

CHAPTER 148 – SUITING UP

“Raiko, do you still have Dual Wield?” Sam asked, remembering the way she fought at Shard’s End.

“Sadly, no,” she said with a pensive sigh. “I’ve been desperately on the lookout for it from what abilities, skills and spells Ninja offers. Makes sense though. Technically, it’s a bit more advanced when wielding magic through a weapon. Might have to pick up Dual Wield the old-fashioned way.”

“What do you mean?”

“Used to be you could learn various skills by training, typically through manuals or a teacher of sorts, rather than just being presented it from leveling up your Job. If it still works like that. I haven’t seen a sign of it yet.”

Sam hefted his two colossal greatswords, getting a feel for their weight. “I saw somebody pick up a skill like that once, just by trying. Didn’t even train.”

“Who?”

“Kylie, I think. The Scout.”

“Probably not a Scout anymore.”

“No way. She’s a survivor,” Sam said stiffly.

“Sorry, didn’t mean it like that. She’s likely onto her Second Order Job by now is all.”

“Wish I knew where they were.”

“We’ll find them,” Raiko assured him. “She, along with the rest of your friends, are out there.”

“We could sure use more people.” Sam found himself wondering if they had already gotten to Copper Rank or not. What Jobs had his friends picked and did they find Professions of their own as well?

He could only assume the Ascension Gems, still waiting to be accepted, might offer more Professions. Particularly useful for anyone without one already.

Despite the odds, he held onto hope that he'd find them again, and offer the Ascension Gems to them in case they needed them.

After a while, his arms trembling with the effort of upholding the weapons, Sam stored his [Dullahan Greatsword], and sheathed the [Vulcan Blade] into his [Biting Sheath].

The pommel glowed a faint red in the failing light.

Aside from the Ascension Gems, Sam only had one reward remaining. He pulled the [Dungeon Armor Coffers (Copper Grade)] closer and cracked open the lid.

Light spilled out as the contents were sorted according to whatever magic dictated such things, and Sam found a beautiful blue metal cuirass edged in gold. It clashed horribly with the rest of his Thanas armor, which had been steeped in the aura of an ogre and looked it.

Meanwhile, this piece of armor looked like something a fantasy Paladin would wear. It was lean and yet heroically imposing, with runic symbols running down the pauldrons and across the infinitely fine scales that fitted so perfectly where there was a need for movement between the plates.

[Almorak Cuirass]

(Heavy Armor) (F-Class)

(★★ Unusual IV)

Enhancements

Physical Defense X | Slashing Defense X

Blunt Defense V | Piercing Defense V

Magical Defense IV | Status Resist V

+12 Strength | +12 Vigor

+12 Arcane | +12 Mind

Crafted from a special alloy that has been lost to the annals of time, this cuirass is from the now-gone Almorak people who had once been the pride of Islegard royalties across the Worldshard.

Considered some of the finest Swordsmen, Knights, and Commanders alike, these proud people were often tapped to become Royal Guards, personal consorts, and bodyguards to many monarchies across the Worldshard. Only those who share in their ideals and skills may don this armor. Though the Almorak are gone, their legacy lives on, and they would not see it besmirched by those unfit to join their ranks.

Requires: [Swordsman] Job

Copper Rank

Sam looked over at the [Thanas Cuirass], picking it up and comparing the two.

He had expected a bigger jump in stats, but only because the Almorak piece had both Arcane and Mind as well.

Still... he was impressed. The defensive enhancements were substantial on the [Almorak Cuirass].

[Thanas Cuirass]

(Heavy Armor) (F-Class)

(★★ Uncommon II)

Enhancements

Physical Defense V | Slashing Defense III

Magical Defense I | Deathblow Resistance II

+7 Strength | +7 Vigor

A rare set of armor created from tempered Dark Bronze. It has been saturated with the menacing aura of an ogre for so long that it has taken on some of the ogre's strength, imparting a variety of stat bonuses to the wearer. While heavy and unimbued, this armor boasts impressive defenses and enhancements. Those who do not meet the minimum Strength requirement will find the armor cumbersome and difficult to move in. Endowed with the indefatigable might of an ogre, this cuirass increases the wearer's resistance to damage that would bring them below 1 HP.

Requires: >38 Strength

With his Blacksmithing Profession trickling knowledge into his mind, Sam could tell immediately the craftsmanship and quality of the pieces were worlds apart.

And this went far beyond just the higher rarity. But by rarity alone, the [Almorak Cuirass] was in a class unto itself.

Its resistances and defenses were more than double the [Thanas Cuirass'], and it had status effect resistance as well as significantly higher Magical Defense.

The only thing it lacked was Deathblow Resistance, which was useful until he remembered that trading the *potential* to not go down with significantly higher mitigation was a stupid move.

Sure, it might stop him from being killed, but higher defenses would *definitely* stop him from being killed. It was like relying on [Endure] after he had discovered that the trait didn't work 100% of the time.

Sam opened up his Inventory and stuffed the [Thanas Cuirass] inside, pressing his hand onto the [Almorak Cuirass] and bonding to it instead.

His stats bounced around for a few seconds as the 7 Strength and Vigor were shed, then immediately were replaced with 12 Strength, Vigor, Arcane, *and* Mind.

Now that feels weird, he thought with amusement.

A quick look at his HP and MP showed that they now had a maximum of 6,496 and 2,017 respectively. A significant jump for his MP, less so for his HP.

Sam's last reward was the 3 [Wildcard Ascension Gems (Profession)]. A quick glance at them showed that they contained Professions that cycled rapidly in a flash of images constantly changing.

They reminded Sam of those blocks in Super Mario Bros. where you tried to line up three of a kind to get a power-up. He caught sight of a hammer and knew it was Blacksmith, but he also saw many others that he couldn't figure out.

The item's description was plain. Upon squeezing tightly, one of the Professions on display would be chosen and the Ascension Gem would change to that Profession.

I've already picked mine, Sam thought, stashing them into his Inventory as well. He heard them rattle around in there and wondered if the place ever got shaken up.

Curious, he peeked into his pouch, looking at all the items, shut it, then shook the thing viciously before peeking again.

No change.

One mystery solved, only a million more to go.

They would no doubt be incredibly useful later on. Either as something to sell to people who still hadn't gotten a Profession, or to provide with new allies that could use a Profession.

Sam turned back around and slumped down into the pool, letting the rejuvenating waters lap around his chin. Komachi stretched out on top of his head, falling asleep like she had ever since she was a kitten, and Sam couldn't help but reminisce.

It had been what felt like an age since he had been back in Hawai'i. There would be no more HEMA tournaments, no retail work, no shitty apartment, or a string of disappointing dates.

Things were different now. So very different.

He had a path to power and a real shot at changing things, even if it only affected his little Skyshard. He had friends and allies that he never thought possible.

Kale was going to flip his lid when he saw that Kai and Matt were welcomed on Sil'mara. He just hoped that his best friend hadn't changed much since.

For once, things finally started to look up for Sam.

There was that horrid Black City stalking them high above and far behind—but catching up rapidly—that helped to dispel the usual anxiety-induced fears of “too good to be true”.

He had a hard time convincing himself that this couldn't last or some random event was going to drop out of the sky and burn every last thing he built when he could literally point at the looming problem and say “yeah that'll be an issue”.

More than anything, Sam wanted to get to crafting. He had never been the type of person to make something with his hands—not

very well, at any rate—and he was absolutely thrilled to be able to smith things now.

He had the tools, the means, and the drive... but his body was still on the mend. The Sacred Tree worked its magic, but even with Komachi's new spell, he was a long way away from his peak.

Injuries took longer to heal than simple HP, and Sam's body was a roadmap of injuries too numerous to list.

They weren't in such dire straits that he needed to pull himself out early, but it still bothered him immensely that he had to just... sit and wait while everybody else got to enjoy their Professions.

He didn't begrudge them their levels and the power that came with that, but he sorely wished he could join them. There was little concern in his mind that he couldn't catch up if he put his mind to it.

And Sam certainly didn't worry that somebody was going to be stronger than him. Not only did that seem highly unlikely considering his monstrous stats, but because he wouldn't have minded it, anyway.

In fact, he probably would have enjoyed the challenge and rivalry.

Raiko seemed to be the chief contender for a rival, but she was practically his opposite. She was fast as lightning, and he was slow. Like a glacier.

Well, perhaps not *that* slow, especially when he had Komachi's buffs on him, but he was still no match for her in terms of raw speed.

But that hardly mattered when she couldn't take a punch to save her life. All it would take was one good hit, and she'd likely be down for the count.

Which made Sam wonder if there was some method of sparring or training that allowed people to go all out without having to worry about such pesky little things like accidentally killing your opponent.

Training would presumably go much further if he didn't have to hold back, but he couldn't imagine there was some sort of Shard-enforced ruling magic that would stop it.

Duels were a thing, but they were also a thing back on Earth and those most definitely ended in deaths way back when.

Komachi's large fluffy paws began to twitch. Her little black beans pressed into his forehead and kneaded gently as she slept on peacefully.

I bet she's having some good dreams, Sam thought, smiling and looking up at his cat.

And then it hit him how much he would have felt alone and depressed without her around. She was as much a part of him as the sun, surf, and beach were.

He could handle the lack of the ocean—as weird and unsettling as it was—because there was a wide open sky around him. In a way, it resembled the ocean. And while there weren't any beaches, he was confident he could find a [Beach Tile]. Failing that, he was sure that one could be made from its component parts.

But life without Komachi?

Never.

She was his little golden fluff ball. He still remembered the day she had just showed up at his door, scratching and meowing so sweetly and pathetically that there was no way he could have refused her.

Not that she gave him any choice.

The moment he had unlocked and unlatched all the locks to his apartment door, she barged in and made herself at home.

So how would Raiko be feeling right now? Seeing him with Komachi and knowing that her Haman was out there somewhere, maybe scared and alone?

Sam shut his eyes and resolved to find Haman. By any means necessary.

Against his better judgement, Sam clasped his hands beneath the waters and began to pray, but in his unique style, *Volquist, you're going to help me find Haman, and here's why...*