

## **Martial Unity 901**

### Chapter 901: Discovery

It wasn't often that Rui ran into something capable of pressuring to this degree.

It wasn't often that Rui ran into something that transcended the Squire Realm.

Yet, the fear it generated had not exceeded his bewilderment and confusion. The sheer dreadful avalanche of pressure that washed over him had not deprived him of his rational thoughts.

The first thought that flashed through his mind was the fact that creatures that transcended the Squire Realm as far as threat level went were not supposed to be able to enter the dungeon without triggering its defense mechanisms. How on Earth was something like whatever it was that was emanating such a terrifying degree of pressure not being attacked by the dungeon?

This utterly contradicted everything he understood about dungeonified vegetation. Dungeons were essentially mutated patches of vegetation that had monsterified after absorbing large amounts of potent esoteric ore from mines far below the surface with their roots. They produced all kinds of fruit and other organic masses that drew in beasts that consumed them, monsterifying those animals and further animals ahead in the food chain into monsters. The vegetation massively evolved and grew to produce large structures with tunnels and large cracks producing spaces generally known as floors.

The defensive mechanism in place was a violent outbreak against anything it sensed to be a threat to it.

So why wasn't it activating now?

There were several possibilities, but Rui put them aside for now.

He wasn't in a position to engage in a long contemplative thought, not with whatever it was that was producing this pressure.

His nerves, his instincts, every cell in his body insisted that he turn back and run away.

But he knew he needed to at least get a glimpse of what he was dealing with here.

Just a glimpse.

He had evaluated the risk rather rapidly and had unfortunately come to the conclusion that the risk of just gaining bare basic information on the creature was worth it.

Not even he was brave enough to even begin conceiving of the idea of challenging this creature.

He put on a Mind Mask that reduced his presence to the absolute minimum. Sensing him was far harder now given that his presence was no more than an ordinary human at the moment. On top of that, the Shionel Dungeon's hampering of senses was extremely overbearing over such great distances.

Inside the Shionel Dungeon, he bet he could sense more than even Martial Seniors could. The reason for this was that he bypassed the sensory impediments of the dungeon, while Martial Seniors would still need to overcome them.

Thus, he evaluated the probability of being detected by the creature producing the devastating aura to be low enough for it to be worth undertaking the risk to gain some more information about what it was.

STEP

He took the gentlest of steps forward.

Slowly.

Carefully.

STEP

STEP

STEP

With each step that he took, the view of the dungeon became increasingly clear, what he saw shocked his senses once he began grasping more of what was within.

A mountain worth of esoteric ore deposits.

"What..." Rui couldn't even begin to believe his eyes. ('That's insane!')

He couldn't help but be bewildered that the Shionel Dungeon contained a floor worth of esoteric ore deposits. Who couldn't have possibly imagined a mountain worth of esoteric ore deposits existed within the dungeon?

('This is inconceivable,') Rui murmured. ('How can such a huge mine be inside the dungeon?')

It wasn't until he got further and further that he realized what the answer was. His senses detected that the bedrock of the floor was quite different from all other floors so far. It didn't contain any of the roots embedded across all of it, holding it together like the rest of the entirety of the dungeon. It was almost as if...

('As if this isn't part of the dungeon,') Rui's eyes widened. ('I've hit the actual mine that the dungeon absorbed its esoteric ore deposits from?!')

It made sense.

Rui had spent more than half a day traveling downwards.

Normally, this wasn't enough to get to the bottom of the dungeon, otherwise, everybody would have reached the bottom of the dungeon rather easily. The fact that most paths eventually led to dead-ends was the greatest reason that nobody made it very far, among other things.

However, thanks to the water elucidating the way to the bottom of the dungeon, he had reached the very esoteric ore mine that had given birth to the Shionel Dungeon!

('No wonder there's such a huge amount of esoteric ore deposits in this place!') Rui could already sense that he truly was examining the very crust of the tectonic plate and not the floor of the dungeon.

What appeared to be a floor was the extracted and absorbed part of the mine that had been assimilated, purified, and then deposited across the entirety of the Shionel Dungeon, though mostly on floors.

That was when something changed.

The weight of the air grew even heavier than it already was!

Suddenly, something entered his senses

"Is that..." Rui frowned as he began steadily heading down towards the mine to get a better grasp.

He got a better look at it, widening his eyes as he realized what it was.

"It's a root," He murmured. "A moving root!"

The root moved in from somewhere outside of his sensory field, lingering over a large mass of esoteric ore substances.

What followed was too fast for Rui's Riemannian Echo to keep up.

The root and the boulder disappeared, leaving nothing behind but a giant shockwave and a trail of dust.

"What?!" Rui's eyes widened.

He walked down over at a faster pace, throwing away caution to the wind momentarily as he got closer and closer to sense more of what was happening.

His senses came across more tentacle-like roots, lashing out radially as they grabbed esoteric ore deposits at extremely high speeds, pulling them back towards the center. Rui rushed forward until he eventually froze as his Riemannian Echo finally reached the needed range to sense what was at the center of the floor.

Chapter 902: Root

He froze.

Not just because of what he saw.

But also what he saw exerted so much pressure on his mind that it took actual physical effort to push his body forward.

Not because there was a forcefield pushing back against him, no. But because his subconscious instinct to run away from the grave sense of danger was extremely high. He knew that he had to get away from there as soon as possible.

Yet what he saw was shocking.

He was unable to turn away.

What pushed him away from it with fear also pulled him towards it with shock.

It was as though these two emotions pulling and pushing at his mind were crushing his mind. It was painful on a psychological level.

('What... is that?') Rui wondered with horror as he stared at the center of the mining floor.

It was a giant messy blob of wood and bark.

Its upper half was connected to a multitude of roots coming from up above.

Its lower half consisted of more roots than consisted of the one that Rui saw earlier, reaching for the esoteric raw ores across the entire mine.

In between its upper half and lower half was a separation that opened up as the tentacles tossed large unrefined ore deposits into the opening that shut close after the ore deposit fell in. Rui sensed a liquid sloshing around inside the mouth once it closed, slowly dissolving the unrefined ore boulder.

('Is that... a mouth?!') Rui's eyes widened as he realized what was going on. ('The roots don't directly absorb the esoteric unrefined ore deposits themselves. They feed it to that... root mouth that absorbs the unrefined ore deposits, refines it, then sends it across the rest of the dungeon through the roots that connect it to the entire dungeon everywhere.')

Rui was completely and utterly bewildered by this discovery. ('The vegetation mutated not just in size but also mutated to be able to absorb unrefined ore deposits faster and more efficiently.')

The root mouth was the size of a small mountain, surrounded by a mountain range of a mine. It made him sick just to look at it. It was grotesque and sickening. Yet he couldn't help but watch in awe as it lifted esoteric ore deposits the size of a small city block with each root. That alone told Rui how much power it had given how many roots it had.

"No Martial Squire... No Martial Squires can beat that thing head-on... That's beyond the Squire Realm in combat power." Rui shook his head.

He couldn't picture even the many Martial Squires that Chairman Deacon had gathered taking down the Root of the dungeon.

In fact, he found it hard to hard to picture himself not getting annihilated by it. The most rational choice was to simply ignore it and pretend it didn't exist.

('But would I really be clearing the dungeon if I ignore all this treasure? This is basically a floor, and will be treated as such by everyone,') Rui wiped swathes of sweat off his forehead.

The pressure was more tiring than a whole day of slogging in the dungeon. He hadn't even experienced it for more than ten seconds in real time.

For now, he just needed to get away.

He did not want to stay around any longer.

He had come across some profound discoveries that changed his view of the Shionel Dungeon.

Was the dungeon actually sentient?

Given that its Root was literally a mouth that swallowed and digested food? Or was this perhaps like a carnivorous plant that could consume despite not possessing a consciousness?

He didn't entirely know.

Perhaps every dungeon was like this at its Root? Perhaps it was necessary for dungeons to develop such a mutation to accelerate their access to nutrition.

Regardless, it made him feel quite icky being inside the Shionel Dungeon. This was a new feeling for him. He normally felt quite comfortable in the Shionel Dungeon because he knew that every other creature wasn't. Thus it was quite relaxing, to the point that he could even take a nap in the dungeon.

Now, however, he felt quite strange being in the dungeon with the new insights that he had made from the new discoveries that he had seen.

He quickly made his way back up, spending several hours back on the journey as he navigated through the dungeon, before finally reaching Kane.

"Hey," Kane greeted him nonchalantly.

There was a huge pile of esoteric ore deposits that Kane had gathered. He hadn't put it in the ring yet because he didn't know when Rui would return and in all likelihood he would run out of cells if he kept it in the ring the entire time.

"How did it go?" Kane raised an eyebrow. "Given the long face, I'm guessing you didn't find a single floor eh?"

He chuckled, patting Rui on the shoulder. "A for effort but life ain't that easy, my friend. Let's get going."

Rui cracked a smile for the first time in what felt like a while. "Is that so?"

He made sure to commit Kane's expression to memory when he explained everything that he found.

Who knew? If he ever mastered sketching in this world, he could make this world's first meme, a popular form of humor amongst gen z that he never quite understood back on Earth.

"Twelve floors?!" Kane recoiled in shock. "And an ore-eating mouth for a root?!"

"Yep?"

"You're not messing with me, are you?"

"Nope."

Kane peered at him suspiciously, narrowing his eyes to a slit.

"I'm serious," Rui shook his head. "Frankly, I have a hard time believing it myself. But, it is definitely real. I've memorized the locations of the twelve floors, so we can go get them the next time we come here."

"Hmmm... And what about this alleged Root floor?" Kane asked with a dubious expression.

"Honestly," Rui sighed. "I know I came here for a challenge, but damn. I need to think about it."

Chapter 903: Resolve

He had come here to challenge himself. Not toss himself into the jaws of death.

Literally.

He had gained plenty of stimulation and experience against bizarre and strange monsters under bizarre and strange circumstances. He had gained an epiphany about the nature of his Martial Art and its relationship with him.

He felt much stronger than he was when he first arrived at the Shionel Confederation.

That was the whole point of challenging himself, it was to take him to high heights. He knew that there were very few things that made a person progress as well as stakes did. When he thrust himself into the dungeon, he was putting himself on the line, and he was putting his friend on the line as well, whom he dragged around.

It had definitely helped him achieve his goal even as it was now, but he definitely intended to finish the objective of clearing the dungeon.

He just wasn't sure if he ought to throw himself at the Root.

That was a suicide mission as he currently was. Was it really worth it to stick to his goal even if it almost certainly would cost him his life when the point of the goal had been accomplished?

('Then again, does a goal really mean much if I'm willing to break it so easily?') Rui clenched his fist. ('Can I really pursue my Martial Path and develop my Martial Art to the higher Realms with such a flimsy willpower and determination?')

He instinctively felt the answer was no.

('Why do I pursue my Martial Path?') A spontaneous question bloomed into his mind, and the answer popped into his head just as quickly. ('Project Water. My greatest dream and ambition.')

His ambition of developing a Martial Art that embodied the concept of Adaptive Evolution that Bruce Lee had alluded to in his time. At a time when such a school of thought did not even exist, his idol Bruce Lee had come across the profound truth and spread it to the world, changing the perceptions of martial arts forever.

Another question immediately presented itself to him.

('Am I willing to die for my dream? For my Martial Path? For Project Water?')

This time, there was no hesitation.

He didn't even need to voice the answer.

His fist clenched as he remembered the final days of his previous life. The medical staff had given up on him for he always refused to follow their strong recommendations of retiring and not straining himself any further.

He had pushed himself closer to death, in a desperate attempt to realize his dream until his body literally collapsed, unable to support his determination, unable to allow him to fulfill his dream, before eventually succumbing to death.

('Am I willing to die for my dream, was it?') His eyes narrowed. ('I did it once, and you sure as hell bet I'm willing to do it again.')

At that moment he had inadvertently made up his mind.

He did not think that a coward who broke his commitments to himself out of fear of death could realize such a lofty ambition. He did not think that such a person could reach higher Realms.

He did not want to be such a person if that was the case.

('Besides, I'd feel too lame if I gave so easily,') Rui snorted, amused. ('I may not be as daring and insane as the likes of Nel, but I'm not a pussy either.')

He immediately began considering several things. The difficulty. The complications. The actual objective, specifically.

('Well, for one, I don't even know if the Root will attack me if I start grabbing the unrefined esoteric ore deposits,') Rui realized, amused.

What if he did end up exploring the Root floor, and the Root just ignored him as he went about his business mining the mine?

In that case, it would mean the floor was completely harmless.

He would feel quite silly having grown all serious about something so harmless.

However, he did not think that this was likely. It was quite likely that the Root would consume anything that moved if it shared even a remote relation to the tree on the sixteenth floor with the tree.

In that case, the difficulty was probably extremely high.

Rui recalled the speed at which the roots lashed forward and snatched away giant boulders faster than Rui could even perceive with his Riemannian Echo.

('It's absurdly fast,') Rui sighed.

And absurdly powerful as well. It would kill him on the spot, all before he could even realize it. He was outclassed in speed and power.

Although he still didn't think the Root matched up to the sheer titanic demonstrations of power that Senior Ceeran displayed that day on Vilun Island, it was still not something a Squire-level force ought to be able to handle.

('Still, that isn't enough to stop me,') Rui's eyes lit up with interest and eagerness and several ideas, and courses of action popped into his.

All of them, however, acknowledge one thing. ('I'm too weak as I'm right now.')

There was no conceivable plan of action that he could even fathom when his ability to avoid death was so weak. He was simply too weak as a grade-six Martial Squire to resist such a level of power with his existing capabilities.

That meant only one thing.

('I need to get stronger,') Rui mused. ('It's time for training arc.')

He joked as he felt a great deal of clarity clearing the fog that had covered his mind since the discovery of the Root at the bottom of the Shionel Dungeon.

('I need to train and get stronger,') His eyes narrowed. ('Strong enough to take down that damn thing and clear the dungeon like I set out to do so in the first place.')

He felt more excited than he had in a while. He had come to realize in hindsight that he had grown bored of the Shionel Dungeon in recent times. He had become so good at it that it was no longer as fun as it was.

Things were about to change now, however.

#### Chapter 904: Monitoring

"Hey, did you hear me?" Kane knocked on Rui's head who was deeply absorbed in thought. "Let's go already."

"Ah, right, my bad," Rui nodded, breaking out of his stupor.

He felt a lot more refreshed after having decisively figured out what he wanted to do, and it reflected in his demeanor.

The two of them quickly took the esoteric deposits from the nineteenth floor before heading back out of the dungeon, making sure to carefully use Void Step to make sure no one ever detected them before heading back to their little discreet inn just outside the Adventurer Ring road.

While the two of them, especially Rui, would have loved to crash into bed and take a good long rest in their rooms, they still had some work to do.

They immediately set out to a remote location in the Shionel Confederation that they had already scouted long beforehand. This would serve as the location of the drop point of the esoteric ore deposits for Guildmaster Bradt.

They quickly buried the portion of the esoteric ore deposits in the ground, before covering it up meticulously to ensure that it was level with the land around it. Rui even used his hot air pipe to dry out the darker sand to erase any indications of it being dug up recently.

The two of them immediately headed out to another location to make a second delivery, one of the rowdier and chaotic districts outside of the Adventurer Ring town, making their way to a single inconspicuous building.

KNOCK KNOCK... KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK... KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK...

The door promptly opened as the two shuffled in.

"Ah, Squire Falken," A man arrived, greeting them. "I see you've come for another delivery."

"Indeed," Rui replied simply.

"Please come right this way," The man led them deeper inside the building before they arrived at a large storage container. "In there will do just fine."

Rui nodded, walking in before he released the huge amount of ore deposits that he had left, and walked away.

"We have confirmed and received the delivery," The man nodded.

Rui and Kane did not stick around for much longer and immediately activated Void Step and left.

The longer they stuck around the esoteric ore deposits without the technique active, the greater the risk they were putting themselves in. It wasn't long before they finally reached their rooms.

"Oh man," Kane groaned. "I'm crashing. Don't disturb me for half a day."

"Get some rest," Rui chuckled before quickly changing and lying down on his bed.

He was quite tired too, but he was far too excited about recent developments to be able to go to sleep. He could finally think about it extensively in peace.

('I can't believe I found twelve more floors,')

It was surreal to him. For a brief moment, he even doubted his memories, wondering whether he had even conjured it up inside his own head and it was never real to begin with. After all, such a thing did not happen usually.

Or ever, for that matter. It took the adventurers in the world nine months to discover and clear the first twelve floors. These things took an immense amount of time, after all. Discovering even one floor was something that was extremely rare for anybody.

Rui had just gone on to discover twelve, which was probably record-breaking anywhere.

('The biggest issue is that Kane and I are unable to monopolize the dungeons effectively, this time,') He sighed.

He couldn't monitor all twelve floors that he discovered, that was beyond impractical, it was downright impossible. His range limited him with the ability to monitor a single floor, and nothing else. He most certainly did not possess the ability to cover all twelve dungeon floors simultaneously.

Such a feat was something he would only be able to do when he was a Senior, or perhaps a Master. He did not think that this feat was within the realm of possibility as a Martial Squire. Even when his Martial body and Martial Art did eventually become stronger as he reached the peak of the Squire Realm, he would be unable to accomplish such a feat.

The only other option to even attempt trying to monitor and restrict the dungeon to other floors would be to manually check up on all of them frequently.

Which was just an absurd proposition. It took a ton of time to travel across all of them given the great distance between each of them, and he was incapable of it.

Besides, even if he was somehow able to monitor all of them in a practical fashion, what was he going to do when Chairman Deacon's teams ran into it? Many of them were simply far too many to kill, making it impractical and highly dangerous, and risky. Considering that these Martial Squires would love to run into him, it was not worth it

This was the reason he had chosen to avoid other Martial Squires entirely, it was not worth engaging with all of them.

If Chairman Deacon did run into one of the twelve dungeons that Rui had discovered, then he would simply have to accept it and move on.

Regardless, he did not think it would happen too soon, so it didn't matter either way. The ants still consumed their time, after all. Although he was quite certain that the other adventurers and Martial Artists would destroy every single ant without a doubt, it bought him at least a little bit of time for sure.

('With that out of the way, there is the other matter to consider,') Rui mused.

The Root floor, as Rui had dubbed it, contained more esoteric ore yield than any other floor in the dungeon, although they were unrefined.

It was basically the final boss floor of the entire dungeon. And the monster occupying the floor was the very dungeon itself, consuming, refining, and then distributing the refined ore outputs into other parts of the dungeon where there was space to store them; namely the floors.

It was the final boss of the Shionel Dungeon, in a way.

#### Chapter 905: Information

Given that Rui had resolved to clear that floor, he had inadvertently put himself at odds with an extraordinarily powerful creature. Even if the Root of the Dungeon was not quite on par with Martial Seniors, it was still extraordinarily powerful and beyond the limits of the Squire Realm.

Rui already knew that if he simply tossed himself in front of it, he would get smashed like a bug.

Yet, he intended to confront it.

He would rather the latter occur without the former. The only way for that to happen was to grow stronger.

Which meant that it was time for another training phase.

It had been three months since the last training phase that he had undergone to prepare for the Shionel Dungeon. The techniques that he came up with back then had resulted in him dominating the Shionel Dungeon extremely thoroughly, upending the stable deadlock that had existed prior, and uniting a ton of people who would very much like to see him dead as a result.

Rui had confidence in his ability to craft techniques that would allow him to be capable of insane feats. He had strong reason to be confident with his scientific martial arts background, as well as a proven track record of developing highly effective techniques that were game-changing, be it the Hungry Pain technique that fundamentally strengthened the Squire Realm and made them significantly stronger from the very start which was one of the reasons that he was strong despite only having spent less than four years in the Squire realm.

His Void Pathfinder had drawn the adoration of a prominent and powerful Martial Senior like Senior Ceeran as a way of overcoming the limitations of accuracy at great ranges and distances. He had opened up an entirely new paradigm of aim in his desire to gain accuracy at huge ranges. Although he hadn't used the technique in a while because of how useless it was within the Shionel Dungeon, it was still a valuable grade-ten technique.

His Transverse Resonance technique allowed him to hit above his paygrade remarkably well, allowing him to launch attacks up to four times as powerful as his otherwise most powerful ranged attack.

His Riemannian Echo could negate conventional sensory jamming technology as it operated on principles that he was quite certain was not used in sensory techniques, otherwise there would be a lot of Martial Squires replicating at least a part of his success.

That was why he was quite certain that he had a solid chance of being able to cleanly handle the Root's terrifying ability to end him, as well as the herculean task of trying to kill the root in the worst-case scenario.

He did not need to fight it head-on, necessarily. He just needed to clear the floor.

For one, he did not think his regular tactic with him and Kane using Void Step to bypass senses would work. He knew that Void Step only worked on sentient beings with a sense of awareness and self-awareness.

It had already failed to work on flora lifeforms like the tree on the sixteenth floor, thus Rui didn't think it would be particularly effective against the Root. Unfortunately for Kane, or fortunately rather, he was going to have to sit out the raid of the Root floor.

Unless he could grow massively stronger in a training phase by developing a technique that allowed him to be useful against the Root, but Rui highly doubted that this was possible. Kane had never even created a technique from scratch, and had only conducted a single major modification as far as Rui was aware. He knew that ordinary Martial Artists could not develop techniques as fast as he did. Developing an original technique from the start usually required a year, if not multiple, to do.

This was the reason that Martial Squires spent many years in the Squire Realm before becoming Martial Seniors.

Rui, however, possessed a lot of confidence that he could do it within a much shorter amount of time. However, even before he could begin coming up with templates, concepts, and theoretical frameworks for the techniques that he intended to develop, he needed to come up with the conditions needed to clear the floor, one way or another. He could not just create a technique for a specific purpose without understanding what was precisely needed of the technique.

This would require him to build a deep understanding of the Root. He would need to spend a lot of time understanding its strengths and weaknesses before he could even think about taking on the giant creature of the Shionel Dungeon.

For instance, if it turned out to be the case that it was weaker the closer Rui got to it, then Rui would immediately develop a technique that would allow him to close the distance between him and the Root. Or if it turned out to be the case that its vitals were extremely weak, then Rui would work on creating superior versions of the Reverberating Lance technique.

He needed to know such information if he had any hope of clearing the Root floor, that was for sure.

Regardless, there were some basic things he already knew. The roots of the Root were extremely fast and capable of exerting a tremendous amount of force. It had thousands of main roots emerging from it, and each of them possessed as much power as mid-to-high-grade Martial Squires.

That was what he was contending with.

Thus he needed to either withstand dozens of attacks of such power simultaneously altogether or he needed to possess means to evade them.

Or a combination of the two. He couldn't possibly have either.

A multitude of possibilities flashed through his mind, though most weren't feasible for him. What he needed was a realistic way of mitigating the heavy advantages that the Root had against him.

He considered going through an abysmal amount of conditioning, attempting a brute force method of toughening himself as much as possible, but he shook his head at the idea, he knew that that was not going to work.

Chapter 906: Spider

In the following days, Rui dedicated only half the time he normally did to dungeon raiding and clearing.

Given that they already knew the location of the twentieth floor, they didn't need to waste time exploring for a day or so.

"So this is the twentieth floor, eh?" Kane murmured. "I guess you weren't lying out of your ass when you said that you discovered a ton of floors."

Rui tutted. "I wouldn't lie about such a thing, you know."

"I know, but it was just so hard to believe, that I had to put on my suspicious face, you know," He shrugged

The two of them bickered a bit before entering the dungeon.

"Is that...?" Kane's eyes widened.

"Spider webs," Rui nodded, confirming. "Looks like we have just happened upon the lair of a spider."

"I fucking hate spiders," Kane muttered, growing more wary.

The floor was a bit of a novelty due to the fact that the entire floor had been transformed into nothing more than the nest for nearly endless spider webs crisscrossing across the entire floor.

"Where the hell even are the esoteric ore deposits?" Kane frowned.

"They're in a nest at the bottom of the Shionel Dungeon," Rui replied. "And coincidentally, it also happens to be where the spider currently is at the moment."

"What about all these webs?" Kane gestured at the many layers of webbing between them and their objective.

SHING

A swift swing of his sword severed the webbing with ease.

"The webbing possesses quantities of the esoteric substances that make my sword as effective as it is," Rui replied.

It was rather convenient as they made their way to the bottom of the floor clearing out a path for themselves as they headed downwards, until, of course, the spider responsible for creating all the webbing noticed that something was wrong.

TRTRTRTRTRTR

It produced a strange clicking sound as it came rushing up toward the areas where the webbing was destroyed. What shocked Rui and Kane was the speed at which it waded through its own webbing. Like normal spiders, the spider seemed almost entirely immune to the stickiness of its own webbing, it didn't get hindered like all other creatures normally would.

It also possessed powerful limbs that allowed it swiftly shoot through its webbings, as it climbed across them faster than Rui could cut across them.

Thankfully, the Void Step technique was active thus neither Rui nor Kane was directly detected by the spider, but that wasn't entirely comforting. Rui was worried that the spider would be able to detect them indirectly.

He deeply inhaled launched a powerful Might Roar Flash Blast projectile, and followed up with three more, aimed toward the spider.

The four projectiles were each faster than the previous, eventually merging into a single projectile as it struck the spider.

The spider staggered at the sudden unexpected attack, yet the attack did no damage despite whatsoever catching the creature off-guard. Considering that tier four Transverse Resonance contained four times the attack power of a grade six Martial Squire's distant attacks, Rui could see that this creature was far tougher than he had given it credit.

He could tell that it was searching its surroundings for the source of the attack, confused at being unable to detect anything.

"Let's go back," Rui told him. "We need to approach this a little differently."

The two of the returned back to the tunnels that they had come from, while the spider quickly fixed all the webbing that Rui had severed.

"What's the issue?" Kane frowned, turning to Rui. "Your long-range attack was perfect. Everything was going well."

"I think we should avoid entering the dungeon so long as the webbing is intact," Rui replied to him calmly. "It takes away our greatest advantage."

Kane furrowed his eyebrows. "You mean my technique...?"

"Yeah,"

"But how though? It never sensed us,"

"It never sensed us directly, it cannot," Rui told him. "But it can locate us indirectly. You recall what I told you about how my senses can detect you despite being in the Shionel Dungeon?"

"Yeah," Kane looked up as he recalled Rui's words. "Something about detecting me through where my footprints led you, rather than detecting me directly."

A look of realization dawned on his face as he understood what Rui meant. "So this is what you meant. The severed webbing."

"That's right," Rui nodded. "The path of the severed webbing is the footprints in this case. By following the path of the severed webbing, it can arrive at our position at any given time. Obviously, this is not nearly that simple, but it reveals too much and is far too risky. Tarantulas have potent venom and I'm willing to bet that that monster is worse. We don't want to get anywhere near it. We definitely do not want to give it an inkling of our position because of how fast it can navigate the web. We, on the other hand, are forced to move slower than normal because of the webs."

It definitely made a lot of sense to Kane.

"But at that point, we can't even enter the dungeon floor, we're just going to have to brave that risk, honestly," Kane frowned.

"Not if we have a better way," Rui disagreed. "We don't need to get close to kill the monster. We have me, after all."

"Oh right," Kane slapped his forehead. "Man, I forgot that we can attack the monster from extremely far away. That's perfect. We normally don't go for that route because sniping down every individual monster is absolutely an inefficient way of going about it when we have my Void Step."

"Yeah," Rui nodded. "The problem is that it's going to take a while alright."

He walked over to the edge of the tunnel before he peered down. "The good news is that the ODA System solves the problem of range for us. The bad news is that this monster is tough as hell and killing it is going to require me to stack a ton of attacks.

#### Chapter 907: Requirements

Rui's concerns turned out to be true, it did take far too much time for him to take down the spider. He knew it would given the fact that tier four Transverse Resonance did not so much as cause the Spider to bruise.

This highlighted the difference between him and the spider.

('Fitting for the sole monster of a floor,') Rui mused.

Generally, the more monsters a floor had, the weaker each monster was individual. Floors with a lesser number of monsters tended to have monsters that were individually stronger.

This was almost certainly the case with the floor with the Earthen Basilisk. Just purely off of the size of the creature, Rui knew that its physicality was quasi-Senior level, though its actual threat level was probably at the very peak of the Squire Realm due to the fact that it was a beast with no techniques and tactical capabilities.

In this case, Rui didn't think the spider was nearly as physically tough as the earthen basilisk, but it certainly was more lethal offensively due to the poison.

('Pity it's not going to save it here,') He narrowed his eyes as he successively launched four Mighty Roar Flash Blast sound projectiles.

THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM

The four supersonic sound pulses overlapped and constructive interference successfully took place as an extraordinarily powerful trajectory slammed into the spider's eye.

SPLAT

As tough as the spider was, not even it could withstand such powerful attacks on such a vital spot. It shuddered in pain as it began bleeding from the wound, clearly bewildered.

What it didn't understand was from where and how such an attack was hitting it.

('Sensing sound projectiles are already hard to sense, to begin with,') Rui mused. ('On top of that, in the Shionel Dungeon, sensing it is an absolute impossibility. If not for the fact that this technique is inconducive to be used in the environment of the Shionel Dungeon, this would have been one of my trump cards in addition to his blade and pipe.')

The ODA System was also an important reason why this tactic was working in the first place.

Normally, using the ODA System along with Transverse Resonance was too difficult, since both techniques required an enormous amount of data when working with the VOID algorithm, which also quite mentally taxing.

Thankfully, the spider was a creature that seemed extremely comfortable with remaining stationary. Which made his life easier as far as constructing predictive models went. He could rather easily know well ahead of time which way and how the spider was going to move.

This reduced the burden from the VOID algorithm just enough that he could use it with tier-four Transverse Resonance.

It took hours before he was finally done.

THUD

The spider's body collapsed after tons of attacks finally wounded it enough to make it bleed out to death.

"It's done," Rui sighed, collapsing down as he rested on his arms in a sitting position.

"Get some rest," Kane told him. "I'll go mine all the esoteric ore deposits since I didn't contribute to anything this time."

"Appreciate that," Rui nodded, left to his own thoughts while Kane descended downwards to the corpse. He didn't even need to clear a path to the corpse since Rui's continuous attack had already done that.

Rui on the other hand considered the battle he had just undergone.

('That spider is probably exponentially less powerful than the Root,') Rui mused. ('It's unacceptable that I can only kill it with such a great advantage.')

He considered the reason that he had to resort to a strategy that was no different from running away from the spider.

('Too slow, too reliant on stealth, too susceptible to poison, Too weak to inflict meaningful damage within a short span of time,') Rui sighed.

There were all reasons that he was unable to fight the spider head-on face-to-face. He would need to address all these reasons and more.

('That's going to entail a lot of hard work, not to mention the creativity,') Although Rui did have an exceptional track record when it came to developing techniques, it was by no means easy. He needed to push himself to the limit to develop powerful techniques. He didn't just conjure them up out of thin air magically.

He was consumed in thought surrounding the matter even until Kane was done, and the two of them returned from the dungeon, heading back.

"Training?" Kane frowned. "You're going to be training in the Shionel Confederation? Really?"

"Yeah," Rui nodded. "That's why I was hoping you could do the deliveries yourself. I need as much time to myself as possible considering all the dungeon raiding that we do."

Kane wasn't entirely sure why Rui was subjecting himself to training outside of the Kandrian Empire so far from it, but he simply nodded. "Gotcha, see ya."

He left, disappearing into thin air, to complete the chores while Rui turned his attention back to himself.

('Before I can even begin training I need to develop a theoretical framework for the techniques,') Rui knew that he couldn't jump the gun. ('And for that, I need to identify what I seek out of my techniques.')

When he considered what he knew about the Root, there was one thing that he knew he sought the most.

('I need a technique that allows me to broadly cope with the absurd speed of the Root's roots,') He still recalled how he couldn't perceive the root's blinding speed with his Riemannian Echo.

Of course, the Riemannian Echo was not a sensory organ that Rui sensed through as much as he was reading it, which made it slower. Still, it was fast enough that he would be unable to react to it had he been there in the flesh as well.

This was most likely not a tenable state for winning. He could not allow for such a giant combat speed gap especially when there was also a giant power gap that came with it, he would be blasted with critical injuries before he could even begin to react.

## Chapter 908: Speed

The reason he was particularly fixated on reducing the combat speed gap between him and his opponent was that he did not have faith in his passive defensive capabilities. If the speed gap between them was high, then that meant he would not be able to evade attacks, which naturally meant he would be forced to endure the attacks with his body.

Given that the attacks were naturally fast enough to bypass his ordinary reaction time, he did not possess the ability to defend against them with active defensive techniques. Active defensive techniques like Inner Divergence and Flux Earther require being able to intercept attacks to some degree, which he could not do if he couldn't react to the attacks due to them being too fast for him.

This meant that if he could not react to the attack then he could only rely on passive defensive techniques such as his Adamant Reforging where his body was conditioned to be tougher generally against all forms of damage.

However, Rui knew for a fact that a single Squire-level technique was not going to save his life against the power that the Root had exhibited. Which meant that he could not tank the attack unless one of his techniques was a passive defensive technique.

"Mmmm..." Rui's expression turned uneasy at the thought of that.

Frankly, he wasn't able to come up with much of any idea at all for a passive defensive technique. Unfortunately, the field of passive defensive techniques was a highly narrow field in so far as the principles and mechanics of the techniques went.

All of the techniques revolved around conditioning. Conditioning was the one and only principle that mattered as far as this particular field went.

Rui had accrued rich scientific background across his long life, but he wasn't sure whether he was able to come up with a brand new paradigm for passive defensive techniques at the moment. It was not easy, and certainly much more demanding as far as creativity went.

He would rather focus on techniques that he was more comfortable creating.

('A technique to mitigate the speed gap it is,') Rui decided. ('That will be the first technique project.')

Now that he had made up his mind about the first project, he felt more clarity and confidence.

('I also need a way to damage it,') Rui mused.

For this, he wasn't even entirely sure if he even needed a new technique. He had existing means to hurt the Root, perhaps even critically, although definitely needed to verify his concerns.

The problem was that he wasn't even sure he could handle more than one project at the moment. Not only did he need to spend time clearing the dungeon as the Voider, but he also needed to keep his regular activities in the dungeon up as Rui.

Those two took time, leaving him not much room for any other technique development project.

Still, he hadn't formed too many concrete plans as far as how to deal with the Root, the technique to mitigate the Root's speed was the most basic condition, regardless of what tactic or strategy he chose to employ, he would need to be able to handle that speed. He couldn't conceive of a way to win without it.

Thus the technique he was developing was merely him fulfilling one of the requirements to not dying, let alone it being the key to actually winning.

That put into perspective how difficult the task that he had undertaken was.

('I can put the strategizing asides after I have gained more information, for now, the information I have is good enough to justify focusing on this development project,') Rui closed his eyes as he began considering the potential principles and concepts that could help him mitigate large speed gaps.

He was able to come up with numerous ideas, but he was far from able to identify which ones were the best, or even viable.

('One additional condition for this technique is that it needs to be able to effectively boost my reaction speed and movements speed,') Rui mused.

The reason for this was that he would not be able to hang with the sheer speed that the Roots had demonstrated without both. If his movement speed was too lacking, then he would not be able to actually move out of the way of an attack even if he could react to it as it came. If his reaction speed was too lacking, then even if he was fast enough to move out of its attacks, he would not begin those movements in time because he would not be able to react in time.

Thus he needed something that effectively boosted both.

The problem was that reaction speed and combat speed both operated through different mechanics. Reaction speed was a product of the timeframes needed for the cognitive process involved with reactions.

The senses perceived a stimulus, sending a message through the nervous system to the brain. The brain then received and processed the information, before coming to a decision and then relaying the decision to the body through the nervous system, causing the body to move.

Movement speed was simply a product born from the force the body generated relative to its body mass. The greater the ratio, the greater the movement speed.

How was he able to create a single technique that boosted both these kinds of speeds? It was almost impossible considering how differently they function.

('Frankly, reaction speed isn't as much of an issue as movement speed,') Rui sighed.

He had always been able to surpass his reaction speed thanks to the predictive systems of the VOID algorithm. By knowing how his opponents were going to move ahead of time, he could effectively bypass the need to react after the attack began, since he was already making preparations for it before it began.

('The problem is that it cannot bridge gigantic speed gaps,') Rui sighed. ('At the very least, I am too weak to do that. Even if I construct a powerful predictive model for the Root based on observing all its patterns, it doesn't matter if I cannot move out of the way in time.')

#### Chapter 909: Forestep

Though the predictive model allowed him to bypass reaction speed by replacing reactions and reflexes with predictions and foreknowledge, there were limits to this. It could not help him evade attacks that were far faster than him. At least, not as he and it were as they currently were.

For example, even if he tried dodging well ahead of time due to having foreknowledge, the Root would most certainly alter its trajectory to match its dodge. If it could see him moving much ahead of time out of the way, then obviously it would not simply hit empty air, no, it would instead shift to attack the dodging Rui.

This meant that he could not dodge too much ahead of time even if he knew it was coming well ahead of time. He needed to time the evasion maneuvers just right, it could not be too much of a headstart.

However, because Rui was so much slower, he could not dodge it if he didn't get a headstart either.

Thus if he started too early, he would get hit because the Root could alter its trajectory and hit him to where he had dodged to.

If he didn't start early, then he would get hit because his body was too slow to move out of the way when they both started moving at the same time.

That was why the predictive model was not enough. Damned if he did, damned if he didn't.

Rui had used the VOID algorithm to overcome speed gaps before, however, he had never succeeded in doing so with such a large speed gap.

The difference between his Martial Art techniques/body and the Root's attacks was no different from the difference between a normal human and a speed bullet.

The VOID algorithm was currently unable to bridge such a gigantic gap all by itself. Even if the VOID algorithm allowed his mind to keep up thanks to predictions, the physical restrictions of his movements were not something that the VOID algorithm could fix.

('What if I only focused on a technique that amplified movement speed and discard reaction speed?')  
Rui's eyes lit up in interest.

Generally, this was not advised. A body that moved faster than the mind was dangerous in many ways. For one, if the body moved too fast for the mind, then the Martial Artist would be unable to react to their own movements. Thus, if they needed to stop a maneuver at a certain point, they might stop it a split second later, completely throwing off their momentum and balance!

In the worst-case scenario, they might end up killing themselves with their own techniques, and causing themselves harm was almost guaranteed.

They might start to throw a single punch and the very next moment find themselves crashing into the ground.

The body ought not to exceed the mind when it came to speed.

Furthermore, in combat, the body moving faster than the mind would mean that the mind would be unable to react to its opponent's movements in response to the body's. That became extremely dangerous and would create openings allowing the opponent to exploit them and kill them.

('However, what if someone's mind possessed an algorithm that allowed them to bypass mental speed with the help of foreknowledge?') Rui's eyes widened. ('What if someone's mind acted on the future instead of the present?')

In that case, the mind would be able to keep up with the body!

Since the mind did not need to react to the body if it already knew exactly when what was going to happen.

('In that case, I can potentially focus on a technique that relies on maximizing bodily speed without any care of my reaction speed being left behind,') Rui realized. ('Then I can compensate for my lack in reaction speed with extensive predictions.')

Rui closed his eyes as he envisioned the mechanics of such a technique. A technique where he predicted an attack ahead of time, and prepared the movement speed supplementing technique, preparing exactly what movements to make ahead of time, allowing him to execute movements faster than his mind at the right time.

His mind did not need to keep up with the body in speed to know what was going on since the predictions would already allow it to know what was going on, it merely needed to execute the movement supplementing technique at the right time.

Thus it was not different from pre-programming his body to respond in a certain way at certain times ahead of time.

Rui's eagerly evaluated and simulated such a technique inside his mind, conducting some preliminary analyses on whether the technique was viable, and if it was viable, whether was it worth investing in.

('It depends on what movement-supplementing technique I use to construct the technique,') Rui concluded. ('It also depends on how solid my prediction model is of my opponent')

He also realized that he couldn't use this technique unless he already had a super well-developed predictive model at hand. Which meant that he couldn't use it at the beginning of a random encounter fight. He would simply get himself killed because he wouldn't have any predictions at the beginning of the fight.

('What kind of technique should I incorporate for movement speed?') Rui narrowed his eyes.

He had several options. He could get a maneuvering technique that relied on accuracy, precision, and application of speed rather than increasing raw speed, though it allowed the user to effectively move faster, even if actually faster. The techniques of this field were certainly quite powerful, Rui knew that for a fact.

('However...') He shook his head, sighing. ('It's not suited for my new project.')

Suddenly, a random thought entered his head. ('Speaking of which, I have yet to name this project.')

He considered a few names briefly before settling on one that had a nice ring to it. "Project Forestep."

Should Rui succeed, he predicted that his ability to engage with much faster opponents would rise much more drastically!

Chapter 910: Convenient

Rui grew incredibly excited at this new revelation!

The reason for this was that he had inadvertently come across one of the principles of Jeet Kune Do, a martial art that Bruce Lee himself had developed. The principle of intercepting one's opponents' attacks by moving before their opponent moved.

('How do you combat something that's too fast for you to combat after it has begun? You defeat it before it begins,') Rui hadn't intended on it but had inadvertently stepped in the direction of one of Bruce Lee's principles.

After all, his technique relied on predictions to begin to move ahead of time with perfectly timed pre-programmed movements.

('It's more than just that,') Rui narrowed his eyes. ('My technique entails not just using predictions to gain foreknowledge on my opponent, and not just using that to move ahead of time. The timing matters the most. In a clash, I must aim to move before my opponents move, yes, but also after it is too late for them to change their movements.')

Once the decision-making process in his opponent's head was complete, the moment the brain transmitted a nerve impulse to be sent to the body, it was too late for the brain to change its decision. It was only after this point, that Rui could begin his movements before his opponents began moving without them reacting and altering their original movements.

He had a narrow gap between before it was too late for them to change their movements, and before their actual movements began.

('That minute timeframe is within which I must time my technique,') Rui narrowed his eyes.

This was an exceedingly difficult demand. He had to admit, he was holding himself to a particularly high standard.

('Bruce Lee would have approved,') Rui nodded.

Theoretically, no attack could be a threat if it was crushed before it was even launched. Rui had to remind himself to stop daydreaming so that he could get on with the formulation of the theoretical framework of the functioning of the technique.

('Now I just need to find a good movement speed supplementary technique and I'm set,') Rui knew that this wasn't going to be too easy.

Supplementary techniques usually involved some breathing technique that would enhance certain functions or parts of the body through the breathing technique.

One example was, of course, Rui's Wind Breathing technique, and Gale Force Breathing technique.

('Those two aren't bad,') Rui noted. ('But they are not what I'm looking for.')

The two techniques, especially Gale Force Breathing were not strictly combat oriented enough. Wind Breathing placed an equal amount of importance on both combat and travel speed, but Gale Force Breathing was a technique that Rui had developed specifically to move faster when traveling so that he

could keep up with Kane if the two of them had to run away, and were unable to rely on their other trump cards.

It certainly had helped in certain moments, like when they were escaping the ant mountain after the ants rushed in. Rui and Kane needed to escape, but Kane was limited to Rui's speed, since he was faster, and could not move away from Rui, and the two needed to travel as fast as possible. Gale Force Breathing ensured that Rui didn't drag Kane back too much.

In fact, the fact that they were able to escape as quickly as they did was because of Gale Force Breathing, and it had probably saved their lives that day. Thus, Rui most certainly did not look down on the technique.

That being said, techniques had their purposes. They were quite useful and powerful when used for their intended purposes, but not when used for other purposes.

Not that Gale Force Breathing would be utterly useless when facing off against opponents while also using Project Forestep's technique, but it could not serve as the main movement-based technique for Project Forestep.

('I need something stronger,')

The problem was that stronger techniques were simply of a higher grade of potency and difficulty. Based on experience, Rui knew that the technique that he needed was most likely going to be an extremely high-grade technique. Only a high-grade technique surpassing grade-eight difficulty and potency operated based on powerful principles could most likely satisfy his needs.

The problem was that when it came to mastering high-grade techniques, affinity mastered and talent mattered. The techniques of the highest grades required the Martial Artist's Martial Path to have some affinity with the field of the technique. On top of that, they certainly needed talent to be able to master such a difficult technique in the first place.

That was the biggest problem that stood in Rui's way.

The movement-based supplementary and maneuvering techniques that were viable for Project Forestep were most likely too difficult for him to master.

('At least, in their entirety,') Rui's eyes flashed with determination. ('If I can just take what I need, then I'm good.')

He didn't need to use every ounce of a technique, what he needed was the core mechanics of how they worked and there was a good chance that he would be able to make do with it.

(As for the precise kind of movement-based technique I need...') Rui gave it a considerable amount of thought. ('I need a focus on speed and agility, as well as fluidity.')

He would need to go through the Martial Union's library unless, of course, he knew of a technique that he already wanted. It would be rather convenient for him to access the Martial Union's library so far from home.

('It's not like I know someone with a super fast te-') Rui cocked his head back as he immediately thought of someone with a technique who fit that exact description. The best part of it was that this person was also extremely close by, and had been extremely close by for a long time.

Rui pulled out his pocket watch, glancing at the time impatiently as he swept his senses across his environment.

"Tsl, when is Kane coming back?"