

Chapter 89 - Closing Deals

Kai followed Reishi inside the warehouse with Flynn. Large crates and chests were orderly piled and moved by half a dozen busy workers.

“My apologies, I didn’t recognize your guest, master Reishi.” Merchant Revhani continued fawning over the merfolk till they reached an office. A lavish meeting room with two sofas around a coffee table.

“Revhani, could you take care of the refreshments for my guests.” Kai wasn’t an expert in merfolk’s body language, but he easily recognized forced courtesy when he heard it.

“Of course, master Reishi. I’ll bring the finest refreshments.”

Closing the door behind him, the merman let out another grumble and invited them to take a seat. “He came with the ship. And he’s surprisingly good at sniffing out a bargain.”

“Do you not travel on the *Fortuna* anymore?” Kai asked.

“That’s my father’s ship. He took it with him when he left. Right now, he’s probably sailing down the Golden Coast chasing profit.”

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

“No need. I have three vessels now and it was my decision to stay behind. The economy of the archipelago is rapidly expanding. It would have been a waste to leave after spending so much time familiarizing with the region and building contacts.” Reishi passed his scaled hand over his tired eyes, even the yellow and silver crest going down his back flopped down. Kai didn’t fail to notice both the merfolk race and profession had advanced from last time, reaching Orange ★★★ and orange grade.

“Sorry, I didn’t want to bother you with the details. It’s been a while since I had a conversation about anything else. Tell me about you. Did you also start employing more people?” He gestured to Flynn.

“Oh, no. He is just a... temporary companion. He’s helping me out around Sylspring since I was new to town.”

Busy observing the richly decorated interior, Flynn made no snide remarks of his grandiosity and nodded distractedly.

Revhani came back with a woman carrying a fuming porcelain teapot with three cups and an excessive number of biscuits. “I had these baked this morning and ordered the tea from the mainland for a special occasion. I’m sure you’ll find it to your liking.”

“Thank you. You don’t mind also fetching Kai’s order, do you?” Reishi stopped the merchant who was about to sit down with them.

“I could send an attendant,” Revhani said, eyeing the sofa and food with clear desire.

“There is no one I trust as much as you.” Reishi smiled.

“Then, of course, I’ll provide.” He gave a short bow making his triple chin jiggle around.

“Flynn, why don’t you go with him to negotiate the final prices,” Kai said to help Reishi get rid of the merchant and get some privacy.

Revhani stopped, throwing him an annoyed look.

“I’m sure it won’t take much.” Reishi intervened. “But do send someone to bring the Water sphere, we’ll personally deal with it. As my father always says: business before pleasure.”

With no way out, the merchant gave one last mournful look at the tea and biscuits. “Naturally. It won’t take much to negotiate the prices. Come, boy.”

Oh, you poor deluded soul. Have fun.

Flynn stepped on his foot disgruntled when standing up. Kai almost felt bad, but he was paying him for that, and he hadn’t missed how the pile of biscuits was already noticeably smaller.

Waiting for the steps to grow faint, Kai and Reishi shared a knowing smile.

“Somehow I can’t imagine Sehn saying business before pleasure.”

“We are merchants, not soldiers. My father loves mixing the two.” The merman leaned forward to pour two cups of tea.

It had a pleasant fresh scent, the flavor didn’t disappoint either. Each sip he could recognize a different taste. “This is really good,” Kai said, surprised.

Not as good as Virya’s, but close.

“I bet, it’s solu’ferr tea. Revhani bought it for himself. It’s only produced by an order of monastic nuns. This is their cheapest product. It goes for a silver a cup, without travel costs.”

Kai froze, staring at the golden liquid in shock.

And I thought I was being extravagant by spending a handful of copper mesars on touristy food.

“You don’t mind if I take another cup, do you?”

“Go ahead, you are my guest. Tell me what you’ve been up to. I could really use an alchemist. Every competent one around here has a shop of their own or is already contracted by the Republic.”

Kai gave him some vague information about his training to be polite. “Unfortunately, my master expects me to come back as soon as I’m done here.” Elijah might have agreed if he informed him beforehand, but he didn’t believe in asking for forgiveness rather than permission.

“There is really no chance?”

“Depends. I’ll probably come back at some point, and I might bring some potions to sell.”

With a knock on the door, an attendant entered and carefully placed a small ornate chest on the table. A network of runes stopped Kai from peeking inside.

“You can open it. I acquired it for you after all.” Reishi said, tapping on the chest which made a metallic sound as if he turned an invisible key.

Kai didn’t have to be told twice. From how the merman separated this item from the rest and its name, he already had a suspicion of what it was. Slowly lifting the lid, a deep blue crystal sphere rested on a velvet cushion.

The closer he looked the more the orb colors swirled, as if water was flowing inside, the dark blue growing to lighter tones.

Picking it up, it didn't feel cold like he imagined. The Water sphere shone with increased brightness to both his senses. He could almost hear the churning waves as he peered at its whirling form.

With a swift motion, Kai let it fall back into its box and stepped back.

"Just as it was getting interesting," Reishi complained.

Kai gave him a cold smile. "I guess it measures my elemental affinity to water."

The merman sighed, picking the crystal up. "Yes, it works faster if you push Water mana inside." The sphere shone with a blue light, reaching around the same brightness as when Kai held it before it stopped.

"That's quite the affinity!" Kai exclaimed.

"Meh... about 40 points. Average at best for a merfolk. Why don't you show me how bright you can make it?" Reishi smiled, offering him the orb.

"Pass." Kai shook his head with no intention of taking it.

"I can give you a discount on it."

"Still pass."

"Half price."

"Nope."

Reishi took a long sip of tea. "Fine, for free."

Does he want to know so badly? I might have been tempted if I were actually spending my own money.

"How accurate is the reading?" Kai asked instead.

"Quite accurate. About a five-point range, if you're good at interpreting it."

That's not that good. And it only does one element.

"It can become even better if you inscribe it with the right enchantment. But it's pretty finicky to make, which means rare and expensive." He paused. "Oh, I see why your master bought it. It never gets boring with you around."

Kai used Acting to avoid letting anything else slip. Refusing to use the sphere even after Reishi offered it for free already spoke volumes, the merman wasn't someone who'd miss that.

"What kind of potions would you be interested in buying and how do I contact you if I don't find you in Sylspring?" Sometimes there was no way to win, he could only minimize the losses.

Kai's conviction to have someone else deal with merchants was doubly reinforced. Reishi fought him on every tiny detail of their deal, even though they were only sketching the lines of a possible agreement. Outside the warehouse, the sun had reached its zenith.

He must have been upset I refused to share my affinity.

Kai reluctantly put the chest with the Water sphere into his backpack. His curiosity could wait for the privacy of the inn.

“Can I get paid now?” Flynn mumbled furiously munching on a biscuit.

Despite Reishi giving Kai a hard time, they finished earlier than them. Behind his obnoxious attitude, merchant Revhani was quite competent and made Mr. Haggler sweat each step.

“Catch.” Kai was hoping to catch him unprepared, but Flynn's swift hand easily caught the coin.

The boy stared at the piece of silver mystified, a crumb falling off his mouth as he forgot to chew. That was several times what they agreed. Kai wasn't sure how much Flynn helped him save, but it should be more than that.

It's Elijah's money anyway.

“Can I get another silver?”

Shameless bastard.

“Get lost.”

“Please, boss. It's my seventh sister's birthday, but she's too sick to celebrate.” He grabbed his arm, a tear running down his face.

“Get off me. I said no.”

“Come on, mister. Just a few copper mesars?”

“Ask another time and I won’t hire you ever again.”

Flynn let him go with a toothy smile. “All clients can’t help but come back after trying the services of the greatest haggler of the Republic. What do you have in mind?”

“Depends, does the greatest haggler also have the greatest prices?”

“You only pay for quality. It’s worth every chip. I’ll give you a friend discount on your first order.”

Kai rolled his eyes. If he wanted to do business in Sylspring, it would be convenient to have someone deal with the boring and time-consuming tasks. He didn’t trust Flynn farther than he could throw him, but the little rat only tried to scam him to his face and didn’t hide his intentions. He’d take that every time over getting stabbed in the back.

I’d also be nice to have someone in the Republic scholarship program to let me know what is going on.

Alone in his room at the *Sage Tree*, Kai performed a last scan of his surroundings to confirm no one else was looking. Awareness was silent too. He closed his windows and locked the door to be extra careful, turning to the chest waiting on his bed.

The blue sphere immediately reacted to his touch, the waters stirring inside its glass surface like a gathering storm. He directed a trickle of Water mana inside, and the brightness exploded.

Shadows of churning waves were projected on the walls of his room. The light took two seconds before settling down. A blue glow filled his room, making him forget he barred his windows.

Well, not sure what this means, but I'll take it as a good sign.

Back in its box, the sphere slowly dimmed. Pacing around in his excitement, he noticed the farther he stayed from the orb the faster it faded. If he was right in front of it, the process was barely noticeable.

And it also doubles as a lamplight.

He couldn't wait to get back to the estate and get his final reading. Kai did an inventory of all the products on Elijah's list. Nothing was missing, so he orderly put them back in the spatially expanded backpack.

It was early afternoon, a day and a half were too short to make the journey. That would mean he'd have to spend two nights in the jungle if he departed now.

I'll take half a day off.

He hadn't got a proper chance to explore Sylspring yet. Outside, Flynn was nowhere to be seen.

That boy is better taken in small doses.

With all his tasks completed, Kai strolled around without a care in the world. He always hated going window shopping on Earth, here he found himself attracted by the shopping district.

Greenside market couldn't compare, and Whiteshore didn't even have one. There was something magical to the experience—not counting the shining runes on the expensive merchandise. Each spoon, glass and statuette were created by someone who probably dedicated their whole life to that job. Even in the touristy shops, each piece of colorful knick-knack was unique. Still pointless, but not boring.

In a merry mood, Kai passed by *Sypie's Herbs* to say hi to Telu and silently gloat. If the deal with Reishi went through, he would cut off the Old Selly who shortchanged him in Greenside.

Wandering aimlessly, Kai was amazed by how large Sylspring was, a proper town also by his old-world standards. Even in the worst district, it never quite reached the same level of decay as Greenside's poor neighborhoods.

Instead of a trap, isolating the town from the rest of the island, the Veeryd jungle was a source of wealth and jobs. And while the tourists were obnoxious to have around, they brought some much-needed cash.

The next day, Kai was *almost* disappointed, when upon opening his door, he didn't find Flynn waiting there.

Kai went downstairs to check out of the inn,. The main hall was quiet with only a couple of tables occupied by people having breakfast.

"Hi, boss. Are you leaving already? Lucky that I got here early."

Messy brown hair, and cunning green eyes. "Good morning, Flynn. I'm just *that* fortunate."

"I couldn't let you leave without saying goodbye. Why don't we eat something?"

"I'm not paying for your breakfast. I gave you plenty to buy whatever you want for a month and I'm in a hurry."

“Please, mister. I had to spend it all to buy medicines for my sick sisters.”

I'll become a saint.

“Fine. But it's the last time.” A handful of minutes wouldn't make a difference.

“I knew I could count on you, dearest friend.”

Kai dodged Flynn's hug, to keep the grabby hands away from his backpack and took a table.

Without a hint of shame, the deceitful boy's order was closer to a three-course meal than a breakfast.

“You already said you'd pay. No takebacks.”

“There are many kids looking for a job in Sylspring. I just met this girl yesterday. She was very honest and smart. Maybe I should ask her for help.”

Flynn watched him closely. “You're lying.”

“How do you know that?”

“You'd never start a conversation with anyone if you can help it. Much less with a kid.”

You little thick-skinned rat.

“Finding someone more reliable than you is a great motivation.”

“No one is as good as the greatest haggler.”

“I’ll eat my losses.”

“We already have a deal.”

“I don’t remember signing anything.”

They were interrupted by three plates of food. Flynn let out a satisfied sigh at the smell of fried bread and scrambled eggs. Then he noticed there was no plate in front of Kai, just a fork. “You didn’t order anything. This is *my* food.”

“I paid for it.” Kai pointed out, wielding his fork ready for a duel.

About an hour later, Kai was leaving town whistling a happy tune. He might have eaten *slightly* too much.

A two-day trip, then he’d finally be able to enhance his race to Orange ★★.