

Martial Unity 941

Chapter 941: Begin

Half a day later, even Rui was starting to get a little bored as he had come to gather nearly all of the data he had wanted. There was nothing new or novel to be gathered from the roots pummeling down the Martial Artists.

In fact, it was quite distasteful to watch. Those Martial Squires were certainly his enemies as warriors of Chairman Deacon but at the same time, they also were fellow Martial Artists. It was unpleasant for him as a Martial Artist to witness his fellow peers get absolutely demolished by a dungeon for Martial Squires.

He definitely held pride amidst his love for his Martial Art, and Martial Art in general, thus he did feel affronted by the end outcome, even if he had entirely predicted that it would come to pass, even if he himself had set into motion the series of events that led to this devastating loss.

"Don't worry, I'll get revenge for all of you," He said, without a single shred of shame. He didn't even realize how shameless the statement was.

Kane, however, did, looking at Rui through the side of his eyes with a skeptical expression. "I don't think you of all people get to say that to them, you know?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Rui said, getting up.

"Where are you going?" Kane asked.

"The fight has ended, so I'm off to clear the dungeon, of course, and to ensure that a rat doesn't escape," Rui replied.

"Rat? No, wait, you're going to clear it immediately?" Kane asked with a surprised expression. "Shouldn't you, I dunno, prepare more or something?"

"Nope, I'm good," Rui replied with a single word. "You should come along too, you won't be partaking, but knowing you're nearby does help."

"Alright," Kane sighed.

The two of them hurried down until they reached the Root floor, Rui swiftly entered the floor, while Kane stayed back behind.

SHING

Rui drew his sword, activating Gale Force Breathing as he rapidly appeared before Captain Deacon swinging hard.

SLASH

SPLAT

Much to his surprise, he was unable to decapitate the man despite getting a clean shot at his neck!

"To think that didn't kill you," Rui murmured from behind his mask. "Grade-ten Martial Squires sure are impressive, it makes sense that you managed to escape despite being blasted by the Root."

The man grimaced as he glared at Rui with shock and rage, yet his eyes widened as he seemingly made a realization on the spot regarding who Rui was.

"You..." He managed to squeeze out. "YOU D-"

SLASH

A second slash finished the job.

THUD

His head hit the ground, rolling away.

Rui had no interest in humoring him. His attention had already moved past the man, focusing on the Root.

"We meet again," Rui offered.

Unfortunately, the Root did not deign to return his greeting.

Rui wasn't afraid of being where he was at the moment. He had already discovered that while the Root was capable of attacking the target anywhere inside the floor after it had triggered the defensive mechanisms, one could not trigger the defensive mechanisms from just about any distance.

Yet, before he began the battle, he swept his senses across the entire floor. There was something important that he needed to make sure that he wasn't missing.

('Not a single one of them can be left alive,') He made sure to thoroughly focus on every single body he came across, inspecting every single one of them to make sure that there was absolutely no chance that they could possibly be alive.

After five minutes of a thorough scan, he was finally convinced.

He closed his eyes as he breathed deeply. As dangerous as it was, he ceased his relentless attention to his surroundings, diverting his attention inwards. At this moment, the Root very well could attack him, and he wouldn't even know of it, and would die on the spot.

But he knew he would die if he didn't get himself to his peak condition.

It took effort, but he gathered his scattered awareness.

He honed his focus.

He gathered his concentration.

He amassed his mind.

He embodied his awareness. At that moment, everything could have ceased to exist, and Rui would not have noticed.

It was difficult focusing every ounce of his conscious mind in a single direction, it required discipline and more perseverance than people realized.

It felt like an eternity inside his mind, but it took only ten seconds in reality.

Ten seconds later, he was almost a different person entirely.

The pressure he exerted was sharp, so much so that it was hard to believe he was the same person. Just standing near him would create a profound sense of peril even among high-grade Martial Artists.

"Fuuu..." Rui opened his eyes, directing his honed mind toward his objective as he tossed his sword into his dimensional ring. He exhaled deeply, activating his various breathing techniques as he felt his body grow tremendously lighter.

It began suddenly.

Rui disappeared into thin air as he rushed toward the Root at an astronomically high speed. The sheer atmosphere recoiled as he tore through the air, leaving behind a gigantic sonic boom.

Not even a millisecond had passed before what happened ensued.

As fast as Rui was, he was still vastly slower than the sharp root that lashed out toward him with a titanic speed.

The first confrontation between the Root and Rui had come to be.

What followed would have blown the minds of all the Martial Squires that had fought against the Root prior.

WHOOSH

With the gentlest of sidesteps, Rui evaded the attack at the most crucial of timings, watching it blow right past him. His gracious movements were smooth, yet swift.

It took him no more than a millisecond to detect cues and tells in the passive patterns of the Root, predicting the trajectories of four more root attacks.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH

Before he even realized it, he had already dodged them.

And thus began the final battle. The outcome of this battle would affect more people than Rui had realized at that moment.

Chapter 942: Profound

All those months of preparation had paid off. The many months that he spent scraping up passive patterns in the Root's movements and the two large-scale battles in which he had spent gathering its active patterns had paid off.

The predictive model that he consequently built was functional. Rui could see its attacks coming from a mile away, sometimes literally. The passive cues and tells warned him of every attack, while the previous attacks and the positions and timings allowed him to see even further into the future.

The predictive model he had on the Root was still not quite as powerful as the one that he had on Kane, but it was not too far behind either.

The sheer insight he had on the Root's future movements was quite remarkable, yet it became scary when those same movements became too fast for him to react to with his own reflexes. His own movements were on par with the faster grade-ten Martial Artists, his eyes could barely catch them, and they were almost entirely over before he could react.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!

Rui somersaulted through the air at hypersonic speeds as he gracefully evaded five root attacks converging on his location. His mind had predicted eight more attacks from ahead, he swiftly prepared the appropriate Forestep movements, waiting for precisely the right moment, before mindlessly executing them with sheer and pure reflex, allowing him to surpass his normal limits when it came to execution speed.

The battle from his perspective had become rather bizarre. One moment he was doing in position, moving in a certain way. The very next moment he was elsewhere entirely, moving in an entirely different way.

It was a jarring experience, and one that he wasn't entirely accustomed to in the middle of combat, but he quickly got used to the sensation of applying it when his life was on the line.

The more comfortable he grew, the smoother he became, the more fluid his movements ended up being, and the greater the intervals at which he could maintain Godspeed. He couldn't maintain Forestep continuously since his mind did not operate at that speed, with predictions, he could circumvent the issue, but at the end of the day, even predictions were limited by the speed of the predictive capability of the mind.

A combination of predictions and seamless thoughtless reflexes allowed him to bypass thinking speed limits to a certain degree which allowed him to spend about half of the time in combat using Forestep continuously. Thus, half the time he was as fast as his normal self, while the other half he moved at speeds close to on par with grade-ten speed-oriented Martial Artists.

In this manner, Rui coped with the onslaught of roots better than he had expected!

The Root launched attack after attack, and Rui dodged one after the other.

('Alright, preliminary ability to contend with Root offense confirmed,') Rui thought as he evaded yet another attack. ('Initiating counter-offense as a solution to begin closing distance between target and myself.')

SHING

SLASH

He instantly drew his sword that he had previously stored, programming a Forestep slash to slice off an incoming root attack. Much to his delight, it seemed that the overpowered offensive nature of his cooled Bellhorn steel blade was effective even against the roots of the Root.

He hadn't been sure if this would be the case, but the blade managed to inflict remarkably heavy damage on the roots with a single attack. Only grade-ten Martial Squires were capable of such feats!

"FUUUUU!" He exhaled crackling hot air onto a root, freezing its expansion before swinging at the root with Outer Convergence and Forestep.

CRACK!

Rui's eyes lit up as he destroyed his first root!

He was quite ecstatic at the fact that his previous tactics still retain their effectiveness against the roots. His current battle prowess was the result of his previous two training phases that gave him the necessary power to singlehandedly cope with an onslaught of attacks that ought to have been far beyond his capabilities as a Martial Squire who had only spent four years in the Squire Realm.

He vigorously fought back with as much of his Martial Art as he could!

Forestep, Outer Convergence, his sword techniques and hot air attacks, Mind Palace technique, and the VOID algorithm at the core of it all, chugging away furiously in order to cope with the onslaught that the Root was exerting against Rui.

Many variables across many years came into play in this battle. A variety of factors pushed Rui forward, bit by bit, allowing him to accomplish the impossible with what little he had. Rui felt a profound sense of culmination as he employed power that he had gathered across the entirety of his second life.

('No,') Rui noted as he reflexively dodged a root with Forestep. ('Across two lives.')

He had persevered through some truly hellish times, and after seventy-nine years of being alive, he was here today. The power he had obtained was born out of seventy years of amassing.

A giddy sense of jubilation and euphoria shot emanated through his body, giving rise to a remarkable surge of power as his movements grew swifter and sharper. He shot across the floor, twisting and twirling through the air as he narrowly avoided waves of root attacks, cutting them down as and when he could.

Rui almost felt it was a shame that no one could see him at the moment, although he fought for himself, it didn't hurt to be validated by fellow Martial Artists that walked their own paths.

Suddenly, his eyes widened as his predictive model foresaw a problematic development. The number of roots lashing out at him doubled as the Root seemingly decided to increase the heat since it was unable to take him down swiftly.

('Shi-!') Almost all his escape routes were cut off!

More than a hundred roots piled in from all directions, threatening to absolutely crush his puny little body flat!

CRACK!

Chapter 943: Bounce

Perhaps Rui had gotten so immersed in the flow that he had actually reacted late when that flow changed abruptly. Perhaps, the change was extraordinarily abrupt that it was just that difficult to handle.

Rui wasn't quite sure.

But there nothing was quite like the eminent threat of death that brought out the very best of one's creative ability.

CRACK!

Rui grimaced as he intercepted the closest root attack with his sword, yet, rather than trying to slice or destroy it. He almost instinctively applied an incomplete version of the Flux Earther.

He intercepted the impact with his sword, his arms limp before progressively stiffening and pushing back as the Root moved in closer to strike his body.

Just like a spring pushed back harder when compressed.

And just like a spring, it pushed his entire body backward at a remarkably high speed. Rui didn't try and ground the kinetic energy by using the second half of the technique with Reverberating Lance.

CRACK!

The Sword was unable to handle the impact, breaking in half before the impact had been completed.

PEW!

WHOOSH

Rui shot out of the target zone at an incredibly high velocity, crashing into the walls of the floor.

BOOM!

"RGH!" He gritted his teeth as he bore the pain that he felt.

He didn't have time to recover.

WHOOSH

BOOM!!!

The roots were relentless, pursuing him even as he did his best to evade them with an aching body. Fortunately, the VOID algorithm, Forestep, and other elements were still in play.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!

Rui dove through the air as he avoided five attacks. He had broken out of his little reverie as he began fighting more fiercely and seriously. A sharp expression occupied his face as he evaded the various attacks that came his way with greater timing than ever before.

('Accumulative counter-offense is no longer viable,') Rui had long realized.

His broken sword meant that he no longer had any way of hurting the Root at the moment with regular attacks. Any hope of eventually accumulating enough damage to neuter the Root was gone.

('But that isn't my only avenue for victory,') Rui's eyes narrowed as he perceived a path forward to victory. ('But I need to get close to the Root.')

Evading the Root was viable for Rui as he was now, but closing the distance as he evaded attacks was harder. The closer he got to the Root, the greater the number of roots that could participate in the attack against Rui.

Rui was grateful that his injuries from earlier were not too severe, although he definitely endured damage, his healing factor was good enough to negate the effect it had on his combat prowess.

This too would not have happened if not for his Hungry Pain technique.

Rui's mind worked harder than it ever had before as he furiously processed the outputs from his predictive model before trying to chart paths that he could follow forward.

However, it was difficult.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH

He evaded roots as he dashed forward. Yet just two steps in that direction and he was forced to take a step back!

BOOM!

A root slammed into the ground where he was about to step, forcing him to back off. He immediately spun through the air to the side as he evaded all kinds of trajectories from the roots.

Moving through the roots was absurdly harder than simply evading them for more reasons than Rui had initially understood, not only did he enter the striking range of new shorter, and more distant roots the closer he got to the Root, but he also had less time to react to them due to the shorter distance between him and the inception of their attacks.

Thankfully, the previous failure had taught him some lessons. Although it certainly did hurt him, it wasn't without its benefits. The last-moment solution that he had cobbled together to get out of the situation was definitely something that could serve Rui well.

Rui's eyes narrowed as he predicted a root attack from the side, instantly, he made the judgment to test out the viability of the plan.

WHOOSH!

The root rushed forward towards Rui, yet this time, Rui didn't evade it like he normally did, he partially evaded it, getting his torso out of the way before intercepting the root with his hand.

POW!

The root crashed into his stretched limp palm which stiffened and pushed back the more Root pushed against it.

Just like a spring.

Rui launched himself forward towards the Root, by pushing and bouncing off a root like a spring. This was the application of the Flux Earther technique that he had devised in the middle of battle.

He had always known that the Flux Earther technique could be used to launch himself at speeds much greater than his limit, but he hadn't considered that it could be used as more than just a getaway, in certain circumstances.

('Circumstances like these,') His eyes sharpened as more than a hundred roots converged on his location!

Yet instead of relying purely on the evasion supplied to him by Forestep, he also employed a combination of Forestep and Flux Earther with his arms to move maneuver across the floor at even greater speeds!

Thus, even if Forestep alone was unable to cope with the increasing pressure of root attacks that came with getting closer to the Root, he could still manage by relying on the Earth Fluxer to move around in ways that would be impossible on his own. Instead, he could get the roots to help him avoid the roots!

This was especially the case given that the roots were incapable of tactical adaptation to exploit the shortcomings of such a technique and strategy. This was the difference between Martial Artists and other creatures. Due to their inability to explore their full potential, they could never match Martial Artists who were exponentially weaker as far as raw power went.

Rui grinned as the battle entered a new phase!

Chapter 944: Home

Had a human been there to witness the battle, they would have seen absolutely nothing. The human eye was incapable of perceiving phenomena that happened in milliseconds. Had a Martial Apprentice witnessed the battle, they would have seen disconnected images flashing all about in an incoherent manner. Still, this was nothing unusual for Martial Apprentices, but they would have very little idea of what was going on.

However, a Martial Squire was different.

Only a Martial Squire would be able to fathom the sheer absurdity of the feat that Rui was accomplishing!

Despite the avalanche of roots. Despite the sheer power and speed of each individual root. Despite the sensory suppression of Shionel Dungeon.

Despite everything that aimed to end his life, he did not fall!

Each root was powerful enough to engage even grade-ten Martial Squires. Fighting even a single one of them was something that required power amassed across one's entire life, it required power close to the limit of what Martial Squires could achieve!

Yet here was a twenty-year-old young man, one who hadn't even spent more than half a decade in the Squire Realm, taking on countless roots simultaneously!

Rui closed his eyes as his mind instinctive honed sharper than it ever had in the entirety of his life!

In the span of a single millisecond, he spun through the air, somersaulting over overhead crashes, sidestepping root jabs, and bouncing off of powerful root swings. The roots moved at speeds that beggared the mind, shredding the atmosphere with each movement. Every motion left behind numerous shockwaves that made even breathing impossible! Every attack ignited the very air!

If not for the fact that Rui had already conditioned his lungs to be able to withstand extreme temperatures, he might very well have died after the very first attack!

WHOOSH

Rui gently shifted his head by ten centimeters, evading a titanic root aiming to crush his head. He swiftly bounced off the root's momentum with his quasi-Flux Earther technique as he barely evaded a dozen roots, smothering the airspace that he was occupying just a millisecond prior!

Rui launched himself forward, shortening the distance between him and the Root by about three hundred meters in a single go!

Yet he didn't have even a moment to acknowledge his progress, the very next second, a new wave of roots, the range of which he just entered, attacked him in addition to the existing roots that were already attacking.

Before him was a hellish view of almost one thousand roots attacking him. simultaneously. Surely, any other Martial Squire would have fallen to despair under the nauseating quasi-Senior level. How many Martial Squires would be able to retain their confidence despite having a full understanding of the sheer magnitude of the monstrosity that the Root was?

Rui on the other hand was not only not affected, but he had the audacity to grin.

"Hah... Haha... Hahahahaha!" Rui couldn't help but indulge his jubilation as he moved in ways that were almost entirely impossible almost any Martial Squire across the entirety of human civilization!

In what felt like a long time, he was truly pushed to his absolute limits despite also fighting with his true potential unlocked with nearly half a year of preparation! This fight was like a confession, he bared his heart out, expressing deep gratitude to the grotesque root.

"Thank you..." He whispered. ('Thank you for bringing out the VOID from deep within me.')

The power he possessed at the moment was the true power of the Flowing Void Style. Yet it was difficult to realize, difficult to obtain, difficult to manifest. It took more than half a year's preparation. Unfortunately, there were very few circumstances worth obtaining this power. Either his opponents and enemies didn't require this level of preparation, and thus weren't worth it because they were too weak. That, or they did require this level of preparation, and weren't worth fighting because they were too strong.

Circumstances where they were worth fighting and worth engaging in extensive preparations, without which he would die instantly, were exceedingly rare. Among Martial Artists, no Martial Squire was that strong, and Martial Seniors, who were even stronger, were not people he would even consider fighting unless in the most dire of situations.

This battle with the Root, a mindless and highly-flawed quasi-Senior level creature that Rui had resolved to fight as a part of his ambitious objective, was one of the few rare rare circumstances where Rui could bring out his potential against a truly powerful being that he had resolved to fight nonetheless!

Despite approaching death more than a thousand times every second as he narrowly avoided being crushed by the devastating attacks of the Root, Rui felt at home. He felt even more at home at this very moment than he did when he was in the Quarrier Orphanage!

His eyes widened at the profound realization.

('I see, the VOID is my true home,')

He instinctively felt that this realization would have deeper ramifications on the choices he would regarding extremely important and significant matters that he had recently been forced to confront in recent times.

In the middle of the heat of the battle, he came to understand who he was a little better. He felt as though a deep fog had cleared in his mind.

He gained more clarity.

He gained more peace.

At that moment, a profound sense of serenity encompassed his entire mind. He felt as though he had taken a step deeper into his Martial Path. Although it felt as though he had suddenly deflated, his engagement in combat suggested the opposite.

He had grown stronger!

His movements grew sharper by the second as the predictive model in his mind kept improving with each exchange!

Although he certainly did get an immense amount of data from observing the Root for all those months and the previous two battles, nothing compared to actually gaining data from fighting against the Root himself. However, it wasn't just a matter of the quantity of data. With how close the roots were to him, he could also perceive the attacks of the roots with all his senses!

Chapter 945: Jump

This meant that the foundation of his predictive model grew richer and stronger as time passed.

The difference was visible.

He began drawing closer to the Root at a pace faster than before. Previously, the difficulty of advancing closer to the main Root had risen with each step because the number of roots that could physically reach him had reduced the closer he got to the Root, the main root that all other roots sprouted.

But the strange strange mental boost he had gotten from the epiphany as well as the data that Rui had collected across their entire fight had empowered his combat effectiveness against the Root tremendously.

He had finally reached a stage where he could continuously close the distance between himself and the Root. He no longer needed to prance around while shortening the distance in bursts.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!

TAP!

Rui dodged four roots, propelling himself forward with the quasi-Flux Earther technique.

He turned towards the Root with a grin. He had crossed most of the distance between them in the past few hours and was only crossing it even faster. Soon he would reach a distance where he would be able to perceive the Root with his physical eyes.

The battle had begun its final act.

During the entire battle, Rui had been the challenger. He had spent the entire battle thus far proving that he could avoid being inevitably taken down and overwhelmed by the sheer output of the Root.

And proved he did. With every second that passed, he was attacked by nearly a thousand roots simultaneously!

Yet despite using most of the roots that it had at its disposal, the Root seemed incapable of even hurting Rui!

Any spectator would surely agree that Rui had done a fine job as the challenger thus far. However, that wasn't enough to win a fight.

Not dying was simply the first level. Just because it was an exceedingly difficult demand for any single Martial Squire did not mean that it was the only demand or even the most challenging condition to be crowned the victor.

Rui had yet to inflict even a shred of meaningful damage on the Root. Yes, it was true that he did inflict damage on the Root with the help of his sword, but that was rather minuscule compared to the total mass that comprised the entirety of the Root.

The fact of the matter was that not even Kane had any idea how Rui intended to win this fight. Rui hadn't been specific when Kane asked, always replying that he needed more time and data.

By the time the fight came, Kane didn't ask him. He figured that if Rui wanted to share the information with him, he would.

In reality, even Rui hadn't gained confirmation until very recently, although he had strong suspicions that the means to victory that he had chosen would, in fact, grant him victory, he had only truly become certain of it when he sensed the Root with his Primordial Instinct technique.

('It's truly mindless... It's not even controlling the roots. The roots may emerge from it, but each root is like its own organ that is also mindless and little more than organic robots,')

In some ways, he was disappointed, but he was also relieved.

It meant that his plan to take down the Root was viable!

He began advancing towards the Root bit by bit, evading and bouncing off the many roots that narrowly missed as he stepped out of the with his Void Forestep technique.

He was reaching a stage where almost every individual root was blasting attacks at him. The environmental damage was so great that the size of the floor had increased substantially, despite the floor already being absolutely gigantic.

The net damage was on par with the damage that Martial Seniors were capable of exerting, although the roots did take much longer than martial Seniors would, at least, Martial Seniors of the caliber of Senior Ceeran.

Rui finally reached a stage where he could sense the Root with his other senses and techniques barring Riemannian Echo, but his rate of progress slowed down as the roots intensified. Not only was the number of roots the total number of roots that stuck out from the main Root, but the closer he got, the less time he had to predict the roots.

Rui's predictive model growing more and more powerful negated the latter, but the increasing number was still a pain in the ass.

One thing he notices was that it was as though the roots didn't have any stamina limits. He realized that if he let the battle progress for too much longer, he would weaken from exerting himself to such a degree that he would decline before the roots did, he would certainly die before he could ever disengage to recharge his stamina.

He glanced at the Root's 'mouth', the cavity in which it crushed and ground all the raw esoteric ore deposits, before slowly dissolving them in some kind of acid and dispersing them across the dungeon. It would be extremely lethal if a person fell in that. An ordinary human, even Martial Apprentices, and even some Martial Squires would get crushed before eventually being dissolved by the digestive liquids of the Root.

('It would be extremely lethal and painful if I fell in there,') Rui thought to himself with an inward sigh as he continued evading the root attacks.

He could only imagine what kind of pain anybody who fell into the Root's mouth would experience. Although it probably was not as bad as the pain Martial Squires felt in the Squire evolution breakthrough procedure, it was still most likely an abysmally excruciating pain. The more he thought about how much it would hurt, the uglier his expression became.

He sighed, before going through with his plan. He pushed himself to the very limit as he evaded every single root that blocked his way...

Before jumping into the Root's mouth.

Chapter 946: Crush

Had anyone witnessed what Rui did, they would be shocked beyond words. It was an absolutely bewildering choice. Some would even question whether he made a mistake, whether he tripped on a rock while running at top speeds, sending him flying into the Root's mouth.

Yet none of it was true. Rui understood what he was seeking to do, and why he was doing it, and did it anyway.

This was the only way for him to take down something as large as the Root. It was far too large for him to take down with his regular attacks. This meant that he had absolutely no ability to take down the Root any time soon with his regular attacks. He would only be pricking the Root even if he used his tiny little sword or his strongest Transverse Resonance attack. The Root was large enough to make even the likes of Senior Ceeran use serious attacks to destroy it.

Thus the question of destroying it wasn't a question any sane Martial Squire would even fathom asking themselves.

But Rui did.

It was a question that he had struggled over for many months. How exactly was he supposed to take down the Root?

Should he have filled his dimensional ring with a substance that was extremely lethal to the organic tissue of the plant kingdom? Maybe if he dumped enough of it, he could kill the Root. That was one of the first possibilities that he looked into.

After months of consideration, he ruled out almost all possibilities.

Except one.

Although he had only just verified its full plausibility in this battle, there was a huge cost that came with it. It, unfortunately, involved doing some rather crazy things.

It was a gamble.

The second he entered the mouth, its opening closed, leaving him trapped.

Inside was a gap between the upper and lower roofs of the mouth. A gap that would close completely in order to crush the esoteric ore deposits before releasing the digestive acids to aid with the breakdown and refinement of the esoteric ore deposits.

That was where Rui had thrust himself into.

Certain death.

BOOM!

The two jaws rapidly moved toward each other at blindingly fast speeds even for a Martial Squire, threatening to crush Rui!

At the same time, something had already begun to change.

It took the tiniest fraction of a millisecond, but the air changed drastically as the jaws began to close down on Rui!

A titanic amount of pressure erupted from him, flooding the entire floor.

Rui donned his most powerful Mind Mask, taking on the guise of a Martial Senior!

In that microsecond, the entirety of the Shionel Dungeon perceived an existential threat from the exact location Rui was present, shaking violently as a multitude of the roots that spawned from the Root lashed out toward Rui the very next moment!

The fact that the Root was in the way between them and Rui did not seem to matter to the roots. Thousands of roots struck at the main Root body that they emerged from!

It took less than a millisecond, but alas, it wasn't fast enough.

The Root's jaws had already closed.

"RRRRRGHH!!!" Rui gritted his teeth as he desperately balled himself up, trying to reduce the amount of area that his body covered.

The sheer amount of force that the Root's jaws exerted on him was greater than anything else he had ever been subjected to in his entire life!

CRACK CRACK CRACK!

He could feel his bones snapping like little twigs!

His flesh was being wrung as it tore across all of his body.

His internal organs were not exempt from the damage, all of the internal systems in his body have suffered damage!

He had only one goal; keeping his brain intact. He positioned his body in such a manner that most of his body would have had to be crushed before his head suffered any damage.

CRACK CRACK CRACK!

In the span of a millisecond, he had already been put into critical condition!

He experienced more pain at that moment than he had since the Squire evolution breakthrough process!

It was a maddening amount of pain that would have driven any normal human being to absolute insanity!

Yet he managed to keep his head intact the entire time. His efforts had paid off as his Mind Mask technique never broke.

And that meant that the roots never stopped.

The Root shivered as thousands of its own roots impaled it from all directions, inflicting a tremendous amount of damage to the Root.

Rui had noticed that neither the roots nor the main Root possessed any consciousness or instinct of self-preservation.

That was why he knew that this could work!

Using the roots to defeat the Root was his plan.

RUMBLE!

The Root opened its jaw as its wounds hindered its functions.

Rui's mangled body fell out, landing on the ground. His body was in so much pain that he struggled to have any coherent sequence of thoughts. The very first thing he did was use Final Breathing, his endurance-related breathing technique to stabilize his condition.

If it weren't for the fact that he had an enhanced healing factor from his Hungry Pain technique, Rui knew there was a realistic chance that he would be dead right now!

That didn't mean he wouldn't die.

DRIP DRIP DRIP

His wounds were not light. If he lost enough blood, he would not be able to survive. The worst part was that his body was so messed up, he couldn't even use his dimensional ring to bring the high-grade healing potion that he had stored in it.

For the moment, he focused on using his breathing to nourish his healing factor as much as possible. As long as he could contain the bleeding and restore enough of his body to access his healing potions, he would be just fine.

He half wished Kane was here, but Kane had already retreated like he was supposed to. Rui had told him not to enter the Root Floor, it was far too dangerous for him at the moment.

Chapter 947: Shock

Rui gritted his teeth as he repositioned his mangled body and closed off wounds with other parts of his body, preventing blood loss from debilitating him any further. Final Breathing minimized his energy and nutrition requirements, giving a bit of ammunition to his evolved healing factor, which furiously began working again to prevent his body from tending toward death.

Wounds clotted soon after, as his healing factor began focusing on stabilizing the most vital organs.

If even a single one of them failed, the probability of death rose exponentially. The bones, muscles, and damaged flesh were less important compared to them, and far down the list of priorities that his body had at the moment.

Fortunately, a trend of positive developments had slowly begun. It took an hour, but slowly, his internal organ systems had reached a point where they wouldn't plummet any time soon.

Soon, his healing factor began focusing on secondary interests as it began the healing of flesh, bones, and muscles.

Unfortunately, the degree to which they had been damaged was beyond the abilities of even his evolved healing factor. He would not be able to heal completely with it alone.

However, what he really needed was to gain enough stability, and control to ensure that he could regain the ability to operate his dimensional ring and summon his healing potion.

That took much longer. His healing factor was good at performing the most essential of first aid rather swiftly, but more healing required more time.

It wasn't three hours after initially falling out that he finally tried to reach for his dimensional ring.

The very effort of the action caused him blinding pain. He felt as though he couldn't even think, of how much it hurt to move.

WOOP

He managed to operate his dimensional ring after immense perseverance.

The vial of potion fell to the ground underneath his hand. He wasn't concerned with the potion breaking, but bringing the vial to his face was another pain.

CLICK

He released the potion in its depressurized gaseous state, deeply inhaling. He could feel the potion coursing through his blood as he took a deep breath in, swimming across his entire body as it restored tissue.

Unlike normal, he wasn't fixed in a few seconds. Despite working alongside his normal healing factor, it was a few minutes before he finally no longer resembled a meat sack.

He had endured so much damage, that even the healing was tremendously painful as his bones were pushed back into place by his mending muscles and flesh.

"Oh god..." Rui gasped for air as he finally undid his Final Breathing technique after five minutes of accelerated healing. He struggled to get up, feeling extremely weak. He had abused the Forestep technique, which meant that he had shed a lot of body mass. His healing had almost no ammunition and instead began drawing from his health.

His body had become much thinner as if he was malnourished.

Which he was.

"Ugh..." He groaned as he struggled to get up.

At that moment, he felt so weak that he wouldn't be surprised if even a Martial Apprentice could defeat him.

He turned, facing the Root. Although he could still sense it with Riemannian Echo, he hadn't had time to care about the Root when his own body was failing, approaching death. It was only now that he finally could afford to pay attention to anything but himself.

The Root had completely dropped, as had all the roots. Rui wasn't sure whether or not they were dead, but they were clearly incapacitated.

"Huh..." he shrugged weakly. "That actually worked. Crazy."

He knew that he couldn't hurt the Root with his own power. It was absolutely impossible. But if he could get the Root to hurt itself, then that would solve everything. But, of course, like Kane had reminded him. The Senior level Mind Mask drew roots to himself, he did not have the ability to control the roots and direct it to his opponent.

That was why Kane had thought that the trick he had used in the Serevian Dungeon would be useless here.

It was only Rui who considered the idea that perhaps it was possible to direct the roots towards himself, but hit his opponent instead. It sounded absurd, but became possible if Rui was inside his opponent.

Normally, that, too, was an absurd notion, but in this case, his opponent was more than big enough for the unthinkable to be possible.

The only issue was that there was a good chance that he would be chewed to hell, which is why he had spent months observing the force with which the Root broke down esoteric ore deposits.

It was definitely far from safe, and could easily kill him if he made even a slight inaccuracy, let alone an actual mistake.

After months of visual preparation of the measures to take to prevent getting chewed to death, he was finally ready to take the plunge.

('It was still worse than I had anticipated,') Rui sighed. He had truly come close to the brink of death at several moments because he had underestimated the damage he would suffer. If not for luck and his enhanced healing factor, it may very well have been game over.

('I guess... I've won?') He scratched his head as he took his time burning the memory of the impaled Root. The sheer amount of biomatter that had escaped it with the many boring holes across its body.

He could say with certainty that this was by far the greatest achievement of his entire life. To think he would not only take the Root head-on but also successfully keep up and even defeat the Root, a quasi-Senior level being, as a Martial Squire, was something that he certainly had the right to be proud of.

He turned around as he swept his Riemannian Echo across the entire floor as a standard safety check, when he suddenly froze, growing pale.

"There's... one less corpse than there was!"

Chapter 948: Corpse

Squire Yuna Xeli was a native Martial Squire of the Shionel Confederation whose Martial Path was large-scale countersurveillance. She specialized in covertly taking down Martial Squires after scouting them from further away than she could be scouted.

In short, long-range senses were her specialty. She had mastered multiple grade-nine techniques that allowed her to accurately and in a detailed manner scan.

That was why she rejoiced when she learned about the special traits of the Shionel Dungeon, the fact that it could jam senses to an extreme degree may have seemed like it was her antithesis, but in reality, it made her services all the more valuable.

She received an astonishingly luxurious contract with Deacon Industries, offering her powerful sensory services as a high-grade sensory Martial Artist.

She wasn't as incapacitated as the other Martial Artists in the dungeon, this made her extremely useful in dungeon raids and dungeon exploration.

However, what others didn't know was that she was also equally a covert operations-oriented Martial Artist as she was a sensory Martial Artist.

Among the techniques that she had created was the Lying Corpse technique. A technique where she manipulated her body such that she was indistinguishable from a corpse. Her body temperature lowered to match that of a cadaver, she reduced her heart rate and made her heartbeat motions extraordinarily slow so that they basically would not be detected unless someone knew to look for it.

Her breathing was extremely slowed down as well, allowing her to sustain her body with oxygen in an extremely discrete manner.

This was a technique she used to, literally, play dead. It helped in circumstances where she didn't think she could get away alive.

Circumstances like the Root floor of the Shionel Dungeon. Given that she served as the scout of a thousand-strong army of high-grade Martial Squires, led by five grade-ten Martial Squires? She didn't think anything could possibly go wrong.

She didn't realize how wrong she was until the actual conflict began.

It was overwhelming. The Martial Artists did their best to resist, and to their credit, didn't take too little to defeat them, but she realized very soon that they were doomed. They stood no chance of victory whatsoever.

Each root was as powerful and fast as a grade-ten Martial Squire, they were unquestionably weaker. And it became apparent very early on.

Instead of choosing to die, she chose to literally play dead on the spot. She had considered running away, but that would single her out from a crowd, and the roots would definitely target her. As such, she had no choice but to feign death and fall to the ground as a corpse. She had no chance of defeating even a single root.

Her senses did not cover the entire floor, far from it, she could only sense what was happening across a portion of the floor.

She witnessed as the Martial Squires put up a vain resistance, dying one by one until the last one remained.

Captain Deacon.

He put an admirable and immensely powerful resistance, taking on more root attacks than she could count, but even he eventually retreated. He was the only one who could turn his back to the root, get struck, and still be able to continue running.

Just as Squire Yuna thought that Captain Deacon would escape, a new figure arrived out of nowhere seemingly, killing Captain Deacon with two strikes.

His words seemed to anger the otherwise calm and collected Captain Deacon.

('How was he able to sense him?') She wondered with shock. ('For him to know that the battle has ended, and to know that Captain Deacon was escaping, he would have to have a huge sensory range...')

Blood drained from her face when she realized who this individual was as she felt a tremendous amount of fear.

The Voider.

Every Martial Squire in the Shionel Dungeon, and perhaps across the entire eastern side of the continent, had heard legends about them. A singular force said to possess unfathomable power within the Squire Realm, capable of equaling one thousand Martial Squires!

As someone who had regularly been covered by international media for quite some time, his infamy had spread.

She felt an immense amount of dread of actually seeing him, she had no doubt that she stood no chance against him in combat, given that he was said to be an extraordinary grade-ten Martial Squire.

She was even terrified that he would detect her, but he didn't even though he was extremely vigilant.

What followed next blew her mind away. He moved so fast that she couldn't even perceive him. He, along with the roots, was too fast for even her to react to. But she could still sense the sheer magnitude of the feat that he was accomplishing.

Dozens, hundreds, and at one point even a thousand!

His graceful movements allowed him to sharply evade every single attack that came his way!

She could not fathom how a Martial Squire could possibly evade so many high-grade roots attacking him simultaneously. She grew entranced as she watched the sheer magic that she was witnessing. She understood that this was not somebody that could be defined by any semblance of normality. What he was accomplishing was absolutely insane. He was either the world's greatest genius or the world's greatest fool.

As time passed, she simply stayed put, hoping that she would eventually get out. She prayed that she didn't get hit by a stray attack, fortunately, she was quite far away. She still didn't dare indicate that she was alive.

At some point, she felt a Senior-level aura, shocking her. She extended her senses as far as she could only to discover with absolute shock that the roots of the Root were harming the latter!

Things soon calmed down after that, the roots fell flat to the ground, growing inactive. She had no idea what had happened to the Voider, but she didn't care, she had enough reason to get up and sprint out of the floor at top speed, even breaking into a sob after she realized she wasn't dying.

Chapter 949: Leave

Rui almost felt his heart palpitating as he tried calming himself down. He was glad that he was paranoid enough to memorize the position of every single corpse, otherwise, he would have never noticed that one of them was missing.

('Wait, calm down,') He narrowed his eyes. ('The roots did damage this floor heavily, maybe she got buried deep under rubble,')

He immediately focused his senses deep underground, sweeping across the bedrock of the entire floor, praying that he found her.

('Shit...') He realized that she was nowhere to be found.

He had simply inputted the entirety of his spatial vision into his Mind Palace when he swept his senses across the corpses, thus he had also inadvertently memorized their physical traits and their appearances.

He could clearly tell that one corpse was missing.

('But how?') He narrowed his eyes. ('How could a corpse just disappear?')

The first possibility that came to mind was that she was faking her death and possessed some strange obscure technique that killed any and all physiological indication of life. That would mean that even if Rui spent a lot of time scanning her body, he might not have noticed that she was alive.

"Shit," He cursed, he was in deep trouble if this was the case. The worst part was that this was the worst timing. He was extremely weakened and could not afford another fight until he regained his full power.

He quickly summoned some physical rejuvenation potions, consuming them rapidly as he felt a surge of energy. He also summoned a bucket worth of heavy and highly nutritionally dense food pills, consuming them rapidly as well.

It was sub-optimal, but he would be able to regain Squire-level combat prowess at the very least, even if he was far from his peak.

His evolved digestion system gulped up all the nutritional bio-available mass, quickly integrating it into his body.

He heaved a sigh of relief as he finally felt power in his body.

First, he analyzed his circumstances.

The worst-case scenario was that she managed to get away alive by faking her death, that was the scenario that Rui went with, for the time being.

The consequences were not immediately dire, but she had probably seen him fighting extensively, thus she might have gotten a good description of his physicals. That alone would be quite dangerous. She probably saw him killing Captain Deacon, which, if Chairman Deacon found out, would exacerbate his hatred for Rui.

If she saw his appearance in the later stages of the fight where his mask broke, then he had no words, he had truly fucked up.

"I need to get Kane, and we need to get outta here," Rui murmured.

However, they could not afford to return to their inn, which was courting death. Rui had already cleared the dungeon, thus his desire to stay in the Shionel Confederation was effectively down to zero.

As long as he cashed out his consolidated gains, he was fine.

('Thankfully, Chairman Deacon is at the arguably most busy moment of his life, he does not have any leeway to focus on me at this particular moment,') Rui was truly grateful that the timing of this was in his favor.

Chairman Deacon was at the most important juncture of his entire life. He needed to focus everything on the elections and make sure nothing went wrong at the final moment. Even if he did take a moment to mourn the loss of one thousand Martial Squires and his son, he could not pay too much attention to the Voider, even if he would be burning at his very gut to do so.

Still, Rui did not think that Chairman Deacon was the most rational man in general, he especially didn't have any expectations when the man was grieving the loss of a son.

('It may be time to leave the Shionel Confederation...') Rui narrowed his eyes.

Without any further ado, he left the floor looking for Kane.

"So you're telling me someone who saw you fight is out there somewhere?" Kane grimaced once Rui found and told him everything. "Damn, what do we do?"

"Well, just witnessing my fight does not mean the one who escaped knows my identity," Rui explained. "What that means is that our identity will not necessarily be revealed, it will make their investigation easier though. Even the Martial Union will have a hard time hampering the investigation. What we need to do is kill any incentive to investigate us, by leaving the Shionel Confederation forever."

Kane nodded. "Alright, so we anonymously withdraw our revenue and then leave?"

"We'll need the Martial Union's help with that, as specified in our contract," Rui nodded. "As long as we disconnect cleanly, we should be able to kill the investigation."

"But Chairman Deacon knows you're the one who killed his son," Kane made a complicated expression. "He's not gonna stop investigating because of how much he's going to hate your guts."

"That doesn't matter, his alliance is going to crumble because he got all of his allies' Martial Squires massacred, he's going to lose the election and lose support. People are going to stop caring about us because the only reason we were a problem is because of the Shionel Dungeon," Rui explained. "With the Shionel Dungeon being cleared, nobody's going to care to put in the effort to investigate us since we won't matter anymore. Chairman Deacon is the only one who's going to care, and he's much more limited in his own capacity than when he had the support of many domestic and foreign stakeholders who no longer have a stake anymore. On top of that, once all the Martial Squires began leaving the country in droves and returning home, trying to find the identity of the Voider will be basically impossible."

Kane looked relieved hearing that, nodding in response to Rui's words. "That makes sense, the threat isn't acute, and won't last long. Looks like there won't be any problems at all."

Chapter 950: Report

The election had arrived.

The Shionel Merchant Guild grew extremely busy, even more so than it was due to the Shionel Dungeon. The various branches and offices across the entire nation went through a multitude of logistical preparations for the event.

All manners of campaigns decorated the entire country as the two most popular candidates by far fought for support from the various members of the Shionel Merchant Guild.

The Shionel Merchant Guild included the most successful and wealthiest merchants in the nation to the humblest of service providers. Any person who supplied goods or services to an open market was considered a merchant, within the nation, and they were all entitled to vote for a candidate for guildmaster.

Thus, although the voter pool did not include non-merchant citizens of the nation, because of the sheer proportion of the country's population that technically and officially counted as a merchant, it still meant that many many millions of votes would be cast across the entire nation.

Many people excitedly witnessed as the two greatest titans of the nation clashed with each other. Guildmaster Bradt had previously domineeringly won every election despite Chairman Deacon's best efforts. However, this time, things truly could go either way.

The many electoral debates that the two of them had were intense, as the two of them challenged each other in an intricate battle for rhetorical and optical victories in the eyes of the voters.

All was going just fine for both sides until it wasn't.

News of the massacre of the one thousand Martial Squires associated with Deacon Industries spread like wildfire across the entire nation. It was an absolute shock, perhaps more shocking than any other news regarding the Shionel Dungeon that had come out prior.

One thousand Martial Squires had all died on one single floor!

It was shocking because it meant that there was a threat level in the Shionel Dungeon so profound that it could kill one thousand powerful Martial Squires.

Many of the citizens naturally got scared by this, since Martial Artists of higher Realms could not enter the Shionel Dungeon, it meant that whatever was inside the dungeon needed to be resolved by Martial Squires, but it was powerful enough to wipe out one thousand Martial Squires!

How many Martial Squires would be needed to take down such a threat?

"I bet the Voider could do it,"

"Don't be stupid, a single Martial Squire cannot rival one thousand Martial Squires. The Voider is impressive, but they cannot handle this threat by themselves."

"Maybe if the Voider and Deacon Industries combine forces, they could take it down together."

Despite the tragedy, it only served as a great source of gossip and entertainment to millions of people.

Chairman Deacon, however, had not been entertained.

"All dead..." He murmured, putting both hands on a table for support. "... All dead?"

Before him had stood an ashamed Squire Yuna, lowering her head as she nodded slowly. "All of them are dead."

"And my son..." He murmured lightly as his expression quivered. "You said he...?"

"He fought a valiant battle, sir," She spoke up with a forlorn expression. "Out of all the Martial Squires, your son fought to the very end. Even after all the other grade-ten Martial Squires perished, your son still stood strong, to the very end, he never gave up."

She felt enormously guilty for being the only one to survive, that too through such cowardly means. She decided to embellish Captain Deacon to be greater than he was. She erased the part of him running away in the end.

"I see..." Chairman Deacon's mask fell as he looked down, hiding his sorrow. "And his death... You said..."

"He was attacked by an unknown figure," She confirmed. "He decapitated the captain from the back in a cowardly fashion, while the Captain was fighting the roots."

The air in the room grew dark as Squire Yuna felt increasingly uncomfortable at Chairman Deacon's tumultuous emotions.

"And you said that... he was the Voider? That he fought all the roots by himself and even radiated a Senior level aura?" Chairman Deacon asked with a shaking voice.

Yet it was different from before.

He wasn't quivering with sorrow.

He was shuddering with fury.

Squire Yuna gulped as she experienced a tremendous amount of pressure from the center of his attention. "Yes, sir."

"And he defeated the main roots by himself?" Chairman Deacon asked with sharp eyes.

"...I cannot be sure, my sensory range is nowhere near wide enough to cover the entire floor," She replied with uncertainty. "But the roots flew back towards the center, and I sensed a large impact, the roots became weaker and weaker until they fell limp and everything calmed down after that, and that was when I left. I don't know what happened, and I didn't dare to try and investigate out of fear for my life."

The sharpness in Chairman Deacon's eyes had not disappeared.

No.

It only grew sharper.

"Thank you for your detailed report, Squire Yuna," He spoke with an exceedingly calm tone that only sent shivers down her spine. "Your cooperation and sincerity are appreciated."

"I'm once again sorry for my cowardice, sir," She bowed her head. "But I had no other choice."

"I understand," He simply said. "You may take your leave."

Contrary to her fears, Chairman Deacon was actually glad that she was alive, she was a valuable asset.

His eyes flashed with rage as he clenched his fist, gritting his teeth. He knew in his heart that the Voider killed his son.

Still, things had grown complicated now, there was a lot at stake and he didn't even have time to mourn. The impacts that the loss of one thousand Martial Squires had on his alliance were severe. He did not have time to do anything but salvage the sinking ship and hope that it wouldn't sabotage his chances of becoming guildmaster.

Once he became guildmaster, he would use his power to use the new information that he had for looking into the matter.