

## Martial Unity 891

### Chapter 891: Sophistication

The Shionel inland taipans and the bloodfury rabbits all led a rather simple life on their respective floors. They simply consumed organic ore deposits and other creatures that stumbled in like the adventurers. It had given him the impression that monsterified creatures were too sick in the head to possibly be more than aggressive mindless zombies.

Seeing what had happened to the humans of the large town of Veril that had survived ingesting the esoteric ore deposits had only reinforced this notion.

Yet the previous floor had had a perfectly viable ant society with functioning ants that worked for the sake of the colony and were led by the intelligent ant queen who was even capable of reproduction of monsterified ants.

This was very different from the image of monsterified creatures that he had conceived of in his mind. He had to admit that his opinion on the matter had changed given that he was forced to acknowledge that monsters could engage in sophisticated cooperation and continued sustenance of their existences.

This was especially the case when he came across an ecosystem that had sustained itself for presumably a year and a half since the dungeon had risen. It meant that this wasn't a transient phenomenon.

Rui narrowed his eyes as he focused on each distinct species.

The birds that he had spotted were numerous and flew across the large floor. Their wide wingspan and beaks were those that predator birds like eagles and hawks possessed, thus he assumed that they were probably among the apex predators of the dungeon floor.

This was especially the case when he could sense small creatures like mice, rodents, and even snakes slithering around in the ground.

What he found when he inspected the snakes was that they were not like the Shionel taipans that he had previously ran into. In fact, given the size of their heads, he greatly doubted that they were venomous at all. It was much more likely that they were the monsterified version of rat snakes. They

were not apex predators, he had watched National Geographic enough as a kid to know that those snakes were the kind of snakes that would get snatched up by the kind of big birds that were plentiful in the entire dungeon.

The rats, mice, and rodents were next on the food chain when it came to such matters. They were most likely targeted by the snakes that he could sense across the entire floor, and they also had a greater population than the snakes, based on Rui's preliminary sense of the entire dungeon.

Predators generally tended to be an order of magnitude less populated than their prey, for a sustainable ecosystem to exist, otherwise, predators would quickly overhunt prey into extinction and the ecosystem would be thrown for a toss. Thus Rui was quickly able to ascertain the food chains in the ecosystems this way.

The ubiquitous herbivorous insects like caterpillars, grasshoppers, and crickets were probably the biggest source of food for them. Rui couldn't even begin to estimate how many there were.

"Really interesting stuff," Rui murmured.

"Speak for yourself," Kane snorted. "When are we going to ransack this place?"

"Now," Rui got up. "I've mostly learned what I wanted to. I don't see any problematic elements. Your technique should work on all of them, so we're good and dandy."

Rui had wanted to make sure that there weren't elements on the floor that would disrupt their stealth.

"Though honestly, your technique is probably the least necessary in floors like this. Previously, all floors were basically united against us, and thus we needed stealth to make sure that we didn't get constantly overrun. But frankly, given the fact that these creatures are far from united, and not liable to turn against us the moment they detect us, this may actually be one of the safer dungeon floors honestly," Rui remarked.

This felt strange.

Shouldn't it have been the case that deeper floors were more dangerous?

Then again, Rui realized that this wasn't a video game, that, by design, got more and more difficult and challenging the further they passed. The dungeon had not been constructed with that in mind or anything like that, thus it shouldn't be too surprising that such a pattern was not strictly followed.

"I hope that we run into many such floors in the future," Kane nodded. Using Void Step continuously on not just himself but also Rui was stressful, especially on the previous dungeon floor where failing to use it would have gotten them killed pretty quickly. He especially hated the floor with the venomous taipan since he was also under a lot of psychological pressure due to how lethal the taipans were. If he slipped even a single time, then the taipans' swift venomous bite would have killed them instantly.

"Floors like this are nice because I get to chill," He remarked.

"Hope you enjoy manual labor instead," Rui sneered.

"On second thoughts, leave the stealth to me,"

The two of them stopped bickering before immediately getting to work. It was only when they actually trodded across the floor did they realize how big it was. It was as though they had been hit by a shrinking gun, and then gone to take a walk in a rainforest. Insects were half as tall as them while the other creatures were significantly bigger.

This was surprising because the largest of creatures were huge. The monster bird's wingspan may as well have been as large as a city block. The largest of the birds were definitely at the peak of the Squire Realm as far as combat prowess went. Rui and Kane definitely needed to avoid them since simply sky-walking would not be able to get them away from the birds. The birds were almost certainly faster than them due to the fact that their bodies were literally built for flight and motion through the air.

"Maybe we should be more careful..." Rui murmured as he took a good look at a giant bird flying past them.

Rui had to admit that the job was more difficult than he had given it credit. It wasn't nearly as easy as he had expected. Although the floor wasn't as diametrically as opposed to them as other floors were, the distribution of esoteric ore deposits was far and wide.

They needed to tread far and wide in order to gain their fill of esoteric ore deposits. It took them an entire day before they were able to fill up their entire storage capacity.

"Damn," Kane murmured. "We only finished like a quarter of the entire floor!"

"Yeah," Rui sighed. "It's crazy, honestly."

The floor was quite gigantic, it would probably take them a few more days before they were ready to completely drain the entire floor of its esoteric ore deposits.

"What do you think will happen to the floor by the time we've extracted all of its resources?" Kane wondered.

"Most of the creatures will die out..." Rui shrugged. "But, I think that we might end up seeing an increasing number of monsters leave the dungeon in search of more esoteric ore deposits, especially organic ones."

"That never really happened with most of the other monsters though," Kane scratched his head.

"That is true," Rui nodded. "But that was because the monsters could still consume the Martial Squires that attempted to clear the floor. In this case, they don't even have that. I'm definitely seeing at least some of the monsters on this floor leaving the dungeon in search of sustenance."

"So they'll end up causing even more trouble for our competitors and enemies," Kane smirked.

"Right," Rui nodded. "Though I don't know if we can keep doing that forever."

"What do you mean?" Kane frowned.

"Our ability to clear dungeon floors without killing a single monster, I suspect that we may have to stop doing that," Rui calmly explained.

"But why?" Kane frowned. "It's so broken and causes a huge problem for everybody else but us."

"You just answered your own question," Rui replied. "It causes too much of a problem for the Shionel Confederation. Think about it. What is the Adventurer Guild going to do about the fact that there are so many monsters running around in the dungeon?"

"I can see where you're coming from, but that's what the Martial Squire adventurers are there for, right?" He asked, raising an eyebrow. "A huge number of Martial Squire adventurers from all across our section of the continent have poured into the Shionel Confederation. No matter how many monsters there are, they possess the ability to handle it."

"You're not wrong," Rui told him. "But why would they handle it, even if they have the ability to handle it?"

That seemed like an extremely bizarre question. It was what the Martial Squires did, they handled it. They assumed the role of adventurers, entered the dungeon, and killed monsters inevitably.

"Because they're paid to, or get paid by selling the fruits of their success," Kane replied, furrowing his eyebrows in confusion.

"And why do they get paid?" Rui turned towards him.

"Because of the esoteric ore deposits that they extract-" He paused abruptly as he understood what Rui was conveying to him.

"Do you get it?" Rui turned back to the floor before him. "The one and only incentive for most of the stakeholders interested in the Shionel Dungeon is the esoteric ore deposits waiting inside. In order to get those, they're willing to bear the cost of killing all the dangerous monsters in the dungeon. However, they're only willing to bear that cost because there is a reward. What happens if there isn't a reward? What happens if someone already took all of the rewards?"

"Then there isn't an incentive to kill all the monsters. Because there isn't as much to be gained. Monster hunting, in general, is profitable, but the difficulty of hunting monsters inside the Shionel Dungeon is not worth it," Kane quickly realized.

"Correct," Rui nodded. "So if this goes on, the Shionel Confederation will be left with a dungeon filled with monsters, but very few esoteric ore deposits left. This is a highly undesirable outcome to the Shionel Confederation."

"Yeah, but at the end of the day, the end outcome is going to be all monsters dead, and all esoteric ore deposits extracted. Even if nobody wants to kill all the monsters if the ore deposits are gone, can't the Shionel Confederation deploy its military and slowly clean them up as time passes?"

"They could," Rui replied. "But they would end up being the ones that sacrifice the most if that does happen. If foreign Martial Squires were the ones to set out to kill the monsters, then it would be mostly foreign Martial Squires dying in the process," Rui explained. "Furthermore, the risk of letting the monsters run around the dungeon like crazy with no esoteric ore deposits. That's dangerous. If the monsters break out of the dungeon, then that would be catastrophic, since Martial Seniors can't go anywhere near the dungeon."

"Ah, yeah, that does make sense," Kane nodded. "But you're forgetting the fact that we have special backing. As long as Guildmaster Bradt has our back, we're good."

"That is if he does have our back," Rui snorted. "What do you think he is, a saint?"

"No, but isn't it in his interests to support us?"

"Not always, not this time," Rui shook his head. "He wants the dungeon cleared as soon as possible, before the next election, at least. Extracting the esoteric ore deposits but letting the monsters delays that. He will most certainly be against it."

"Hm..." Kane frowned. "But what can they even do? It's not like they can stop us."

"They cannot, but he can," Rui sighed. "He knows we need him and his Bill C-16. I predict that there will be... measures taken by him to ensure that there aren't too many monsters who should be dead running around in the dungeon. As for what form that takes, I don't know."

#### Chapter 893: Medium

It was only a few days before they cleaned almost all of the esoteric ore deposits on the nineteenth floor. The two of them duly took their time making sure to get as much as they could before finally leaving the dungeon floor.

It turned out that Rui was right, to a certain degree. The insects were the first to begin leaving the dungeon and were probably leaving the entire place. The rodents and other smaller creatures would probably follow suit soon enough.

Rui wasn't sure about how the big birds would fair, they were too big to fit into the tunnels and the fact that they relied on flight meant that they were probably doomed.

Rui shrugged. He was pro-evolution and survival of the fittest.

The two of them immediately set out for more dungeon floors in the Shionel Dungeon, they traveled further down the Shionel Dungeon. They still hadn't reached the full depths of the dungeon, which extended sixty kilometers below the surface.

Who knew what kind of strange sights they would see?

Rui for one, was curious about what was there at the bottom of the dungeon, even if the path there was long and annoying. The tunnels wound about so much that even with Riemannian Echo it was extremely difficult to track down a path downwards.

The two of them treaded around for half a day before they came across something interesting.

"What is that?" Rui's eyes widened as something strange entered his field of senses.

"Finally, another floor?"

"Is..." He stuttered for a second. "Is that water?!"

"What?" Kane turned to him with widened eyes.

"There's no mistaking it," Rui murmured, as he strode forward to get a closer look at the new dungeon floor. "It's a floor that has a huge body of water in it. A gigantic lake."

Rui couldn't help but be incredibly surprised. He didn't understand how a lake could form inside the dungeon, it made no sense!

"Where could water even come from?" Kane frowned. "There's no rain, there's no influx of water, right?"

Rui had some suspicions, but he wasn't sure.

It took a while before the two of them finally managed to reach the floor by picking the right tunnel. When they reached, their eyes widened as came across a startlingly beautiful sight.

The lake was glowing.

"No... to be more precise, the esoteric ore deposits at the bottom of the lake are glowing," Rui murmured as he ran his senses through the water.

His senses detected rich and diverse life flourishing in the lake. He quickly noted that this too was a floor with a developed ecosystem. His senses extended to the very bottom of the lake as he examined the sheer amount of esoteric ore deposits there were at the bottom.

"This is definitely another big find," Rui told him.



"I'm just curious as to how this lake came here, honestly," Kane replied. "As for actually clearing this floor, I don't know Rui, maybe we should sit this one out."

Rui understood his sentiment.

Neither of them was particularly adept in water, they didn't have almost any experience in it. Rui had once hunted down a beast hiding in underwater back when he was a Martial Apprentice, but that was it.

They were completely out of their element, literally.

His senses could tell him that these waters weren't safe, either. He could sense a ton of creatures that he would rather not tangle with. From piranha-like fish to crocodilian creatures, none of these creatures looked like they were fun to hand out with underwater.

Rui personally would be extremely hampered underwater, his attacks would be much weaker, and he wouldn't even be able to use his hot air pipe underwater. They would also be much slower in extracting esoteric ore deposits.

Then there was the matter of Kane. Maintaining Void Step underwater was going to be a nightmare of a problem. Rui truly did not think that he could pull this off without making a single mistake.

Although he didn't enjoy the fact that he didn't trust Kane's ability in this regard, it couldn't be helped. The probability that Kane would fail was simply too high. Fighting underwater was an entirely different art compared to fighting on land or in the air.

The difference between fighting on land and in the air was substantial, but the medium of the two remained the same: gas.

The same could not be said for fighting underwater. The medium was fundamentally different, the inability to breathe, the increased pressure, as well as the vastly greater resistive force to motion that the medium provided made it far too different.

A technique as delicate like Void Step required far too much precision and accuracy, there was a reason it was a grade-ten Martial Art technique. Trying to fulfill the highly demanding requirements and thresholds of the technique in a medium that he had no experience in was extraordinarily difficult.

On top of that, Rui couldn't even imagine how long it would take to extract all the esoteric ore deposits even if they didn't end up becoming food for the sea creatures. How many days, if not weeks or months would they need to spend diving to the bottom of the lake grabbing as many esoteric ore deposits as they could before eventually needing to get back to the surface.

Martial Squires could hold their breaths for longer than humans, but not by too much, their need for oxygen was greater than humans, after all.

And none of them had a single aquatic technique on top of all of that. Rui could not imagine handling this the normal way.

It would most likely lead to their collective demise.

"Still, I'm not in the habit of quitting that easily," Rui said out loud. "I came here to this nation to challenge myself."

"You're not actually thinking of going, are you?" Kane looked queasy at the very thought of it.

"No," Rui shook his head. "But I do have another idea in mind."

#### Chapter 894: Gathering

"Esosale Suppliers has refused to supply to us."

In an underground facility that served as a nexus for a series of tunnels, six figures had gathered around a table.

The atmosphere was solemn and tense despite their nonchalant demeanor.

The source of pressure wasn't the various Martial Seniors standing behind them serving as bodyguards.

No.

Each of the six seated figures appeared to be a normal human. Yet they seemed to draw more attention than even the formidable Martial Seniors. Such a gravitas did not come from their fists' power, but the power of their positions. It was a distinct sense of power that came with their position, one that wasn't overt but could be just as scary.

"I haven't had time to go through the reports yet..." A woman sighed, maintaining a cold expression. "How many of our shells have been unable to purchase supplies from Esosale Suppliers?"

"About eighty-six percent, give or take," A spectacled man replied. "It's a rather shockingly high number, all things considered. Such a thing does not happen organically, especially when we can be reasonably certain that other legitimate companies of a similar size to our shells have not experienced any sanction of any sort."

He pushed his spectacles before continuing. "I have considered the possibility that Esosale Suppliers has perhaps adopted the policy of avoiding shell companies that are clearly hollow or have very shady ties. However, I have seen no indication of other such third party companies experiencing the same restriction."

"Then, what about the possibility that Esosale Suppliers has shunned shell fronts of the mafia in other nations as well?"

"I see no indication that this is the case. The only companies that have received prohibitions are Kandrian companies. The Bradt Distribution Service is seamlessly cooperating with other continues but has ceased all negotiation with our shell fronts."

"In other words..." The woman leaned forward. "This is without a doubt a targeted restriction against the Kandrian mafia."

"It can be safely concluded that this is the case, yes," The spectacled man nodded.

There was a brief moment of silence in the room as each of the members gathered their thoughts on the matter. The weight of the air grew more tumultuous while the temperature seemingly dropped a few degrees.

Each of them understood the gravity of the situation, it was truly an important enough situation to gather in person to address the matter.

The woman turned to one of the men in the room. "This is a serious issue, where is Aggragor?"

The man smiled perfunctorily. "Sage Aggragor instructed me to act in his interest, he told me to relay to you that he doesn't care to wrap his head around complicated issues. He would rather engage in his Martial Art training."

"Hmph," She snorted but didn't dare say a word.

It didn't matter if they were fellow leaders of the black market. One was a human. Another was a Martial Sage. The difference between them was that of Heaven and Earth. If not for the fact that Sage Aggragor disdained the responsibilities that came with his position, he may very well have assumed more power by dissolving the various segments of the black market under his single-handed control.

As it was, the black market had six distinct sections.

Human-related goods and services. This included things like slaves, organs, sexual services, manual labor, and darker indulgences that the consumers of this black market possessed.

Martial Art related goods and services that were illegal and not provided by the Martial Union. Mostly entailed matters like assassinations and violence.

Information. The sale of classified information was one of the largest black markets anywhere on the continent. Information was power.

Smuggling and distribution. This was one of the foundations of the black market, being able to deliver supplies of goods and services to the consumers, across borders, without being caught was the cornerstone of the black market.

Prohibited goods and substances. There was an enormous demand for conventional and esoteric drugs, as well as strategic materials and substances.

Money-related services. Managing the circulation of black money was a requirement of its own, and the size of this market was proportional to the size of the rest of the black market, thus this sector could never be left behind. Money laundering and the production of currency were one of the most commonly required services.

"Putting aside the matter of Aggragor, this is more important," Another man said, turning to one of the other six figures. "I'm more concerned why Carnil, the leader of goods supply, has been silent about this matter so far."

His eyes narrowed as he continued. "You're supposed to be on top of this."

Carnil moved for the first time, opening his eyes. "There is nothing to get on top. This matter is trivial."

The other leaders narrowed their eyes. "Trivial?"

"Did I stutter?" Carnil closed his eyes once more.

"Is this a joke to you?" The woman's tone grew ice cold. "Perhaps we ought to kill you and replace you."

"Hah," Carnil expressed emotion for the first time, turning to the woman. "Give it a shot why don't you?"

The air grew heavier as the two of them glared daggers at each other. Their bloodlust was so palpable that one could nearly feel it broiling in the air.

"Enough," The spectacled man pushed his spectacles up, adjusting them. "Carnil, explain yourself."

Carnil glanced at the spectacled man, snorting. "Y'all are kicking up a fuss for nothing. If the shell fronts have been exposed. Then we create new ones. Simple as that."

"You're missing the core of the issue," Another elderly woman remarked. "The question is why is Esosale Suppliers refusing to work with shell fronts associated with us when it does not exhibit any abstinence for other shell fronts of different groups and mafia."

"I don't give a fuck about that," Carnil snorted. "But if I had to guess, the Royal Family or the Martial Union got to Esosale Suppliers, probably the former. End of story."

"Not, if anything, that's just the beginning," The spectacled man replied sharply. "Have you forgotten? We need those esoteric ore deposits. The war of those esoteric ore deposits will impact the future of this very nation."

Chapter 895: Plan

"How do you plan on extracting all the esoteric ore deposits?" Kane asked, raising an eyebrow as he glanced at Rui.

"It's simple, really," Rui told him. "The reason for the difficulty of extracting the esoteric ore deposits of this particular floor is because of the fact that there is a huge body of water between us and the esoteric ore deposits and powerful creatures who are extremely capable in water, correct?"

"Right," Kane nodded, furrowing his eyebrows as Rui rehashed the obvious.

"Then it's simple," Rui smirked. "We just need to get rid of the water."

Kane stared at him.

"Here me out,"

"That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard," Kane scoffed. "'Oh there's problem? Just get rid of it.'"

Rui laughed as Kane mocked him. "I don't mean figuratively get rid of the problem, I mean it quite literally. We'll displace all this water and literally get it out of our way."

"That's insane," Kane replied with exasperation. "How are you going to displace all this water out of the way? Even if you had the biggest bucket, it's too untenable."

"We have a tool better than buckets," Rui replied with an amused smile. "We can use gravity."

"Gravity points downwards, not upwards," Kane reminded him.

"Exactly," Rui turned towards him with an amused grin. "So let's just allow gravity to do its thing."

"Except the bottom of the floor prevents that from happening-" Kane paused abruptly. "Oh."

"Seems like you figured it out already. I'm thinking we can break open a hole at the bottom of the floor, drain all the water out, and then peacefully extract all the esoteric ore deposits from the now emptied floor."

Kane's eyes widened. "That's insane. But... it makes sense."

Still, Kane couldn't help but marvel at how simple but brilliant the plan was. It wasn't going to be easy, but it was straightforward and viable for Rui, even if it wasn't viable for others.

"Still," Kane paused. "That still requires you to go underwater, right? Depending on how deep it is you may have to stay down there a while, won't you run into the same problems as you would if were trying to extract all the esoteric ore deposits from the bottom of the lake?"

"Only if we try to break it from the inside," Rui replied. "I plan to blast a hole into the floor from the outside, from under it."

"I feel stupid for asking. But I suppose you are the only one who could possibly do that."

"You're right," Rui nodded. "Only with my Riemannian Echo is detecting the right avenue for breaking a hole in the bottom of the floor feasible. Otherwise, it's extremely difficult to even come around to the right spot."

"I see," Kane nodded. "Also it's not entirely risk-free, I'm guessing."

"That's also true," Rui nodded. "The hole needs to be large enough to drain the lake in a reasonably short amount of time, but also, making it larger will flood the tunnel that I will be in at the moment it breaks through. This means the moment I break through, an extremely large flood of water will blast out at extremely high speeds. The total force will be a threat to even Martial Squires, not to mention the Squire-level monsters that will flow out along with it. Getting caught by it will be extremely dangerous."

Rui played several scenarios in his head as he calmly analyzed the situation. Based on some rough estimates of the size of the lake in conjunction with his knowledge of fluid dynamics from his bachelor's degree in physics, he was able to understand just how dangerous this operation could potentially get.

What if he broke open a hole, for the water to blast out, hitting him at high speeds only for a giant shark to come through and chew his head off?

The water pressure would be working against Rui in these circumstances, making it difficult to move, while the flood of water would aid the shark, allowing it to reach Rui in an instant where it would rip his head off, or at the very least cause him significant wounds.

What Rui needed to do was ensure that the hole was big enough to drain the entire floor at a reasonably fast pace.

It would take far too long if the hole was the size of a human, after all. What Rui needed was a much larger hole. However, the larger the hole, the more dangerous and risky it would be immediately after completion.

Thus he needed to find a way to mitigate the risk as well.



"Distance from the hole will greatly mitigate the risks," Rui noted.

Thankfully, Rui had learned techniques that allowed him to put distance between himself and his opponent. Transverse Resonance was a technique that allowed him to hit above his grade as a Martial Squire. This meant he could hit with the power of a high-grade Martial Squire at range.

Of course, there was a limit to the distance he could put between himself and the hole, given that he was not working on an open field but inside a cramped maze in a dungeon. The maximum distance he could achieve when considering everything was the height of the tunnel plus the thickness of the bedrock of the lake.

"It's manageable, probably," Rui murmured.

"Probably?" Kane raised an eyebrow.

"It depends, if I get really unlucky and have too many monsters, then I might get hit by one of them, though they'll undoubtedly be frantic due to being sucked down by a powerful whirlpool. I don't know if they're strong enough to resist the sheer force of the downward pull at the lowest point.

"Well, it's a risk you're going to have to take alone since I'll be chilling up here while you'll be doing all the hard work," Kane patted his back lightly, whistling humorously. "Let me know when you're done."

Rui chuckled. "Will do."

He didn't bother trying to get Kane to go along with him, he was right. This was something for Rui to do alone.

## Chapter 896: Requirements

The first thing Rui needed to do was find the right location under the nineteenth floor. This mattered a lot and would greatly impact his chances of getting away unscathed. The bedrock of the lake was not evenly thick, thus it was probably best that he looked for the place where it was thickest.

Aiming for the thickest part of the bedrock may end up being the hardest and most time-consuming, but it would certainly be the safest. Thus he needed to pay attention to that, among other things.

On top of that, he also needed to pay attention to the tunnels in the vicinity of the point where he was hoping to break through. If the tunnels all lead downwards, then that point was unsuitable. What he needed was a place where there was a route upwards as well.

The reason for this, of course, was the fact that the released water would rush through the tunnels and go downwards. Thus, if there was no way up, Rui was screwed and would need to spend quite some time in a wild escape for his life until he got far enough that the water would not reach him or found a way back up that wasn't flushed with water.

Thus a tunnel in the immediate vicinity leading him back up was definitely very important to him.

Another condition that the hole he would create needed to satisfy was that it had to be at the lowest points of the lake. If it was too high, then there would be a portion of the lake that would not get drained due to being lower than the hole.

On top of that Rui also needed to take into account the debris that he would be creating by blasting a large hole across the bedrock relative to the size of the tunnel. He needed to make sure that the debris did not block off the tunnel, nor did it raise the height of the tunnel such that the distance between him and the hole was reduced.

Water would travel faster through a narrower tunnel, and that was not good for him.

A multitude of variables was within his consideration as he picked a tunnel downwards, scanning the tunnel network below the nineteenth floor with his Riemannian Echo. Going down would allow him to sense everything better.

The lake was surprisingly deep for its size. It was almost closer to a trench than it was to a lake, from his perspective.

('That's going to make the water blast out with even greater speed,') He murmured unhappily. Height corresponded with more pressure at the bottom, which corresponded with the speed at which the water would blast out.

Still, he wasn't too concerned. The reflexes of a Martial Squire, when prepared, were quite remarkable. Although the water would blast out at an incredible speed, he was not going to get caught unless he was truly unfortunate. What he was most careful about was the initial moment of breakage.

Specifically, he needed to make sure that he timed it right, and was not caught off-guard. Furthermore, he needed to make sure that it was large enough on the very first shot, otherwise, he would need to escape even if it wasn't, and would be forced to waste too much time

He also needed to keep in mind that he could just peacefully go on hacking at the bedrock whistling away. The lake was also exerting a tremendous amount of pressure on the bedrock from the other side of which Rui was on. Meaning, at some point, the lake's own pressure would be enough to crack open a hole, he needed to ensure that it would be big enough.

('On top of that, I need to make sure that my attacks are sharp and precise. Else it is liable to cause cracks that will start leaking large amounts of water ahead of time,') Rui sighed. ('This is starting to become more of a pain than I had imagined it would be when I initially conceived of the idea.')

It took him longer than he expected to finally settle down on an idea spot after extensive searching and filtering. He found a single spot that suited his needs.

STEP

"Hmm..." He inspected his surroundings when he reached his chosen spot. "Good thickness, large tunnels, and straight tunnels where I can reach a high speed, and a decently close path upwards to avoid the water."

He glanced up. "Thirty-six meters... give or take. Just barely large enough it should work."

He heaved a sigh as he prepared himself. Breaking a ten-meter wide hole in the lake was the bare minimum in order to drain the lake in a reasonably short timeframe. If it was much smaller than this

then it would take far too long to drain the lake. Rui risked the lake being found by other adventurers which he most certainly did not want. He definitely wanted to cleanly finish it before any external entanglement could complicate matters.

He was even warier of other Martial Squires after his fiasco on the sixteenth floor with Chairman Deacon's raiding team. The man had no doubt taken the time to form some measures that hoped to replicate the stroke of good luck of having Rui and Kane detected that day.

He closed his eyes as he gathered his focus. He breathed deeply as he honed his mind, gathering his focus and concentration.

"Let's begin,"

He pulled out his hot air pipe. Although Transverse Resonance was a sound-based technique, not a wind-based technique, it was still best to heat up the initial air particles of the sound attack, even if most of that heat was lost in transit.

He inhaled air from the hot air pipe deeply, before facing up.

THWOOM THWOOM!

He shot two rapid sonic blasts one after the other, the second being considerably faster than the first one. The two sonic pulses overlapped in constructive resonance as they merged into a single projectile of sound.

BAM!!!

The first sonic projectile slammed into the top of the tunnel, causing a huge crater.

Chapter 897: Breakthrough

The best part about the Mighty Roar Flash Blast technique that he had gotten from G'ak'arkan Tribe, as well as the Sonic Bullet technique was that he could control the kind of damage that he inflicted on the ceiling of the dungeon.

Thus he could control the projectile to ensure that the resulting crater was ten meters wide.

He found it a shame that he couldn't use tier four Transverse Resonance, where he overlapped four sonic projectiles in constructive resonance. Unfortunately, that required a distance that was far in excess of ten meters.

THWOOM THWOOM!

BAM!

He kept striking at the ceiling, forming a deeper crater with each attack. The hot air pipe definitely helped, even if it wasn't too significant. The heat made sure that the damage was more localized whereas impacts could spread unscrupulously

The land around him shook with each attack, so he hoped that Kane was aware that he had already begun. He wasn't too sure, however, because esoteric ore deposits jammed all senses by inhibiting the flow of energy and matter. This included seismic radiation since even now he was unable to detect any external seismic radiation in the ground.

Rui made steady but slow progress. Ordinarily, this would have been a matter of several attacks at most had it been ordinary bedrock. However, the Shionel Dungeon was reinforced with dungeonified vegetation and low-grade Squire-level esoteric substances. This astronomically increased their durability and thus the force needed to fragment the bedrock.

THWOOM THWOOM!

BAM!

CRACK!

Rui narrowed his eyes as his senses heightened, a small trickle of water had begun dripping through the cracks in the crater. The cracks had crossed across the remaining bedrock left. The fact that they were made out of Squire-grade esoteric and reinforced by the dungeonified roots of the dungeon was probably the only reason that the remaining bit of bedrock had not been utterly shattered by the sheer weight of the entirety of the lake.

Rui gathered energy across his entire body as his muscles tightened.

His nerves tingled as he readied himself for what was about to come.

His body brimmed with power as he positioned his feet ready for running, before inhaling from his hot air pipe one more time.

THWOOM THWOOM!

BOOOOM!!!

A huge explosion of water blasted through the newly formed hole at a shocking speed. The water accelerated downward, pulled not just by gravity but also pushed down by the extreme weight of the entire lake pushing down on all of it.

The air rippled as the water blasted through, blasting downward with great speed.

Yet Rui didn't wait even the briefest moment to admire the sight. He immediately dashed away with Gale Force Breathing and Outer Convergence, running forward at top speed.

The sheer speed at which he ran blasted the air out of his way, leaving sonic booms in his way as he shattered the sound barrier.

With Riemannien Echo, he could sense that there was no shortage of monsters in the water that was rushing behind him, eager to catch and swallow him up!

He could even sense what seemed like a Megalodon Shark!

('Ain't no fucking way I'm dying in the jaws of that, hell no,') He picked up the pace as he strained himself even more.

He was almost there.

STEP

He leaped into the air as he sky-walked up a straight tunnel that led right up.

It wasn't that the water did not enter the vertical tunnel leading upwards either, but the pace was pitifully slow. Rui knew it was because the water had already begun traveling extensively through the convoluted maze of tunnels that was the Shionel Dungeon.

Many of those tunnels led to lower levels, and they would be the first to be flooded.

Rui considered the ramifications that this would have on the rest of the dungeon. The tunnels were actually quite small compared to the volume of water, which meant that the tunnels were most likely going to be filled to the brim.

The aquatic life that got swept away would not necessarily die immediately. They would instead live in tubes for a while until the water got absorbed into the bedrock of the dungeon and by the roots of the dungeon too.

The water would accumulate in places where the tunnels ended in a dead-end creating various pockets of water that could sustain some of the aquatic life.

Funnily enough, he didn't think most of the adventurers would be affected by this the way they were affected by the ants that were released from their dungeon just yet. The reason for this was that the water would get swept deep into the dungeon, places that hadn't been explored yet.

('Wait a minute, this will actually help us now that I think about it,') Rui noted.

The places of the dungeon where the water clogged indicated a dead-end. Thus Rui and Kane could safely avoid such segments of tunnels the moment they entered his Riemannian Echo.

It was only the tunnel systems that were empty that actually had paths forward.

('On top of that, this is an advantage that only Kane and I can enjoy because this water isn't sticking around forever!') Rui grinned.

This would significantly cut down on their exploring activities by highlighting all the paths that they ought not to explore. Gaining even more of an edge on Chairman Deacon was music to his ears.

('They're not even going to know what happened, hopefully,') Rui smirked. ('Not unless they find the nineteenth floor, but it will probably be too late by then.')

Even if they did happen to find the floor, he would have long gone having taken all the esoteric ore deposits from the floor.

('Right, I ought to get back. The lake will take some time to drain though.')

Even if the hole was ten meters wide, the lake was more than a kilometer in diameter. It was not going to get drained any moment now, they would probably get to watch how the aquatic life forms dealt with this new crisis.

## Chapter 898: Choice

"I was half-worried that the water would start pooling into these tunnels around us," Kane told Rui when he returned back to him.



"Nah, don't worry, I made sure that there was no way that that could happen, there are plenty of tunnels leading deep down into the dungeon, so we'll be fine," Rui reassured him.

He turned towards the lake. "I knew that this was not going to happen instantly, but damn, it's a ten-meter wide hole and the rate at which the water levels are receding is painfully slow."

The water level was falling a few centimeters every second, which indicated just how enormously wide the lake was, given that water was gushing out of a ten-meter-wide hole.

"It's just a matter of time now," Kane shrugged, before leaning against a tunnel wall.

Rui could already see esoteric ore deposits slowly starting to emerge now that the water levels were receding. Though it still was too dangerous to try and extract them given the fact that they could still be attacked if they were close to the water.

He ran his Riemannian Echo sense through the water as he studied the reactions of the various aquatic and amphibian monsters and creatures in the lake.

"They sure are panicking," Rui remarked.

Most of them had grown erratically active, understandably. The many creatures had probably not encountered a time when the very medium they had existed their entire life pulled them downwards with such a great force. If they simply remained still, they would get pulled down.

Thus each creature had gotten into a frenzy to stay as high up as possible. Fish began migrating higher and higher as the lake was getting dragged down lower and lower. Many amphibian creatures had already begun moving out of the water in order to avoid the powerful pulling current, although none of them had noticed Rui and Kane standing at the entrance of a tunnel to the floor.

Rui couldn't help but feel curious about the psychology of these creatures. To them, was water truly no different from air? From their perspectives, were they effectively floating and flying midair when they swam around in the water?

In that case, their circumstances would be even more inconceivable to them than he had perhaps suspected.

Just as Rui was about to relax as he waited for the water to drain, he noticed something strange.

"Hm?" He furrowed his eyebrows. "Have the water levels stopped declining?"

"I can't really tell..." Kane squinted his eyes.

"They have..." Rui murmured as he swept his Riemannian Echo technique at the bottom of the lake where the hole was. "Wait a second, the hole... is blocked!"

Kane frowned. "By what? A rock?"

"No," Rui shook his head. "A creature blocked it. It looks like a giant octopus."

Rui could clearly sense a large octopus-like creature settling on top of the hole, squeezing down on it with its entire body. It used its tentacles to seal down the edge of the hole, making sure that no water could leak through the hole at all.

Rui was impressed. The creature correctly identified the source of the problem and realized the gravity of the situation before coming up with a quick solution.

('Octopi always have been clever creatures back on Earth,') Rui recalled watching some videos on Youtube where an octopus would solve some complex problems and puzzles. ('It appears that those traits exist in this world as well.')

"A creature voluntarily blocked the hole?" Kane raised an eyebrow. "Are you sure that it isn't just stuck?"

"Yeah," Rui nodded. "For one, octopi have extremely flexible and ductile bodies. The notion of them getting stuck is practically impossible. For another, this octopus looks like it's trying everything in its power to ensure that the hole doesn't open up."

"That's not good for us, is it?" Kane sighed

"Not one bit I'm afraid," Rui chuckled, but there's a pretty simple solution, although it's a pain in the ass,"

"Going back down and slicing him up?"

"Yep,"

Rui quickly returned back down to the tunnel network where the hole was.

Thankfully, because the octopus was blocking the hole, thus the tunnels were not filled with water. There were many creatures en route, that had been left in the tunnels when the octopus closed the hole. He sky-walked to avoid getting wet and the corpses, before reaching the hole.

"That looks painful," Rui winced as he saw the octopus' abdomen stuck in the hole.

SHING

He drew his sword. "Not as painful as this, though."

SLASH SLASH SLASH

Three rapid strikes created deep gashes in the body of the octopus. The octopus' body internally cleaved apart as the cold bellhorn steel of his blade repelled the esoteric substances in the octopus' body on either side of the blade in the opposite directions.

Consecutively, the wound extended far deeper than the blade's length, killing the octopus on the spot.

Rui immediately dashed away from the site as the octopus' corpse fell through and the rush of the water flooded through, immediately reclaiming the tunnel as it completely consumed it.

Rui gritted his teeth as he barely managed to avoid it. This time, he was sky-walking instead of running on land due to the fear of potentially slipping on the wet tunnels.

SLOSH

A small wave splashed onto Rui's lower half as he escaped up into the tunnel.

"Tsk," Rui tutted. "That was annoyingly close."

He pulled out his hot air pipe, before inhaling and heating himself dry.

It wasn't long before he returned to Kane. The two of them waited as the lake drained itself. Rui kept a sharp watch to make sure that there were no more creatures attempting to block the hole as before.

It took about an hour, but the lake was finally drained.

"Alright, let's get this over with," Kane was about to jump into the emptied lake.

"Wait," Rui stopped him. "I think you should do the mining."

"Huh?" Kane tilted his head in confusion.

"I think I should explore the unclogged parts of the dungeon before the water is gone."

## Chapter 899: Waterways

It seemed like an absurd suggestion. Kane did not even bother replying. His expressions fully conveyed the sheer magnitude of how unimpressed he was. "Explore the rest of the dungeon first before mining a floor that we just cleared, have you lost your mind?"

"Hear me out," Rui placated him. "The water isn't going to stick around for too long, it will eventually be absorbed into the bedrock of the dungeon. I told you the benefits of exploring the dungeon while the water was still there, right?"

Kane nodded. "Tunnels systems that don't really lead anywhere except for eventual dead-ends will be blocked off, while tunnel systems that lead to dungeon floors will be open because the water will be drained into the dungeon floors, rather than being blocked off inside the tunnel."

"Exactly," Rui grinned. "So basically, the water is the best exploration team that we could possibly ask for."

Kane's eyes lit up as he considered Rui's idea. He was sure that his friend's idea was probably good this time because it was good every time, but he didn't want to make it too easy for Rui. Questioning his ideas would at the very least make them more solid.

Still, he had to admit that the way Rui framed it was very attractive.

"The ants were not bad as an exploration team, but the problem is that they were able to detect dungeons, and they weren't able to communicate the existence of one to the queen even if they happened to run into one because they're stupid," Rui explained. "But the water is perfect. Clogged tunnel systems are the tunnel systems that we ought to avoid exploring, and the open ones are the ones that are most likely to lead to something fruitful."

"So you intend to run around as far as possible and memorize which ones are clogged and which ones aren't?"

"Exactly," Rui nodded. "The sooner I start, the better my gains. If I start even an hour from now, much of the gains I could make will be gone for sure. That's why I have to go. I promise I'm not just gonna kick back and relax."

"Alright," Kane nodded.

"You make sure that you're using Void Step every step of the way, alright?" Rui warned him.

Kane didn't have Rui's senses, he could be caught off-guard by surviving monster or another adventurer. The best way to combat this was to employ his stealth capabilities. No one would possibly catch him off-guard if he used it constantly. Unless of course it was something that wasn't targeting him specifically, but such a thing was far too unlikely to hit him.

Regardless, Kane could also use Void Step much more continuously without having to use it on another person as well. The fact that he had to use it on Rui in addition was the reason that he needed to take breaks so frequently.

Thus, Rui was quite confident that he would be fine as he mined the esoteric ore deposits.

"Some of the creatures are still alive," Rui glanced down at some of the aquatic creatures flipping around. "The amphibian creatures like the crabs are definitely not dying, so make sure that you avoid them."

"Don't worry, I know what I'm doing, you hurry up and make sure you get everything you need before it's too late.," Kane reassured him before leaping into the empty lake.

Rui immediately got to work, leaving the floor as he quickly hurried through tunnels, moving downwards as much as he could.

At the same time, he paid a ton of attention to his surroundings with his Riemannian Echo, making sure to pay attention to clogged and unclogged tunnel networks while carefully inputting all of this information into his Mind Palace.

The deeper he went, the more the water began eliminating all tunnel systems and networks. When he extended his senses as much as possible in a single direction, while rotating that direction across all three hundred and sixty degrees, he was able to cover a vast amount of area with his senses. It drastically cut down the amount of area that he had to explore.

He prioritized going downward first before exploring radially outwards. The reason for this was that he would rather cover every existing primary route that was unclogged across the entire dungeon before he explored each primary unclogged route in order to further memorize which secondary and tertiary routes springing out from it were unclogged.

"This is amazing," Rui murmured.

Normally, running into deadends in the Shionel Dungeon was a frustratingly common happening. Most Martial Squires experienced dozens to hundreds of dead-ends before they actually discovered a new path that actually led somewhere. The Shionel Dungeon was quite cruel.

Only thirty percent of all possible paths at any given juncture actually led somewhere that wasn't eventually a dead-end. When combined with the fact that tunnels very frequently and constantly intersected with each other in the dungeon, it meant that adventurers and explorers ran into many, many junctures as they traveled the Shionel Dungeon.

The probability of picking paths that didn't lead to dead-ends was anywhere from one in a thousand to one in a million. When these odds were stacked on top of the fact that losing one's sense of direction and

This was why even with a huge number of Martial Squires pouring into the Shionel Dungeon, the exploration of the dungeon took an immense amount of time. Rui was able to bypass this significantly thanks to his Riemannian Echo, but not even he could know which paths were right, and which paths weren't. Not even he could pick the perfect paths correctly each time.

Until now.

The water from the gigantic lake had spread across all paths that went downwards, elucidating which ones were worth following, and which ones weren't. That combined with his senses, he was able to pick an incredible number of just the right paths.

Of course, this system wasn't completely flawless, but it made life far easier.

## Chapter 900: Another

As Rui went down, he scanned the dungeon around him in every direction he could by extending his senses as far in all three hundred and sixty degrees one by one to create a circle. Doing this every split second as he traveled down led to the creation of a tube as he went downwards, mapping circle after circle on top of each other.

He committed all this data to the Mind Palace for later revision, but he was essentially recording which paths within this mapped tube were unfilled and thus open.

On top of that, he made a great amount of progress as he went downwards by simply following tunnels that weren't filled. Covering distance that even he would not have been able to cover under normal circumstances.

He was grateful that the dungeon bedrock wasn't too porous. Otherwise, all the water would have been drained into the bedrock far too soon. Thankfully, because it didn't allow water to single into it too easily, the tunnels would be filled for a few hours, to potentially half a day.

Rui trekked across the tunnels for many hours avoiding the filled tunnels as he chose to stick to the most central part of the Shionel Dungeon he could. He wanted to map as much of the core of the dungeon as he could while he could thanks to choosing the right paths. He also wanted to map the core of the dungeon while the water showed him which parts of the core of the dungeon were worth pursuing and which weren't.

He was quite certain that future endeavors into the dungeon with Kane would become a lot more fruitful than their previous endeavors. They would be able to overtake their competitors and enemies to such a degree that no one would be able to compare to them.

Rui's eyes lit up as his senses picked up on a familiar sensation.

"A new floor!" Rui rejoiced as he laughed out loud. "Hahaha, I'm a genius!"



He didn't always like tooting his horn, however, even he had to admit that the idea of using the fact the paths in which the water drained across the dungeon tunnels was brilliant. The rate of success in finding new dungeons by following the right paths was incredible!

('I can revisit this dungeon floor when I'm done,') Rui made a choice on the spot. ('Right now, exploring the unfilled paths before they dry or drain is most important because I have a time limit for that.')

Even if he found the new floor, what could he do? Kane was still mining the nineteenth floor, and even if Martial Squires were massively superhuman in speed, it would still take time given how big the floor was. There was no point in rushing up to grab him and rush down to clear a dungeon when they weren't even fully done with the prior floor.

This floor was not going anywhere, and the probability of an adventurer stumbling into this new twentieth floor was extremely low. His competitors were still fighting off the more than ten thousand ants that were running around at the higher levels of the Shionel Dungeon. Adventurers had become far more reluctant to simply wander off deeper into the depths of the Shionel Dungeon.

It was far too risky. The ants were annoying because it was as though they didn't even feel pain or fear. They just lashed out in the most aggressive manner without any care!

On top of that, their bites were toxic. The venom wasn't anywhere nearly as potent as the inland taipan, but it caused a tremendous burning sensation atop debilitating swelling. Thus the risk of having a single attack land on them was too great for them to saunter nonchalantly looking for an adventure.

While this certainly wouldn't remain true forever, as the many highly competent and powerful Martial Squires hacked away at the weakling ants one by one, they would definitely annihilate every ant at a rapid pace.

However, Rui was sure that it wouldn't be happening immediately. Thus the probability of anyone stumbling into this new floor was extremely low.

He surged forward with the reassurance that the new twentieth floor would remain a secret. He didn't even bother trying to conduct a preliminary analysis of the dungeon floor, he could do that later as well.

He continued moving down to depths that probably not a single human had ever been to. Simply coming here required a great amount of fortune without bizarre circumstances like the ones that Rui was in at the moment.

It wasn't until an hour or more descending that he ran into yet another floor.

"Unbelievable," Rui murmured. "This is the life. This game is broken."

He briefly considered whether he should turn this into his primary method of investigation from here on out. Perhaps he should store enormous amounts of water in his dimensional storage ring before dumping them down certain sections of the Shionel Dungeon?

"It takes too much water," Rui shook his head.

It was a fun and novel idea, but the only reason it was working this time was that he dumped a gigantic lake's worth of water into the tunnel systems of the dungeon. A lake big enough that it took quite some time to drain out despite the hole being ten meters wide.

He shook his head putting aside such superfluous thoughts.

He didn't have too much time left. He could sense that the water levels were growing shallower as time passed.

He kept traveling deeper.

He ran into another dungeon floor.

And another.

And another.

And another.

And another.

And another.

And another.

And another.

And another.

And another.

And another.

Half a day had passed, and he had ended up running into twelve floors in total, each larger than the next.

Rui had almost become numb to the discovery of new dungeon floors, even if he was extraordinarily ecstatic. His joy reached another level when he discovered one last floor before the water was all gone. Yet just as he went deeper toward it...

Something changed.

Was it the air?

The temperature of the air was the same. Yet it was the tone of the atmosphere that changed.

He was familiar with this sensation, wasn't he?

His eyes widened as he experienced a titanic amount of pressure, unlike anything he had ever experienced.

No, that wasn't quite right.

"No..." he murmured with a horrified expression. "This feeling..."

He recalled this dread. The fear of a being in an entirely different Realm of power.

The atmosphere only further chilled as he identified the origin of this sensation. Any joy and ecstasy he was previously experiencing melted away as an enormous amount of dread clasped his heart.

His nerves tingled as a chill crawled up his spine.

Primordial Instinct begged him to run away, yet he steeled his expression, preparing himself.