH!" A grade-ten Martial Squire bellowed as he unleashed a gigantic omnidirectional wind attack.

This was outside Rui's expectations. He had not expected any of the Martial Squires to execute such a wide-scale attack when so many of their comrades were around them.

It was absolutely insane. It would severely hurt their comrades, potentially killing those who got hit in the vitals at close-range completely off-guard. That was why Rui had evaluated the probability of anyone engaging in such an act of self-harm.

But Rui had simply failed to account for the irrationality, and impulsive knee-jerk reaction of some Martial Squires in high-intensity circumstances.

The powerful wind attack not only hurt all the Martial Squires of the Deacon Industries but also the much further away duo of Rui and Kane.

And for just a moment, just before they could enter the tunnel, they broke apart.

Rui was satisfied with the plan that he had come up with under the constraints that he was forced to operate under, two of them, specifically. He wanted to make sure he extracted the giant esoteric ore deposit under the trunk of the tree before Deacon Industries became explicitly aware of its existence. He definitely would not consider taking it after they had already extracted it and begun transporting it.

Which meant he had to act as soon as was humanly possible. Given that condition, the plan he had created definitely maximized that outcome. The second the final layer of branches was being destroyed before they could reach close enough to get a glimpse of the esoteric ore, he distracted and obscured their vision with a few special smoke grenades before quickly extracting the boulder and immediately leaving the area. The two of them reached the tunnels they were headed for extremely swiftly without any hitch, just as they had planned.

What they hadn't accounted for was a crazy overpowered grade-ten Martial Squire launching a gigantic long-range and wide-area wind attack that ended up severely hurting many of his own comrades. It was an insane thing to do, and Rui did not think Chairman Deacon would overlook such a transgression.

Still, it didn't matter. What mattered was that even though it was diluted when it reached them, it was enough to disrupt the Void Step technique when it slammed into them.

Rui and Kane almost reflexively got back together in a state of heightened alertness and adrenaline. Only a brief moment had passed when the Void Step technique was inactive, and the next moment, they had restored it.

And yet, the damage was done.

"What?!" One of the patrolling Martial Squires exclaimed as his senses just barely caught some figures appearing and disappearing into thin air. Deacon Industries had set up patrolling Martial Squires around the walls to ensure that any Martial Squire that entered the floor and happened to discover it would end up dying so that the secret would not spread.

Even if it is for just a brief moment. Even if it was just the barest of silhouettes.

Rui and Kane had been exposed.

The two of them immediately dashed out off the floor.

"Damn it!" Kane cursed. "That fucking psychopath! He probably killed the most immediate Martial Squires around him given how off-guard they probably were. What on Earth was going through his brain?! He definitely has a mental disorder! I'm putting all my savings on that bet."

"Calm down," Rui said despite his grim expression and severe tone. He was forcing himself to keep his composure regardless of how much they had been exposed. He was well aware that if there was one way to screw the situation up more than it already was, however bad that was, it was to begin panicking and make even dumber choices.

He cooled his mind as he analyzed the situation.

('That Martial Squire who was a hundred meters away from us when Void Step was disrupted is really the only problem,') He first concluded, before stopping in his tracks.

"What are you doing?!" Kane urged him.

"Calm down, Kane," Rui sighed heaved a sigh. "They're not chasing us."

Rui took the liberty to sit down on a boulder. "Frankly, we should have killed that Martial Squire then and there even if it was extremely risky. But everything happened far too quickly. It doesn't help that we had specifically primed our minds to complete the operation without any superfluous thought processes to ensure we don't dilly-dally. That has come back to bite us in the ass partially, even if killing there was a serious risk. That Martial Squire has almost certainly already regrouped with the others, and we cannot kill him now."

Rui tutted with a frustrated expression. Had he known that there was a grade-ten Martial Squire volatile enough to launch a powerful attack on friendlies impulsively due to being subjected to a smoke screen, he would have altered his plan, or at the very least, added preparations to counter it.

But alas, he did not possess precognition. There was no fathomable way for him to have come to know of the information of this unfortunate event ahead of time. Anyone who could have deduced the exact unfolding of such an event would probably possess a mind that utterly dwarfed even his.

He quickly analyzed his situation, the information that he could be certain about, and the various possible outcomes that could eventually be yielded by this occurrence.

('That man sensed us,') Rui narrowed his eyes. ('His reactions when facing are direction are absolutely an undeniable indication of that. However, we were outside the range of clarity of the senses of even particularly high-grade Martial Artists. Meaning, it is extremely likely that what he sensed was limited to noticing our existence, and not gleaning any specific details about our persons. At most, he may have noticed that there is more than one presence even if he had great sensory techniques. Unless he had a grade-ten sensory technique, there is a very little chance he actually sensed any of our physical traits.')

With that realization, he calmed down a bit. Unfortunately, that was the extent of the good news barring the fact that they had succeeded in their operation. The bad news was that the core of their operation was probably revealed. Frankly, even if Rui successfully managed to kill him there, the fact that a patrolling Martial Squire died to Martial Art techniques would still reveal the same amount of information more or less as it did now that he was alive.

Essentially, the moment he vaguely sensed their presence, the damage had already been done. Now, Rui had to find a way to best navigate the consequences of this unfortunate outcome. Should he and Kane continue to operate as always, or should the two of them change their modus operandi? He wasn't sure, but he would need more information, and time to consider all his options.

#### Chapter 860: Eavesdrop

"Kane, go dump the esoteric ore deposit in the hole that we dug up earlier," Rui informed him. "We're running out of time."

"Oh right, I almost forgot about that," Kane nodded.

It didn't take Kane too long to finish this task. Rui had wisely chosen the closest adequately deserted location to the Shionel Dungeon, as long as Kane traveled at top speed, he would be able to reach there in two minutes.

It wasn't long before Kane returned, Rui sought him ought since he was the only one who could navigate and detect him. Yet, the first thing Rui told him when they reunited puzzled him,

"We need to head back to the floor, I need to know what's going on," Rui told him.

"You want to head back?" Kane tilted his head frowning. "We just barely got back from there. I thought you stayed back because I was faster without you. What if we get hit with another attack from that psycho again?"

"Think about it Kane," Rui calmly explained. "That Martial Squire probably killed two or three Martial Squires and severely hurt the rest. Even if he is highly impulsive, he is not going to repeat a decision that he probably regrets from the bottom of his heart, most likely. Furthermore, Void Step broke because you were caught off-guard since you did not expect an attack to hit you. However, if you knew that you were going to get hit ahead of time, would your technique have still been disrupted?"

"No," Kane shook his head. "In combat, I adopt a mindset that prioritizes fortitude, and I can get hit without letting the technique break because I'm expecting it and can also see it happening usually. But that's different from the mindset I have when we're mining esoteric ore deposits, or pulling off extraction operations like that."

"Right, the issue was just that there was a mismatch between what you had primed yourself for, and what ended up happening. We just need to be specifically prepared for anything to happen." Rui told him.

"Sure, but why do you want to go back in the first place?" Kane frowned.

"I want to eavesdrop on their conversations," Rui replied simply. "The more we know, the better we'll be equipped to make the right decisions ahead of time."

"Won't you need to get very close to hear what they're saying since your hearing is jammed, and your Riemann-whatever Echo does not sense sound right?" Kane asked.

"Right, but I can read their lips, tongues, and even their larynxes to deduce what they're saying to each other," Rui replied. "That's why we don't need to get too close to them, even a hundred meters is more than enough for me to comfortably spy on all conversations happening around me at that range, thus the risk is minimized."

Kane considered his words for a bit before nodding. "Alright sure, though they've probably finished whatever conversation you want to eavesdrop on."

"The probability of that is quite low," Rui replied. "That report from the Martial Squire does not take priority over the fact that a few Martial Squires are probably dead while a hundred are injured from light wounds to critical injuries. Regardless, intelligence is intelligence."

Kane considered that rationale, it certainly made sense.

The two of them quickly activated Void Step as they headed back the way they came. This time, both Rui and Kane prepared defensive techniques if anything similar happened this time as well.

They soon reached the opening to the fourteenth floor, entering it very cautiously and abrasively.

Rui's predictions turned out to be spot-on. The patrol guards had closed up, forming a tight perimeter around the raiding team of Martial Squires that appeared to be quite injured, consuming potions.

A little ahead were three corpses laid side by side. These were the Martial Squires who were closest to the grade-ten Martial Squire who recklessly launched a powerful omnidirectional wind attack, resulting in their skulls being cracked, causing irreparable brain damage, and taking their life subsequently.

Some distance away was a Martial Squire who was surrounded by several figures. Rui recognized him immediately.

It was the man responsible for all of this. He was standing with his head lowered surrounded by many Martial Squires who had taken their stances. Yet they didn't attack.

('He's probably going to be restricted,') Rui mused, before glancing around at the entire site. He also happened to spot the patrolling Martial Squire who had sensed them, causing this whole problem to spring up, but as Rui predicted, he was in a position where Rui could not kill him. If there were only two, maybe three witnesses, Rui could still kill them with the help of Kane's Void Step, but right now the perimeter had been tightly compressed to protect the recovering Martial Squires in this time of vulnerability. Even if there were no monsters sighted on the fourteenth floor, none of them dared lower

their guard. The Shionel Dungeon was far too dangerous for them to do so. The uncertainty that came with highly restricted senses did not help them either.

However, it appeared clear to Rui that he had most likely not made any extensive report to the head of the operation, who was preoccupied with far more immediately pressing matters.

"YOU FOOL!" A Martial Squire wearing a particularly extravagant attire with the emblem of Deacon Industries bellowed at the Martial Squire who caused all this mess. "How could possibly launch such a wide and powerful attack with so many of your comrades around?! We entrusted you to have our backs! Not break them! That too with a grade-ten wide-scale technique! You've done precisely that because of your impulsive reaction to the smoke screen!"

"He's the one in charge, clearly," Rui noted as the other Martial Squires stood a few steps behind him, clearly in deference to his status and authority. "He seems quite strong actually."

"Sorry boss..." The Martial Squire lowered his head, gritting his teeth.

"Sorry doesn't bring back the dead you imbecile!" He screamed in the man's face, despite the latter being a grade-ten Martial Squire.