

Chapter 119 - Fun and Headaches

Right as Kai was losing hope, a new notification popped up.

Ding

New Feat: All Orange – For learning fourteen orange or higher tier skills before the opening of the Second Seal, you are awarded: +1 Favor!

Initiation to the Mysteries of the Guide - A Deeper Look into Professions, Feats and More contained an achievement for possessing only orange skills before he came of age. Kai had worried that having Hallowed Intuition would rob him of the feat. Thankfully, the Guide allowed for some wiggle room.

With this, Favor returned to its rightful place, firmly leading his attributes. Kai leaned on the headboard of his bed, adjusting the pillow behind his head. Elijah's book fell into his hands. The plain leather cover hid pages of esoteric information.

Why can't feats be easier? I guess that would defeat the point, huh...

He had read those chapters several times. While he had yet to find any loophole or exploit, it helped shine a light on how the Guide rewarded Favor.

The author divided achievements into two unofficial categories: *milestones* and *accomplishments*. Till now Kai had almost exclusively gotten the first.

Milestones were the most straightforward, achievements that worked for every person in the same way. These included the status feats for race and skills, but also for hunting awakened beasts or surviving close-death encounters.

What they all had in common was the clear set of requirements that would grant him Favor, if correctly satisfied.

Then there were *accomplishments*, the more ambiguous bunch. While milestones worked for everybody, these strictly depended on his own circumstances.

The examples the book gave were one more ridiculous than the other. Saving a town from certain destruction, making a revolutionary invention, discovering a forgotten realm or winning a war.

Difficult deeds tied to a specific situation and impossible to repeat in the same way. The accomplishments didn't necessarily have to be so grand. For a common person building a successful business from the ground up or establishing a new settlement could also work.

The metrics were the difficulty of the task, the impact on the world and the grade of self-reliance needed. For a king, using his wealth or status to enact sweeping changes would never reward anything.

At most, a parent or a mentor could set you up for success by placing you in a favorable situation. It was a question of balancing help and challenge, one more suggestion might lose you the chance to gain a feat.

Mysteries of the Guide made clear the Guide couldn't be deceived. No matter how smart somebody was, there were no records of anyone ever succeeding.

That raised a different set of questions regarding its origin. How did it follow strict rules while adapting and making exceptions?

The author supported the theory that the Guide was an intelligent entity. Though Virya had often repeated him there was no definitive proof, only questions and theories. The critics pointed out how the Guide only reacted to people's actions, never taking a proactive approach, as a demonstration it couldn't be a conscious being with a will.

What a headache.

Understanding the underlying mechanisms was interesting, but it had fewer practical applications than he'd like, at least in the short term.

If there was any easy feat, it had to be in the chapters with the don't read warning. Kai put the book back into his spatial closet with a sigh.

I can only strive to be my usual exceptional and humble self.

The knowledge of milestones gave him objectives to strive towards, but it couldn't help him reach them any faster. Hunting a yellow-tier beast sounded like a good way to get himself killed.

As for accomplishments, those were harder to predict and would push him into the spotlight. Perhaps plotting a revolution against the Republic might work—if he disregarded the bloody consequences.

Kai hoped to keep a low profile until he got a profession. Attention was like a bright light that blinded him and attracted bloodsucking mosquitoes. Without anyone to watch his back, he'd rather do without.

Maybe Reishi got a feat for his business... Wait! Could I get one too by brewing potions?

The merman's talk about dominating the local market echoed in his mind. Even though he could never know for sure with accomplishments, that checked all the boxes.

Making money would catch attention, but he had already accepted he couldn't hide his Alchemy. He had been the apprentice of a powerful and mysterious master, something exceptional was to be expected. Better to show them that than any of his fighting capabilities.

Earning money would make him a valuable asset, while being able to cast offensive spells made him a threat. If someone thought brewing potions was all he knew, they were in for a very nasty surprise. With any luck it would just remain paranoid self-talk.

The biggest danger was always the one you didn't see coming, that was true for both him and for other people.

With a little luck, Reishi would be able to keep away the flies. At worst, someone would try to wring him out of his profits.

Kai hadn't forgotten the meeting with Zerith. Even if the captain didn't have nefarious intentions and was only an eccentric dude, there would be other people to be wary of.

He yawned, slipping inside the covers of his bed.

One problem at a time, I can deal with that in the morning.

Scouting new locations for his lab, Kai ended up opting for poshtown since he wasn't the one paying. If he planned to make waves, he might as well do it comfortably.

"Huh, he said that?" Reishi frowned. "I'm sorry I didn't warn you, I didn't think that would be a problem."

They were walking down the shopping district. Sparkling windows showcased merchandise on both sides.

The merman wore a cape with a wide hood to avoid curious glances. Merfolk weren't as rare in Sylspring, but they tended to stay near the docks. The dark blue fabric was interwoven with delicate shining runes. With a cursory glance, Kai recognized some cooling and concealment runes.

"Was he lying?" Kai tried to keep his voice down. Even though Reishi told him it didn't matter, he couldn't help it. He almost expected Zerith to jump out of one of the blooming shrubberies that decorated the street.

"Yes and no. That would be a large stretch of the law, close to outright theft." Reishi clicked his tongue in distaste. "My father told me of *such* possibilities, but they rarely happen around here. The governor needs the wealth merchants bring. He needs us much more than we need him. If the Republic starts fleecing us, we can always sail our ships elsewhere."

"So I shouldn't worry?" Being optimistic and hoping for the best wasn't his usual approach.

"Not as long as you are with me. You are safe like the gold in my vault," the merman grinned, showing his sharp teeth. "Trust me, I already pay an outrageous amount in fees and taxes. They can't afford to scare me away."

"Maybe you should have used that in the negotiations."

"I would never use such underhanded tactics with a friend."

Kai looked at him with skepticism, "You didn't think of it."

"Fine, I didn't think of it," Reishi admitted with a shrug. "In my defense, that would have been hard to sell as a real benefit before you met that officer."

"You were too eager to get my shiny pearl."

“Yeah, the best deal of the year.”

Kai stopped in his tracks. “Did you rip me off?”

It was only an orange treasure, it couldn't have been worth much more than that. He's just trying to win the argument.

“I've paid more than a fair price for its crafting uses. *However...* What do you think will happen if I put the pearl on display in a shop window?”

Damn, greedy fish.

Kai wanted to kick himself, he could already see it. The golden pearl would capture the eye of every passerby. No advertisements would be more effective in attracting people to a shop.

The smug smirk on Reishi's face was maddening. “Maybe you should have used that in the negotiations. Oh, I think this is the place.”

They had turned into one of the side alleys, a street over from the main avenue. Kai suppressed his annoyance and looked up to see an unassuming wooden building.

“This is it?”

It appeared decently built but paled in comparison to its flashy neighbors. Only the higher mana density proved they were still inside poshtown, barely.

“They told me it looks better on the inside,” Reishi hurried to open the door with a silver key. “I thought you would appreciate the quieter area.”

Yeah, I'm sure the price didn't have anything to do with it.

The first room looked spacious and empty. It was well-lit, with the windows placed high enough not to meet the eye of the passersby. The walls were unexpectedly sturdy, muffling the clamor of the town. Kai crouched to check the floorboards: they were also perfectly even without the shadow of a nail sticking out.

“See, not bad. Plain but functional.”

Kai remained impassive. “Where’s the bathroom?”

Naturally, there was only one door inside.

“This way,” Reishi played along, leading the way.

Maintaining his aloofness, Kai marched after him. With Improvisation every gesture flowed without effort.

A short hallway held three different doors. The first two they checked were about the same size, a bit larger than his bedroom and, finally, there was the most fundamental room. The one that would decide the fate of this place.

“Does this satisfy your requirements?” Reishi invited him to check the bathroom with a theatrical flair.

“Mhmm...” There was a granite sink, a toilet and a bathtub. Passable. “I prefer to have tiles in my bathroom.” His foot tapped on the wooden flooring.

“I’ll take care of that and furnish the place to a reasonable degree,” Reishi generously conceded.

“Excellent,” Kai gave a curt nod. Testing the faucet of the sink, a cold jet of water touched his fingers, twice as strong as the one at home. Same with the bathtub. He could even see a few runes shine in the piping. No doubt the privileges of choosing poshtown.

I knew those cheapskates were holding out on me.

“This can work.” Kai reluctantly admitted. “I’ll need supplies to add a heating enchantment.”

Reishi stared at him, baffled. “You can do enchantments too?”

Oops, I forgot he didn’t know yet.

“I dabble, but I’m not nearly as good as an alchemist,” Kai said dismissively before the merman could get any idea.

From the thoughtful look in Reishi’s blue eyes, he wasn’t sure he was successful. “Write me a list of what you need, and I’ll sell them at cost.”

“Isn’t this part of the *furnishing*? And this building is still yours, I’d be increasing the value of the property.”

Reishi weighed the options with a calculating look. “Fine. Send a list to my mansion.”

“And people say merfolk are all greedy.” Kai smiled brightly. Making the proper ink required testing, and who knew, he might even get enough for his family bathroom.

Reishi scoffed. “Don’t make me regret it. We need to discuss what potions you are going to brew, their quantity *and* quality.”

“I can’t wait to start *as soon as* the place is ready.”

“It won’t take more than a week. You have my word.”

The next few days flew by. Shopping for his new place with someone else’s money was great. The budget for furniture was a few silvers, still more than Kai was used to spending. He had never bought much apart from mana herbs.

All he had to do was point at something, and the crew Reishi hired would figure out how to carry it to his new place. It was amazing. No need to worry about logistics or bureaucracy.

Who knew ordering people around was so much fun?

He practiced mana skills with Ele, while in the mornings he trained with Kea. Naturally, she hadn’t forgotten. Two days after their marathon, Kea waited in front of his door at dawn.

They opted for a slightly more sensible dip in the sea. Kai kept a close eye to make sure she didn’t drown herself to keep up with him. Swimming wasn’t her strong suit. Halfway through the exercises on the shore, she vomited on an empty stomach.

At least she didn’t collapse or faint, let’s call that progress.

Thank the spirits, Kea agreed to only follow him once a week. She was still having trouble accepting her limits and he couldn’t really focus on his training when he had to make sure she didn’t kill herself.

Every other spare moment of time was spent on Virya's puzzle. Kai managed to solve two more layers, causing the cube to reset each time. He had no clue how many more were there.

Would a red skill like Decoding make a difference?

Evolving Acting to Orange gave him the chance to switch skills with few losses. But he remained hesitant. Even at level 1, Improvisation wasn't going to be pleasant to discard. He wanted to be sure before getting knocked out for a day.

Figuring out the solution to unlock a new level of the cube was only half the equation. The riddle also tested his mana control, requiring him to weave increasingly complicated patterns.

Both parts were equally challenging, and there would be little point in improving one if the other couldn't keep up. He needed to see how far he could go before hitting a wall to decide.

I can wait till I reach Orange ★★★.

That would lessen the backlash of abandoning Improvisation and give him time to consider his options.

That same day, Kai also received the ingredients to concoct the ink. Following the recipe of *Kai's Handy Mixture*, it took only a few tries to perfect a working solution. There were plenty of ingredients to use, how could he have known he would get it right so easily?

I'm just that good.

With the specialization of Inspect focused on patterns, Kai chose an ambitious design. He managed to add both a gathering array and a rechargeable battery for when the ambient mana wasn't enough.

“I just have to push my mana here?” Moui put his hand on the small focus crystal, driving a flood of mana through. The runes shone to his naked eyes.

Kai barely had time to pull away his hand before the array burned out. “Not that fast.” He dashed in front of the shower to protect it.

The network of runes and ink were holding, though he noticed a few lines fizzling.

“You said I *just* had to push my mana inside.” Moui pointed out without an ounce of shame.

Damn brute. Ele was able to get it on the first try.

“I didn’t say to push half your mana at once.”

“It wasn’t that much,” the hunter looked more radiant than usual. “I’m still getting used to the changes.”

“What do you mean?”

No, not when I am so close to reaching you!

“You didn’t—“

Mana Sense quickly confirmed it. Moui’s mana veins were blinding.

“Just this morning. You aren’t the only one training.” The hunter looked entirely too pleased with himself.

