

CHAPTER 149 – THE SAGE’S SPOILS

Unwilling to wait any longer, Raiko accepted the Dungeon Quest’s rewards all at once.

Coffer by coffer appeared around her in a semi-circle. Kneeling, she popped open one chest after the other. Though she didn’t like to compare herself to Sam, she knew she was far more efficient than he was.

Everything was still so new and bright to him. He savored every new experience. To Raiko, these things, such as they are, were like old friends. She understood them, translated them from a long life of adventure and heroics that she now was able to do all over again.

This time, she’d do it better.

Already, she had spent too long looking over what Alchemist had to offer and discussing it with Sam.

While it was in no way time wasted, multiple things needed to be tended to. She didn’t necessarily need the Mana Engine hauled over to begin. The others could do that.

Delegation had never been a strong trait of hers, but if a restart instigated by the *literal apocalypse* wasn’t the time for self-improvement, when was?

In any case, there were more important matters that demanded her attention.

The dullahans were missing. That, more than anything, screamed of something wrong. And while Sam needed longer to recover, she didn’t.

Raiko glanced over at him, wondering if he was sleeping. His hands were clasped oddly beneath the water, but aside from Komachi sleeping on his head, there was nothing odd. At least, no odder than all the other things she'd seen on Earth.

It was a clear sign of his need for convalescence, and an opportunity for Raiko to prove herself more than equal to the challenges ahead.

Or so she hoped.

The soul aeder separation debuff was growing more severe by the hour. She wasn't sure what would happen if it upgraded—or downgraded, depending on how you thought about it—in tier again.

Once anyone let one of those creatures into their spirit, you weren't meant to abruptly lose contact for extended periods of time. If it was prepared, maybe, but that wasn't what happened.

Haman was closer, Raiko was sure of it. Sil'mara was ever so slowly heading towards the little pobul. But her sense of him was muted, indistinct. It was difficult to tell anything more than that little tidbit, and she doubted it would grow stronger unless they were very near.

Raiko was determined to grow Alchemist into either the Artificer or Enchanter Profession. Some careful planning was needed to get there. Or just an incredible amount of luck.

She wasn't going to count on that. It was her intention—her hope, really—that by focusing on certain parts of Alchemist, she could shape what future evolutions were offered.

A small, tiny part of her was afraid that the Professor had been mistaken.

And she was stuck with Alchemist.

She shoved aside the fear, turning her thoughts towards how to go about achieving her goals.

Maybe there would even be an achievement in it for her.

No use in dealing with poisons. Likely the road to walk would be mana potions, refined inks, and certain tinctures. Things that were tangentially the building blocks to enchanting or artificing.

Unlike most starting from the bottom, Raiko had a knowledgeable Professor to ask questions and a host of experiences to rely on.

Once she could get that [Spirit Lantern] fueled up and put somewhere safe, that is.

It was true Raiko used to be an Alchemist on old Islegard, before the shattering ascension. Though, Raiko's practice of Alchemy had been taken into a less than standard direction, anyway.

Most Alchemists had not been able to put enchanting-like effects into their potions. At the time, those potions fetched a high price.

Too bad she didn't have that treasure vault anymore.

Despite the jokes made about her, she actually used to be a solo leveler with a soul aeder companion. That wasn't the case anymore.

Even the soul aeder part, she thought miserably.

There was strength amongst friends. Besides, she would be a fool to walk away from a War Incarnate who wasn't after her head. It was still worth it even after dealing with the harsh grief of losing another Incarnate so recently.

The prospect had just been more difficult to accept. She didn't tell Sam, but she spent quite a while following him on Earth, trying and failing to spirit him away.

At the time, she needed him to fight at the Shard's End, and nothing more. Eventually, Raiko realized that she wanted more than that.

To level together in the new world.

Now things between them had gotten a bit more complicated, but the last thing she wanted to do was tell him that. Being vulnerable was more terrifying than any monster.

Hopefully, Sam didn't remember her telling him that she needed him as he lay there dying.

As a solo leveler, being able to use potions to recover resources without anyone else to rely on was necessary at the time. The upside, aside from the infamy she built up from defeating various boss monsters, was that there was nobody else around that you had to worry about getting hurt and dying.

Haman was the exception. Always had been.

Now, Raiko could develop her gifts in a more specialized direction, rather than prioritizing sheer survival and never crafting anything truly wondrous.

From the [Dungeon Accessory Coffers (Copper Grade)], Raiko pulled out a rather plain looking necklace. The most remarkable thing about it, aside from its curious enhancements, was that the material resembled polished bone.

[Protean Necklace -1]

(Relic) (F-Class)

Enhancements

+1% Refresh Effect

+1% MP

An old, worn smooth necklace of interconnected cube pieces of a bone-like material. A miniscule trace of Ancient Magic lingers faintly in this relic.

Raiko wondered if that enhancement would work on [Glyph: Refresh]. It did seem to be the case.

Aside from straight up stats, the relic's enhancement uniquely and directly affected her ability to buff. Not just herself, but anyone else.

With nothing else competing for the space, Raiko equipped the necklace immediately after giving it a cursory look for any curses.

Unlike old Islegard, there didn't appear to be any limitations as to how much gear you could equip at once, aside from logical restrictions. For example, a gauntlet wouldn't fit over another gauntlet.

The necklace slipped easily beneath the scarf. Perhaps if they were both scarves, it wouldn't work.

So far, Raiko hadn't seen any cursed items yet, but it was possible they were out there. It didn't seem out of the realm of possibilities that a system driven reward might turn out to be cursed.

If anything, the Dark Vault reward seemed a greater candidate for that occurrence, but arguably, that's what the mystery mimic would've been.

Even if it was rather upfront about it.

Somehow, Chompers turned out different.

The only explanation why the mimic hadn't aggroed the whole party and opened up with their signature [Deathtrap] ability, swiftly killing them all in a massive area of effect, was soul aeder magic.

Komachi had fundamentally reworked his monstrous being, even when she herself was struggling to become a fully fledged soul aeder.

Raiko couldn't sense any lingering hostility in the creature, however muted her capabilities were in that regard compared to her previous self.

Chompers seemed, in all ways, socialized. Domesticated.

Much like any dog companion would be by those that genuinely cared for him.

From the [Dungeon Sheath Coffers (Copper Grade)], Raiko picked up a sheath finely worked with golden strokes of a far eastern dynasty's lettering.

[Quickdraw Sheath]
(Accessory) (F-Class)
(★★ Unusual II)

Enhancements

Quickdraw V
Spellcasting Speed II
Expansion I

Enchantments

Manatuned V

A sheath suitable for spellblades and shinobi alike that favor a curved blade as their spellcasting focus with an advantage of a fast

unsheathing speed. Automatically adjusts to the wearer's weapon, provided it is of a light variety.

Swapping out sheaths at her hip, she flipped her katana over to situate it in her new item, but stopped.

Damaged and worn, it wasn't likely to survive another battle. That was one of the issues with both smaller weaponry and manatuned items. Their durability sucked.

That was just one of the many reasons she wanted to pursue a more advanced magic style of crafting. To properly maintain, and possibly even create manatuned weaponry.

Who knows, maybe it's possible there's something even better than the manatuned enchantment.

It was obvious to Raiko by now that whatever loot the Dungeon awarded was mostly things that belonged to the Aker Academy or were once related to it in some way.

Whether the items were directly plucked from its halls, she didn't know for sure. Hopefully not, as they could've just gone and collected the loot themselves.

Too bad I didn't get a new belt. That'd be useful, but this is a good haul as it is. Manatuned items are hard to come by, Raiko thought, feeling satisfied with the loot rewards.

She checked the contents of the opened [Dungeon Weapon Coffers (Copper Grade)]. With great surprise, she found another katana. And manatuned at that.

There was no way these items weren't specialized for her. Two manatuned items from a single Dungeon was nothing less than incredible.

Truly, this realm was more sophisticated and advanced than the last. Often in old Islegard, whatever hauls you got from a Dungeon weren't even suited for your Job.

That wasn't as bad for a party. They could trade equipment with one another, or even cast lots for who wanted what. But it was hell on a solo leveler.

For yet another day, she could put off fixing her damaged manatuned equipment. Hopefully, this one would be a little bit hardier than the last one.

[Ghoststeel Uchigatana]

(Enchanted Katana) (F-Class)

(★★ Unusual II)

Enhancements

Magic Damage VII

Draw Speed V | Swing Speed V

Ghost Damage V

Durability Up II

Piercing II

Enchantments

Manatuned VII

Imbuements

Ghost Mana III

Metal Mana III

One of Aker Academy's finer treasures from a lost far eastern dynasty of Islegard. The manatuned enchantment remains strong despite the weapon's age, not diluted into its lesser enhancement form. Crafted from an ethereal metal, further reinforced with a durability enhancement, this curved katana excels at both speed and magic damage.

Raiko sighed with relief. It was the strongest weapon she had acquired thus far. This katana, more than any of the other rewards, was by far the best.

Even if it wasn't of a higher rarity than her nearly broken weapon, it was still incredibly useful to have more manatuned katanas. She planned on always having a backup in her Inventory, just in case.

She didn't have much else to fall back on if she lost her weapon, other than [Spiritblade]. A different spellcasting focus might work for rifts, but certainly not as well.

And she didn't really want to try. Monsters were getting increasingly more dangerous. Perhaps monsters that spawned from a Dungeon Core were worse, but Raiko wouldn't bet her—or Sam's—life on it.

Turning the blade over, she noticed the faint pattern across the mostly transparent metal. It was unlikely that the material the blade was forged from would take well to any kind of physical damage. Blood mana wouldn't synergize well with ghoststeel.

Pleased with the Unusual rarity weapon, Raiko slid the curved blade into her new sheath.

The accessory combined with the blade would unleash even more highly damaging rifts. The piercing enhancement was quite the find, too. That would increase the likelihood that even typical rifts

might pierce through a monster and strike another in the magic's path.

Looking back through her doubled memories, one in her spiritform and another as that hollow creature defending the tree, she recalled that was one of the effects imparted to her Chaos rifts.

It had increased her area of effect damage to a devastating degree. Well suited to dealing with any high number of enemies, such as had been the case at the time.

She didn't mind the lack of armor. Her current set, the [Sage Domaru Armorset] was quite unusual in that it had enhancements improving her particular brand of magic.

Eventually, she might have to leave it behind in favor of something else that imparted greater defenses, resistances, and even stats.

At the moment, she had no such other options.

Raiko had some hope there was a way to move enhancements, enchantments, *and* imbuelements from one piece of equipment to another.

She wasn't quite sure how that would translate across gear of varying rarities, but she'd cross that bridge when she got to it, or just burn it all down and jump the preverbal ravine herself.

Raiko had done it before, and there was no doubt in her mind that she'd do it again.