

## Martial Unity 921

### Chapter 921: Void Forestep

Rui had limited himself to defense to explore the limits of his new technique, while familiarizing himself with how the technique felt in different counters.

STEP

('Flying knee kick; 98.9% probability,') He waited for only the briefest moment before activating Godspeed on a sidestep.

WHOOSH

He had half-dodged the attack before it had begun after it was too late for Kane to change his decision.

This was not the most optimal counter to Kane's maneuver according to the adaptive evolution model. But that was fine. His intention was to grow familiar with using Godspeed to move before his opponents moved after it was too late to change their decision. His normal speed meant that against something of the Root's caliber, even if he did begin moving ahead of time after it was too late to change the attack, he would be too slow to make it in time.

('But with this... I think I can-Hm?') Rui's attention returned back to Kane who was tired of being toyed with, taking a crouching stance.

Instantly, the air grew taut as Kane radiated danger. Yet Rui welcomed what was about to come.

"Oh...?" Rui raised an eyebrow as his smile widened. "Let's see if I can match the real deal."

The original Godspeed that Kane had mastered was a grade-ten technique. When used, it could grant him speed that was theoretically crossing past the threshold of a higher Realm of speed!

Even if barely.

Could Rui's improvisation match the original? Rui was excited to find out. Furthermore, this performance would allow him to gauge how potent the technique was.

His focus sharpened as his mind unleashed an avalanche of pressure as his demeanor grew more solemn and serious.

And then it happened.

BANG BANG BANG BANG BANG...!

Kane exhaled one hundred times in one millisecond as his body weight plummeted even further below how light it normally was!

A titanic surge of power flushed through his muscles.

And then he was gone.

WHOOSH.

The atmosphere rocked violently as Kane entered territories of speed that almost no Martial Squire could even begin fathoming!

The air recoiled as a shockwave the size of a small district violently expanded perpendicular to his motion, splitting all the clouds in the sky in half.

The land beneath his feat crumbled to a fine powder as the air around him was set ablaze.

He crossed Rui in the tiniest of split seconds, stopping ten meters behind him.

...

THUD

Kane fell to the ground, unconscious. A heavy bruise on his lower jaw began swelling immediately.

"Argh," Rui collapsed to one knee as he coughed some blood, much to his shock. "To think Kane could hit so hard with that technique."

His fist was still clenched from having landed a clean strike on Kane's jaw. He had purposely avoided using Outer Convergence, given Kane's constitution, the difference in power between them, and the power of the Outer Convergence technique, he knew for a fact that Kane would instantly die to an attack that powerful hitting his head.

"Still, the outcome is not perfect even then," Rui murmured with mixed feelings.

He had predicted Kane's exact movements, yet even Project Forestep technique was not fast enough to defend against the attack, which moved even faster than Kane himself did. Yet he had been able to knock him out with a well-placed and timed blow even while he incurred damage from failing to intercept the attack.

He immediately hobbled over to Kane, even before he tended to his wounds, feeding him rejuvenation, nutrients, and healing potions.

"Urgh..." He groaned as he woke up. "What in the world...?"

"You alright?" Rui asked as he consumed his own potions.

"What happ-" He paused as his eyes gained clarity. "Oh. Right. I lost."

"It was a good fight, I've never been hit by the Godspeed technique," Rui remarked. "I didn't know how much it hurt, and that was after you massively reduced your mass too, unbelievable. That was on par with a grade-ten Martial Squire attack man."

If not for the fact that his mass was reduced, Rui probably would have died. The reason Kane was able to obtain Senior-level speed with Squire level power was that he made himself incredibly light, to a far greater degree than Rui did. Otherwise, it would just be a Senior level attack and would blast a hole in Rui.

"What's unbelievable is that you accurately tagged me even though I was using the Godspeed technique," Kane shook his head with disbelief, sighing.

"Well, I considered dodging but I knew I wouldn't be able to get my entire body out of the way," Rui sighed. "Your speed is enviable."

"I am not the one who should be envied between the two of us," Kane grumbled as he got up. "So that's the trump card you came up with to handle the Root, huh?"

Rui nodded. "The roots were way too fast for me to deal with, this technique will allow me to cope with things that are way faster than I am."

The Project Forestep technique gave him speed on par with the average speed of peak grade-ten Martial Squires. It was far inferior to Kane's Godspeed in this regard. The reason for that was because of Kane's mastery and affinity to it, but also because Rui chose to spread the speed empowerment across time, rather than squeeze all of it in a single attack like the Godspeed technique normally did.

"Got a name for this technique?" Kane asked casually.

"Hm..."

Rui considered the Project's name, though it sounded too bland for such an impressively powerful technique.

"Void Forestep," Rui replied.

"Huh," Kane shrugged mildly. "That technique is insanely powerful, I bet the Martial Union would love to get its hands on that. It's probably grade ten, given that it beat the Godspeed technique."

Rui was inclined to agree, although the technique certainly was not short of its many drawbacks, that was for certain without a doubt. There were several drawbacks that it possessed that the Godspeed technique did not.

#### Chapter 922: Flawed

To Kane, the Void Forestep technique may have appeared to have been flawless, however, Rui knew that this was far from the truth. The truth was that this technique had several drawbacks and detriments.

For one, the only reason it worked so exceptionally well this time was that Rui had an extremely well-built predictive model of Kane, with excellent depth into both his active and passive patterns. This predictive model was built over the many years that Rui knew Kane. He had an immeasurable amount of exposure to Kane in all the time that he had known him.

It was unlikely that he would be able to replicate such an extremely well-developed predictive model for pretty much anyone else ever. Least of all the Root, to which he had the least amount of exposure.

That was why he did not take the performance that he had against Kane as the norm.

It was not.

It was quite likely that for any predictive model that he did end up building, he would not be able to replicate the level of prowess that he had just demonstrated against Kane.

('The biggest problem is that this can only be used after I form a predictive model,') Rui sighed. ('Until then, it's useless.')

That was also a rather severe restriction and limited the scope of the technique. That was a limitation that the original Godspeed technique did not suffer.

On top of that, this technique could not be used lightly.

Rui sighed as he glanced at his malnourished body, he felt as though he had lost precisely half his weight, which seemed like an absurd proposition.

('Martial bodies are denser than normal human bodies, that's why I can expel mass that isn't immediately substantial and still retain most of my complexion,') Rui glanced at his body, which looked the same as always.

Regardless, the technique left him weakened, he would need to consume a lot of nutritious food to regain all the expelled body mass back. Thus he could not use this with the expectation of fighting after he used it.

He ought to reserve this technique for only when he truly needed it.

These two restrictions were much more limiting than he had hoped, but they couldn't be helped. It was as though nature was balancing the technique out by giving it such restrictive limitations.

The technique was too powerful if Rui could use it freely without any detriments to himself.

After all, even if Kane's movement speed via Godspeed was much slower than any actual Martial Senior, it was still the speed of a higher Realm!

Even though Rui wasn't able to combat the attack, he had been able to accurately land his own attack.

That was something that no Martial Squire ought to be able to!

If the Martial Union learned about this, they would go to any extent to persuade Rui to submit the technique to the Martial Union.

Of course, Rui was under no illusion that this technique would be effective against an actual Martial Senior, not at all.

An actual Martial Senior did not just possess movement speed surpassing Kane's Godspeed technique, they also possessed reaction, cognitive, and processing speed on par with it. They would be able to observe Rui in slow motion, almost like he was a statue to them.

Thus, Godspeed was only quasi-Senior level speed when one considered speed in a holistic sense.

('Even with that consideration, it's quite insane,') Rui knew that there probably were almost no Martial Squire, if any ever at all, was capable of such a feat.

However, it didn't matter if he could not get the information that was necessary to form a powerful predictive model on the Root. What he needed was more information. Although he probably would never be able to make a predictive model for it that was as good as the one he had for Kane, it would probably make a huge difference.

He would at least be able to obtain a solid portion of the prowess that he demonstrated against Kane.

('I may have created a technique that, at least in preliminary tests, is satisfactory, but I haven't made as much progress against the Root of the Shionel Dungeon,') He sighed.

It couldn't be helped. Not a single other living creature in the entire Shionel Dungeon had run into the Root, as far as he was aware.

('This can't go on,') He sighed inwardly. ('If what I'm looking for won't occur naturally, then...')

An interesting idea popped into his head.

If the Root did not engage in conflict, then maybe he just needed to force it to. That could be the key to solving one of his biggest problems. It was unlikely such a thing would occur naturally on its own in the

first place because he was far ahead in the exploration of the Shionel Dungeon compared to anybody else.

What that meant was that he would normally be the first one to undertake the final 'floor' of the Shionel Dungeon to claim all the ore deposits below the Shionel Dungeon.

There were several potential solutions to gaining combat data for active patterns in the Root's movements that popped into his head. Unfortunately, none of them were easy to realize in actuality.

"Hm..." Rui narrowed his eyes. "Time to enter the dungeon again, Kane."

"Like... now?" Kane tilted his head. "I mean, we just employed the Godspeed technique, and are weaker than our normal power levels. This probably isn't a good idea you know."

"We'll recover quickly, of course," Rui told him. "Our digestion system can extract all the necessary mass, as long as we eat enough. So we can bounce back after twenty-four hours of rejuvenation. Though this is quite inconvenient."

He sighed.

"You can see why I don't use it regularly," Kane grumbled, "The places I would be if I could use it without that drawback, I would be two grades stronger than I am, that's for sure. The combination of Void Step and Godspeed is super overpowered you know!"

## Chapter 923: Recover

Rui had to admit, that that combination did sound overpowered. He hadn't even considered the fact that the two techniques were highly compatible with each other. He hadn't even considered that they could be used together.

"Nigh Senior level movement speed, and imperceptibility," Rui shook his head. "That shouldn't be allowed. No Martial Squire can possibly handle that."



"Except you," Kane huffed as he turned towards Rui.

Rui did not deny that. Even if Kane combined those two techniques and used them simultaneously, he could not defeat Rui. Void Step was fundamentally useless against Rui, and he had already beaten Godspeed. Using them together would not allow him to change those individual outcomes.

"I'm probably the only one, and only because of extremely unfortunate compatibility disadvantages for those techniques of yours," Rui placated him.

He couldn't think of a single other Martial Squire he knew that could handle the combination.

"If not for the fact that it can only be used against a singular opponent, you would be so much more of a threat," Rui remarked. "It's actually interesting because your peaks are so much higher than the rest of your Martial Art, that makes you harder to gauge."

These two techniques made Kane more of a threat than the rest of his Martial Art did, considering that they were grade-ten techniques.

However, Kane did not spam Godspeed because of its drawbacks, and while he did use Void Step regularly, it was the reason he was even evaluated to be a grade four Martial Artist at all.

It was too easy to take him down because his defenses were no different from paper for a Martial Artist of Rui's caliber. Any high-grade Martial Artist could kill him with even a fraction of their power. The reason for this was because his Martial body was weak as far as durability went, and his defensive techniques were lacking. He had yet to create a single defensive technique.

"They're so difficult to create," Kane complained. "How do you have even make original defensive techniques."

The two of them chatted as they returned to their lodgings, proceeding to wolf down gigantic meals that looked like it wouldn't fit inside their body.

Rui already felt more energized half a day later.

His digestion was more potent. He was rather certain that his stomach acid was concentrated rather than the dilute version that normal humans had. A day later, his body felt entirely normal, like all of the body mass that he had expelled was finally replaced. The two of them fully recovered from all their exertion, before heading out into the dungeon.

"How many floors are left in there anyway?" Kane asked. "Feel like we should be done, honestly. The dungeon is huge but ultimately finite. It's been two years since it was first opened, and ever since, we've been making tons of progress, and all Martial Squires travel super deep into the dungeon to have any hopes of finding a new floor."

"We've gotten most of them," Rui told him. "Considering we're nearing fifty floors. That's a huge amount of area within the dungeon, and will probably close to the limit. I suspect we have several more floors to go and then that's that."

"And then we reach the floor below the dungeon," Kane said what Rui was thinking.

"Right,"

Kane already knew that he wasn't participating in such a conflict. It was simply too much for him. He could die of the environmental side effects of fighting with a floor guardian like the one that Rui had described to him.

"Look," Kane began. "I know your technique is super powerful and all, but it's not enough to win, right? In the first place, you created that technique to not die, not as a path to victory. So what do you actually have in mind for actually defeating the Root?"

Kane had a very valid point.

It was true that Rui had created the Void Forestep technique to survive and combat the speed of the Root, but that wasn't the same as winning.

"It's not like your trick of the Senior level Mind Mask can work here given that you're facing a singular opponent, and not an entirely hostile army surrounding you as you did in the Serevian Dungeon," Kane told him. "You can't direct the roots at an opponent, only at yourself."

"I know," Rui nodded. "I have an idea, but I'll need to flesh it out by getting more data on the Root."

"And how do you intend to do that?" Kane sighed. "You've been observing it for months, correct?"

"Yeah, but this time, now that I have completed my training, I intend to invest more into the matter than I did before," Rui informed him. "I need more data, and that is part of the reason that we're heading into the dungeon today. We're going to find ways to come up with more data."

"So we won't be looking for dungeon floors?" Kane tilted his head.

"We will," Rui replied. "It's a shame we finished all of the floors that I discovered that day."

In the past half year, the two of them had cleared almost all of the floors that they had discovered in the past, and now they were back to ordinary adventuring. Of course, with Rui. It was anything but ordinary. With his enormously wide sensory range, they merely needed to go for a walk, and he would gain a deep awareness of the entirety of the surroundings within a radius of several kilometers of their position.

The two of them quickly reached the dungeon with Void Step, before heading into its depths. Even ordinary Martial Squires no longer felt much danger from the upper-most levels of the Shionel Dungeon that had long been swept clean by the many Martial Squires that had traveled through its tunnels, the monster had been sighted in any of the upper levels in recent times.

Everyone knew that the real adventure could only be found in the greatest depths of the Shionel Dungeon.

Rui felt strange as he began spotting an increasing number of Martial Squires the deeper they went. Given that the depth of the Shionel Dungeon was sixty kilometers, most Martial Squires were exploring tunnels at a depth of forty to fifty kilometers. Rui could normally relax the deeper he went since he didn't need to deal with the annoying adventurers who were basically associated with Chairman Deacon, or the annoying freelancers that accepted the bounty that Chairman Deacon had put on his head, which had grown by a factor of eight since it was originally instated.

Now all those annoyances were migrating to the places that were normally devoid of human presence.

Rui and Kane traveled deeper until they reached levels that weren't too far from the Root floor at the bottom of the Shionel Dungeon.

It took more than a day of exploring, but Rui finally managed to detect a new floor.

"Finally!" Kane exclaimed. "This damn dungeon finally yields a floor!"

Kane had truly begun to grow sick of the Shionel Dungeon. He couldn't wait for him and Rui to have finally cleared it to that they never had to enter it ever again. Spending an entire day trudging through annoyingly contorting tunnels was not fun.

"What kind of floor is it?" Kane asked, eagerly.

"It's a... snake pit" Rui narrowed his eyes.

"Urgh," Kane's expression soured as he grumbled. "Why can't it be something nice like a bunch of bunnies?"

"It's a little strange though," Rui frowned.

"What is?" Kane raised an eyebrow.

Rui didn't respond immediately as he observed what he was seeing, moving closer toward the dungeon to get a better look.

The snakes seemed to be constantly wrestling with each other to move toward the center of the floor. As if the rest of the floor would lead to their deaths

"They're not venomous serpents like the inland taipans, through," Rui told him. "They're more like pythons. They're constantly engaging in this huge wrestling war with each other as they're piling on top of each other at the center of the floor. It's strange, really."

"And let me guess, the esoteric ore deposits are under that pile?" Kane sighed.

"Yep," Rui laughed mirthlessly. "An advantage that we do have is that they seem really preoccupied with whatever their strange goal is," Rui shrugged.

He didn't have much of an idea as to why the pythons were doing what they were doing, but he had to admit that as long as it kept them distracted, he was completely fine with that.

"Let's get started," Rui told Kane when they arrived.

He drew his hot air pipe and sword, before inhaling a deep puff of air.

THWOOM

The crackling hot Tempestuous Ripple struck several pythons, making their flesh rigid and brittle, yet what happened had exceeded his expectations.

Suddenly, every single python ceased their actions before turning towards Rui, and the targets of his attack.

HIIIISSSS!

They all immediately abandoned what they were doing before immediately dashing in his direction.

Kane immediately dashed away while Rui narrowed his eyes, preparing his sword, he intended on mowing them down as much as he could.

Yet to his surprise, they did not go to him, they immediately stopped at their paralyzed siblings whose flesh had turned rigid after being hit by Rui's hot air wind blast attack. A whole wave of snakes began fighting and wrestling with each other as they all tried to reach the super-heated and paralyzed bodies of their siblings.

"What...?" Rui frowned, confused as he sky-walked around the increasingly large pile of snakes, trying to reach the targeted pythons that got hit by his attack.

In the meant time, the giant collection of esoteric ore deposits in the center of the dungeon floor was unchecked.

Rui sky-walked down to them, glancing back at the pythons.

He ought to have just taken the esoteric ore deposits, but unfortunately, his confusion and curiosity had peaked far too much.

('What's going on?') He wondered.

He could come up with a dozen theories as to why they were acting too bizarrely, but he wasn't sure.

"Hm?" He noticed that the esoteric ore deposits of this floor were strangely hot.

He glanced back and forth between the pythons and the esoteric ore deposits as his eyes widened.

"Could it be...?" Rui murmured aloud.

"Could it be what?" Kane asked as he reached Rui's position.

Rui didn't reply, instead pulling out his hot air pipe, before inhaling and launching a heated Tempestuous Ripple at a random spot on the floor.

THWOOM

Instantly, the pythons ceased their wrestling, before glancing in the direction of the target of his technique, staring at it with their yellow eyes and flicking tongues.

HISSSSSSS!

They once again repeated the same old pattern.

"Uh... What's going on?" Kane asked Rui, confused.

"I think I figured it out," Rui murmured. "It's simple really, but they just love heat."

"What?"

"They love really high temperatures, it appears that the hotter it is, the more they're drawn to it," Rui explained. "That would explain their behavior pretty well."

He hadn't heard of any species that was so strongly attached to heat before, but it wasn't outlandish. Snakes had infrared vision, thus the means by which they detected heat was evidently clear.

"I see..." Kane scratched his head. "So you can just lure them away from the esoteric ore deposits of the floor by leading them away with heat. Great. That makes life easier."

Rui smirked. "That's true, but we can do so much more than just lure them away from the esoteric ore deposits, you know."

"Like what?"

"Like lure them to the Root," Rui grinned. "After months, I have finally been blessed with the opportunity to direct test subjects exactly where I want them. I can use these snakes to gather more information on the Root of the dungeon as I watch the snakes engaging in conflict with the Root."

"That..." Kane raised an eyebrow at that plan. Luring away heat-loving monsters to take them to fight an opponent he couldn't to gain more information was a plan that he hadn't even conceived of.

## Chapter 925: Path

"I swear..." Kane chuckled. "There has probably been no one in history who has been as creative with clearing dungeons as you have been."

Kane couldn't help but think back to the many remarkably creative and unusual solutions that Rui applied to get things done.

The one that stood out the most, of course, was when Rui used the water of an entire floor to astronomically increase the rate of exploration of the Shionel Dungeon, discovering twelve dungeons in a single day. Who could possibly claim to be able to do such a thing?

"I need to trace a path from this floor all the way to the Root floor," Rui murmured.

In order to lure them away with his heat, he needed to find a pathway that was large enough to accommodate a large number of pythons that were aggressively eager to reach any heat. This wasn't something he could do on the run after already luring them out, he definitely needed to plan things ahead of time.

"Alright, see ya," Kane nodded.

Rui nodded before exploring his surroundings with Riemannian Echo, mapping the entire area with his senses.



"That should do just fine," Rui murmured as he spotted a giant tunnel that seemed to be headed downwards, immediately sky-walking towards it.

After a while, it appeared that his fears of the tunnel being a dead-end weren't true, he soon began experiencing a familiar sense of pressure.

('I'm getting closer,') Rui's eyes narrowed.

He had experienced this pressure many times in the recent past, having visited the Root Floor to get a good understanding of the capabilities of that part of the Shionel Dungeon.

About a few hours later, he had found what he was looking for.

He didn't even need to rely on the Riemannian Echo to sense the Root.

The frozen atmosphere told him everything he needed to know. The avalanche of pressure that crashed onto him, warning him not to go any further, it told one everything one needed to know about the Root.

('I just hope that the heat my hot air pipe generated will be hot enough for the pythons to ignore the overwhelming sense of danger,') Rui sighed. Though he wasn't too sure how that would be true. He needed to get a solid grip over himself in order to stay put and ignore the warning sirens that Primordial Instinct was giving off inside his head.

It was unfortunate, but there wasn't much he could do if it turned out that this wasn't the case. There were only so many ideas that he could come up with inside the dungeon with the limited resources that he had.

"Welp, just gotta hope I'm lucky," Rui paused as he found a tunnel pathway that opened up to the Root floor. Having completed his objective, he immediately turned around and headed back up the way he came up, eventually returning back to the python floor.

"Found what you were looking for?" Kane asked.

"Yeah," Rui nodded. "You use Void Step to cover us, while I use hot air pipe to heat the path that I want them to follow. If all things go well, it should be smooth."

Rui wasn't as certain about that, but he didn't comment. The good part was that there wasn't much to be lost, they weren't particularly risking their lives or anything of the sort, not to a particularly high degree by their standards.

Even if the pythons didn't end up inside the Root Floor like Rui wanted them to, at worst, he would not gain something he hoped he would. He wouldn't lose anything he had already gotten.

On top of that, the esoteric ore deposits were theirs for the taking unless they got extremely unfortunate.

"Alright, let's begin," Rui nodded to Kane.

Kane placed his hand on Rui's shoulder and the two of them disappeared into thin air.

Several seconds later;

THWOOM

The pythons froze before cocking their heads in the direction of Rui's target, before immediately dashing towards it.

Rui and Kane promptly began moving away from the pythons as Rui continuously heated up a path for the pythons to swiftly follow the two of them guided all the pythons through the tunnels that Rui had found leading all the way down to the Root Floor. The tricky part for Rui was to keep lighting up the path as he guided the pythons to follow without facing the way they were going.

Kane had to pay attention to the direction that Rui was moving too and adjust his technique to work in that direction. The misdirection of his technique was an active element and Kane needed to know what direction he was moving in, in order to use it.

Thankfully, the two didn't need to hurry and could take it slow, by Martial Squire standards, and slowly but thoroughly lure the snakes into the Root Floor.

The bad news was that even when he was going at a decently fast speed, it took him several hours to travel the entirety of the path to the Root Floor. With the slow pace that they were currently traveling at, it took them nearly an entire day for them to get near the Root Floor.

('Now comes the rough part,') Rui sighed inwardly. He could only hope for the best. The pressure from the Root Floor had already begun washing over him.

He glanced at Kane to reassure him that they were fine, but to his surprise, Kane was unperturbed.

"You seem to be handling it well," Rui told him before blowing out more crackling hot air.

"Handling what well?" Kane raised an eyebrow.

"You know, the pressure,"

Kane furrowed his eyebrows, turning towards Rui with a quizzical expression.

"The pressure from the Root Floor?" Rui asked once again with a confused expression. "You're handling it like a champ."

"What pressure?" Kane glanced around briefly, before turning back to Rui.

Now Rui was beyond surprised. "You don't feel any pressure?"

"I literally have no idea what you're talking about,"

## Chapter 926: Pressure

He had been prepared to reassure Kane when the pressure set in, but was surprised when Kane claimed he didn't even feel any pressure.

Rui turned towards the pythons as he observed their body language and demeanor. Given his Fauna Flow technique, he was able to easily read the pythons even if they didn't have any facial expressions whatsoever.

It was clear that none of them were exhibiting any of the behavioral patterns that they would if they felt as though their lives were under threat.

('Neither Kane nor the pythons feel this pressure...?') He frowned, incredibly confused. ('Did they conspire to pull a prank on me, or am I losing my mind?')

He wasn't quite sure why they were unable to sense them.

('Especially pythons they should have a strong sense for survi-') He paused as realization dawned on him. ('It's the Shionel Dungeon's sensory jamming.')

It made sense. However, it wasn't the case that the Shionel Dungeon's sensory jamming traits were jamming the pressure that the Root was exerting on everybody.

No.

Rui often had to remind himself that the pressure that he exerted and experienced wasn't real. It wasn't real in the same way that atmospheric or water pressure was.

It was psychological pressure that the mind experienced when the subconscious evolutionary ability to evaluate risk and danger, evaluated a being to be extremely dangerous. This pressure was not some energy radiated by the dangerous being that traveled through the air and entered the mind. It was pressure generated by the subconscious fear that the mind produced.

However, if the mind was unable to even perceive the existence of the dangerous being and thus unable to evaluate the danger of the being, one's mind would not generate the fear or the pressure.

That was what was happening right now.

Rui was experiencing the pressure because he possessed the ability to actually evaluate the risks and danger that dangerous beings pose to him, the Root, in this case. The inability of the pythons and Kane to sense the Root at all meant they couldn't experience the pressure.

('That's great,') Rui's eyes lit up.

He was quite happy that this was the case. His biggest concern was that he would be unable to lure the pythons into the Root Floor due to them backing out in instinctual fear of the Root, but he was glad that that was not a problem in the first place.

"Let's keep going," Rui began working with a renewed vigor when he knew that the biggest hurdle of his plan was not there in the first place.

Within an hour, they had finally arrived at the entrance to the Root Floor.

"So this is where it is huh?" Kane peered down the tunnel leading to a large hole. "I still can't feel any pressure, and that's honestly scarier."

Rui and Kane put some distance between them and the tunnel leading down as he heated the tunnel walls with his technique and the hot air pipe.

Rui grinned as the pythons did not even hesitate to slip down the tunnel into the floor one by one.

He even spewed more hot air from the edge of the hole leading into the floor in the direction of the grotesque Root, which was still actively engaging in mining the mine that the dungeon was based on.

He was grateful that the Shionel Dungeon was so good at hampering senses, otherwise, there was no way the pythons would have willingly jumped into that tunnel and hole.

"Now what?" Kane asked.

"Sshh," Rui was fully focused on what was about to unfold. He completely ignored Kane as he focused all his attention on the Root Floor. He had spent quite a lot of time waiting for what was about to happen, he did not want to even blink his eyes in fear of missing what was about to happen. Even though he wasn't using his eyes to observe the battle.

('They're moving closer to the Root from the edge of the floor, I wonder when the Root will attac-') The furthest bunch of pythons suddenly got flattened into a gigantic crater faster than Rui could even react.

He had been paying extremely sharp attention to them, but they died before he could react nonetheless.

He sharpened his focus even more, focusing only on the Root floor and nothing else.

The deaths of the pythons did indeed confirm that the Root did not tolerate what it perceived as a living creature or any motion in general.

A split second later a huge wave of pythons was absolutely flattened by devastating impacts.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

The roots of the Root ruthlessly flattened the pythons, leaving the latter unable to resist the brutality of the former. They were unable to even mount up an opposition due to how quickly they died. They didn't even know they had an opponent on this floor.

They simply died in droves like they were insects.

It didn't take too long.

Soon enough, the Root returned back to its business while an entire floor's worth of python monster flattened corpses had left a pool of blood in their area.

"It's done," Rui sighed.

"That quickly?!" Kane cocked his head back in surprise. "That's absurd! It's only been thirty seconds."

"Yeah," Rui sighed.

"You're telling me the Root did all of them in half a minute?"

"Yep,"

"And you intend to fight this thing?"

"Yeah," Rui shrugged. "If it chooses to fight back, anyway."

"..." Kane stared at Rui with a concerned expression. "Well, good luck."

He bit back a lot of things he wanted to say, and Rui appreciated that.

"Don't be so pensive," Rui told him. "It may have lasted only half a minute, but I did manage to get a lot of important necessary data."

Rui smiled. Even thirty seconds was more than enough time for a Martial Squire like Rui, and for the Root as well. A lot had been accomplished in that time and a lot had been observed in that time.

"Like what?" Kane frowned. "What could you have possibly learned in such a short amount of time?"

"Well, for one, the amount of time may have been short, but what you need to consider is what was accomplished in this time," Rui told him.

More than a thousand pythons had been annihilated by the Root in half a minute. Rui had gotten enough data for him to get the active data patterns that he was looking for. He had even analyzed yet, and he had already noted several patterns.

('It does not attack until things move within a certain range from the Root,') Rui concluded.

It hadn't attacked the pythons from the moment that they had entered the Root Floor from the edge of the floor. Furthermore, it only attacked them after they entered a certain range.

Even now, when he observed the corpses of the pythons, their positions confirmed the pattern. It meant that simply entering the dungeon did not make you a target of the Root, you needed to enter the dungeon and then cross a certain boundary.

That gave Rui a bit of relief. It meant that he did not need to leave the floor if he wanted to retreat from the attacks of the Root. It also meant that he could effectively control when the attacks would begin.

That wasn't the only thing he had noticed at first glance.

('The attack of the root begins from the base, before going up to the tip of the root.,') Rui noted.

This was an extremely significant discovery. It meant that he had discovered a cue and a tell that would allow him to concretely predict the attacks and movements ahead of time. It would serve as a strong basis for the predictive model that he had been creating for the Root.

Predictions were the basis of the means by which he intended to resist the offense of the Root, and finding such a useful pattern in the manner in which the attacks of the Root evolved was definitely quite useful.



He had been afraid that the Root lacked such concrete tells and cues that would allow him to predict the moment of attack. If such a thing really was the case, then Rui would be in quite the dilemma. But fortunately, his fears hadn't come to pass.

('After all, that isn't the only significant pattern there is,')

He discovered that every time a root attacked, it would always be the closest root to the target of the Root. This might not seem like much of a pattern or an advantage, but it meant that at any given time, he knew where the attack was coming from, ahead of time, and even when it was coming.

That was a huge gain, without a doubt. The prior pattern only established his ability to predict an attack from a root, now he knew which ones would be attacking him.

Unfortunately, these were not enough in and of themselves.

He needed more data in more varied situations and circumstances. He needed to know what would happen if it was forced to attack highly powerful grade-ten Martial Squires who could resist some attacks and potentially even hurt it. That was what he himself intended to do, so he definitely wanted data on that.

A grade-ten Martial Squire would last far longer than the Squire-level python monsters that he had tossed into the Root floor did. Martial Squires at the peak of the Squire Realm could not be compared to mid-grade Squire-level monsters.

All in all, the plan was a success, it definitely did yield the result that he was hoping for it.

But, at the end of the day, Rui did not feel confident in dealing with the Root as he was now. The information that he had currently would allow him to use the Void Forestep technique defensively to handle the attacks of the Root to a certain extent, but he would die unless he had access to even more information.

"That's the problem with relying on information on your opponent to perform higher than your limits," Rui sighed. "You need to go through the efforts of procuring it."

Normally, he did that in the actual fight itself. Gaining more information on his opponent to form a predictive model on them was feasible, but only when his opponent wasn't powerful enough to blitz and flatten him with a single attack.

This was the only weakness of the VOID algorithm, arguably. Its need to gather information could be quite a drawback in certain circumstances where the very act of obtaining information was extremely difficult and potentially even deadly.

Of course, it wasn't as though other Martial Art would fare better than his own. This was most certainly not the case. Rui's VOID algorithm was the only Martial Art that he knew had the necessary potency and prowess to be able to bridge such a gigantic gap between the Martial Artist and the opponent.

Still, it was most certainly not a bad thing to recognize and acknowledge the limitations of one's Martial Art. It was actually quite a good thing and was also something Rui was actually accustomed to, in his former life, at least. He had spent most of the latter half of his career recognizing and attempting to get rid of the flaws, drawbacks, and limitations of the VOID algorithm.

The VOID algorithm had gone through multiple upgrades before, so he wasn't averse to the idea by any means at all. It was just that he had absolutely no idea how to go about it at the moment. Conceptually, the VOID algorithm was extremely sophisticated, he couldn't think of an avenue to improve it fundamentally.

He shook his head. This was a matter for the distant future, certainly not something that he sought to achieve now, with the sheer amount of time and effort it would take, the Shionel Dungeon would have long faded into irrelevance by the time he completed such a gigantic and ambitious endeavor.

## Chapter 928: Plans

"Unfortunately, it's not enough," Rui murmured aloud, informing Kane of his thoughts. "The good news is that I know how to get more data."

"Do you intend to pull off the monster trick once again?" Kane raised an eyebrow.

"No," Rui shook his head. "It's unlikely that we can do something like that again. I got lucky with the python monsters being extremely heat-loving creatures, but there is certainly no way that we can possibly get that lucky again. Manipulating monsters this easily is extremely difficult and the python monsters were the first set of creatures that we ran into that were so easily manipulatable."

Rui didn't hold out any hope of being able to manipulate other monsters the way he did the python monsters. It was statistically too unlikely that he would have a way to manipulate the monsters of any other floors.

"Then what?" Kane asked. "You're not going to be able to get more data unless you figure something out."

"Don't worry," Rui replied. "Ironically, manipulating humans is easier than manipulating monsters."

Kane took a second to process those words, before realizing what Rui's plan was. "You intend to use Chairman Deacon's Martial Squires to get more data for you."

"At this point, I don't see much of another viable choice," Rui sighed.

He had considered several other courses of action. He briefly considered the idea of manually knocking out monsters and dragging them to the Root Floor before dumping them in. Depending on their size, he could possibly get several in at a time with some kind of harness. But he quickly discounted that idea.

"The problem with that idea is that it's too impractical to try and incapacitate monsters as opposed to just killing them," Rui sighed.

Due to their vastly differing physiologies from humans, he didn't even know if he could even knock half of them unconscious. Furthermore, he didn't even know if they would stay that way.

On top of that, how was he supposed to harness them to himself? He didn't want to just tie them and drag them across the tunnels of the Shionel Dungeon. If they somehow broke through, it would be over, and potentially even dangerous if they caught him off-guard.

On top of that, they didn't listen to threats, obviously. He couldn't just tell them to shut up and obey, or they would die if they didn't. Even if he used Fauna Flow to try and convey that, the technique could not make up for stupidity. He would be forced to kill them.

He considered doing something to sabotage the entire floor, forcing them to leave, then sealing off every possible exit that did not lead to the Root Floor, making sure that eventually, they would be forced to enter the Root Floor for a larger space.

But this too was quite impractical, as he quickly realized. Firstly, sabotaging the floor in a manner that would force all the monsters to exit was quite difficult. He did not really have a way of doing that in a pragmatic manner. He considered setting an entire floor on fire, but even ordinary Squire-level monsters were completely impervious to ordinary fire.

They would not be forced to leave the floor just due to fires.

Of course, there was the smoke, even monsters couldn't get rid of their need for oxygen. However, they could just put out the fire with great. Martial Squires and Squire-level monsters could generate powerful shockwaves and gusts of wind with their movements that could easily kill humans, they were more than capable of putting out a fire across the entire floor.

Of course, Rui could try and use an esoteric fuel that generated devastating infernos that would be impossible even for the Squire-level monsters to put out in time but the plan had already started becoming too convoluted. Obtaining large enough amounts of such an esoteric fuel, then spreading it across the entire floor in a manner that didn't kill all the monsters, while also securing their own safety, then making sure that the dungeon didn't inadvertently burn down.

It was far too impractical of a plan.

The smoke from such a fire would clog the tunnels, making breathing absolutely impossible, and this was something that would be detrimental to humans and Martial Squires equally, meaning it could be quite deadly.

"Too much," Rui shook his head.

That was why he had thoroughly ruled out trying to dump more monsters into the Shionel Dungeon. It was not a plan worth following, he did not believe that there were ways in which he could realistically make the plan more feasible and viable.

"Well, humans it is then," Kane shrugged. "It's ironic because humans ought to be harder than monsters to manipulate, but it seems to be the opposite in this case."

"It does feel counterintuitive," Rui concurred. "The issue is that monsters don't play by certain rules. Benefits, incentives, and disincentives. They're too primitive for them to serve as viable test subjects. They're also too weak to give me the more rigorous testing of the Root's capabilities that I desire. On top of that, they won't be able to even weaken or injure the Root before my battle with it."

Kane considered his words. "Ah, so you're also hoping that the Martial Squires associated with Chairman Deacon will weaken the Root to make it easier for you? Feel like that's unrealistic given how strong the Root is if it called all those monsters so quickly.

"Don't underestimate what a thousand Martial Squires and a hundred veteran high-grade Martial Squires can do," Rui replied. "Not to mention the dozen or so grade-ten Martial Squires that stand at the peak of the Squire Realm. Those elites leading the rest of them will be able to hold out for quite some time, I suspect."

"Hm," Kane nodded. "When you put it that way, then yeah, I can definitely get it."

"Still..." Rui continued. "They'll lose. The Root has more than a thousand roots capable of expressing extremely high-grade Squire-level power. Their lack of preparation and understanding of their opponent will seal the deal."

## Chapter 929: Lure

"Unlike me, they will most certainly not possess a rich understanding of what exactly it is that they are dealing with it," Rui continued. "Like with all the previous floors that they have explored, they're supremely confident in the quantity and quality of their raid force."

The raid force and exploration teams of the Deacon alliance were quite powerful, and this gave them the confidence to be quite brave in the manner that they explored dungeons.

There was an unshakable sense of confidence that came with so many powerful Martial Squires gathered densely within a floor to clear whatever monsters they ran into, and plunder all the esoteric ore deposits that they came across.

It also came from the dominating victories that they had against the monsters of each dungeon.

Of course, this didn't mean they lowered their guards and acted sloppily, certainly not. At the end of the day, the Shionel Dungeon was an extremely unsettling place for Martial Squires, just the very fact that their powerful senses were so hampered meant that they could never truly let their guards down in this place. It meant that they could not grow too cocky, even if they tried.

Still, Rui was sure that employing his enemy against his enemy to obtain more intelligence on both of them, but especially the Root, while also weakening it in the process as he cleared the dungeon.

He wasn't sure to what degree they would be able to weaken the Root, after all, he lacked too much of the huge amount of data needed to predict that parameter. But he was certain about the end outcome.

"So you're convinced they'll lose, huh," Kane gave it some thought. "That makes the Root sound even more scary, how is what is basically a quasi-Senior level creature doing in a Squire-level dungeon, honestly."

"It's part of the dungeon, thus it bypasses the rule," Rui reminded him.

"Yeah, but how is a Squire-level dungeon able to produce a quasi-Senior-level organ?" Kane raised an eyebrow.

"You're misunderstanding 'Squire-level' for its physical capabilities," Rui shook his head. "It's a Squire-level dungeon in the sense that only Martial Squires can enter without triggering its defense mechanisms. The actual life form that the fused vegetation has constituted as a whole is a Senior-level being. The Root, being a part of that, is a quasi-Senior level being. The same goes for the Serevian Dungeon, as a whole, the dungeon was probably a level or two weaker than I currently am."

"That makes sense, actually," Kane had to admit. "So when do you plan on executing this plan, how will you even go about it?"

Rui considered the matter. "I could go about it the way I did last time with the sixteenth floor with the tree."

He had purposely lured them into the sixteenth floor by sabotaging the checkpoints that they had set up to be able to track their previous route. They achieved this by relying on technology that contained esoteric substances that were extremely radiative of energy, making tracking them quite easy.

They were originally designed for long-range tracking over extraordinarily large distances, but within the Shionel Dungeon, they could only be tracked if one was within ten meters of them. That was the sheer degree to which the Shionel Dungeon's energy jamming trait affected it.

The exploration method of Deacon Industries involved employing thousands of these to cover massive distances and making sure that they could never lose track of their old paths.

Rui had once shifted the checkpoint trackers and redirected them to a floor that he had wanted them to clear for him.

There was a good chance that he could employ a similar strategy to lure them to the Root Floor.

"Remember that the sixteenth floor that we did end up using this strategy to clear, did end up being a fiasco that ended up giving a lot of clues about our modus operandi to Chairman Deacon," Kane reminded him. "This operation is actually quite similar to that one as it involves using our enemies to trick them, so you do need to be very careful."

"Yeah, you're definitely right about that," Rui nodded. "I actually have a rule. I won't be entering the dungeon until the Martial Squires of Chairman Deacon are all dead or gone."

Kane nodded. This rule prevented the possibility of any Martial Squire ever perceiving him and thereby gaining more clues on him that could increase the probability of them being caught by Chairman Deacon.

Rui definitely did not want such an outcome to happen.

With how much Chairman Deacon hated his guts at the moment, the second that the man found out his identity, he would deploy his formidable power to ensure that Rui gets exterminated. In the worst-case scenario, he might even use the Quarrier Orphanage as leverage, or just massacre them just to spite Rui.

Even if the distance between the Shionel Confederation and the Kandrian Empire exceeded ten thousand kilometers, it was far from insurmountable if Chairman Deacon was willing to go to the lengths when it came to Rui.

That was what Rui was afraid of the most when it come to this entire conflict. It wasn't just losing the battle over the resources of the Shionel Confederation, it was putting himself, and the people he cared about in direct danger.

Thus he intended to make sure that there was absolutely nothing that went wrong in whatever plan he did decide to enact.

"I don't know if I necessarily need to sabotage their tracking and direct them to the Root floor immediately, anyway," Rui mentioned. "They'll find it naturally eventually. Messing with their tracks is more complicated because if the total distance that they have covered does not exceed the shortest distance from the starting point to the Root Floor, then it will be impossible for me to lead them to the Root Floor."

"Why would it?" Kane raised an eyebrow.

"Because distance needs to be conserved. The trackers need to be ten meters from each other regardless of direction so the total distance cannot change, thus if it's lesser than I need it to be, there's nothing that can be done."

## Chapter 930: Reactions

This was part of the reason that Rui was somewhat inclined to get things done less aggressively and more patiently. Not only was there a lot at stake, but the difficulty of matters was higher as well.



"In that case, it's better to let things proceed more naturally, I guess," Kane replied.

"That is what I intend to do," Rui nodded. "At most, that will change at the very end when I'm confident I can exert more fine control."

And so he did.

For the next few weeks, he did not interfere with the exploration teams of Deacon Industries at all. The two sides minded their own business, or at least Rui did, the other side would love to have gotten their hands on him for the juicy bounty that was on his head to this day.

At that time, both sides had begun to explore the very final sections of the Shionel Dungeon.

It had become increasingly clear to the entire world that this chapter in the story of the Shionel Confederation was soon coming to an end.

The response from the populace to this news was more mixed than Rui was expecting. Apparently, he had underestimated how many people were ready to move on, although the number was still lower than the number of people who reacted negatively to this news, it was quite surprising.

A ton of people had gotten sick of the chaos that it brought to the nation. The Shionel Confederation had always been a nation centered around commerce, but there was a limit to how much they could tolerate. The past half year had flooded the nation with such an absurd degree of immigration and competition in the market that many natives were simply unable to cope, and needed to end up leaving the nation. Those that could cope were entirely sick of the exacerbated conditions of the market.

The sheer increase in competitors made the market share that they usually had a claim on, had dwindled down significantly, while the cost of production had risen dramatically. Raw materials and supplies had become a lot harder to source, and the price of owning land, and the difficulty of maintaining even a spot for a stall had all become much more difficult than before.

On top of that, the consumer market had not shot up in balance to the increase in competition in the supplier market. The reason for that was that most of the consumers interested in the Shionel Dungeon's supplies bought from large-scale suppliers that could supply mass batches of supplies.

Corporations like Esosale Suppliers and Deacon Industries sucked up all of the prizes. Small-scale businesses and retailers suffered the most.

These were among the ones that were most relieved by the indications that the exploration of the Shionel Dungeon was coming to an end.

The ones whose livelihood and day-to-day life that wasn't negatively affected by the Shionel Dungeon were naturally in the camp that enjoyed the presence of the Shionel Dungeon in the nation and the exploration of it the most. Those that were positively affected by the Shionel Dungeon were also displeased by the news that the exploration of the dungeon was in its final stages.

Regardless, there was nothing that could be done about it regardless of how one felt about the matter. Nearly two years after its initial discovery, it was quite surreal to many people that this chapter in their lives was finally coming to an end.

The Shionel Confederation was unrecognizable from how it used to be. Even on a map, its sovereign borders had been thoroughly rearranged. The appearance of the dungeon had not strictly fit inside the prior borders of the state thus it had to officially annex certain parts of the territory that contained the Shionel Dungeon. These were previously within the domain of influence of the Shionel Confederation but never officially a part of the nation.

The GDP and GDP per capita of the nation had risen tremendously, and its economy had surpassed that of even the powerhouse nations in the general geopolitical vicinity of that section of the Panama Continent. It had become an economic powerhouse with the sheer amount of wealth and power that was pouring into the nation from the dungeon.

The concentration and density of the Martial Artist population had reached unprecedented heights. There was no other nation in the geopolitical vicinity that had such a high number of Martial Squires within such little area. None of them had ever experienced a state where there were more Martial Squires in the nation than there were Martial Apprentices!

It sounded like an absurd and laughable joke, but it was the actual reality, the Martial Squires in the nation had grown so numerous, they exceeded the Martial Apprentices. There were so many Martial Squires, that Martial Seniors and even Martial Masters were deployed across the entire nation, away from the Dungeon, to monitor the Martial Squires that had flowed into the Shionel Dungeon.

If left unchecked, they could potentially destroy an entire town before the Shionel martial Squires of the military or law enforcement even arrived.

The presence of higher Realm Martial Artists was one of the reasons that the shoving of such large numbers of Martial Squires into a single relatively small nation had not led to a large amount of conflict.

However, the influx of Martial Squires had now slowly begun to turn into an outflux in recent times when word of the twilight of the exploration saga of the Shionel Dungeon spread around. There was no point in showing up to a party that was about to end. Furthermore, the two giants of the Shionel Dungeon had already carved out the spaces of the Shionel Dungeon as their own, there was no room for Martial Squires who was not associated with either as dominating and monopolizing dungeon floors had increasingly become normalized.

As the significance of the Shionel Dungeon began to fade in the minds of the citizens of the Shionel Dungeon, another long-awaited event in the Shionel Confederation was going to arrive.

It was soon going to be time for the election of the next leader of the nation.