

Chapter 110 - Reaping the Rewards

The words hung in the air before him. Kai reread the skill description for the tenth time.

New skill available in the Archive! Hallowed Intuition (lv1) – Favored by the realm, grasp the whispers of the ineffable to warn you of a possible future. Increased effectiveness when your well-being is threatened.

The first line confirmed he got it offered because of his high Favor. Virya had told him certain skills had minimum stat requirements to learn or evolve, but they had never touched upon the seventh attribute. This opened a whole new ocean of possibilities.

I've truly got a yellow skill—

“Everything okay?” Ele glanced at him, making him jolt from his stupor.

“What? Yeah, I’m fine.” He hid his thoughts behind a grin. “More than fine actually.”

His sister eyed him suspiciously. “You looked like the ancestors had spoken to you. Did the Guide say anything interesting?”

His smile grew wider. “Maybe.”

“You can keep the mystery. I’ve got enough shocks for one day, and I also gained a slew of experience and skill levels from today.”

The excitement kept bubbling inside of him. “It’s a skill.”

“You don’t have to tell me.” His sister continued to row.

“It’s yellow grade,” he blurted out.

The regular rocking of the boat came to an abrupt end. “Merciful Spirits!”

Ele fumbled with the wooden oars, but only managed to catch one of them before the other fell into the sea.

Kai gripped the edges of the vessels as Ele stood up making them tilt dangerously. Hands at her sides, she stared down at him with shock, then with joy, and then with exasperation and more he didn’t recognize.

“You know, I thought I’d get used to this after your blessing, but this... Congratulations are in order.”

Kai pointed to the wooden oar. “You might want to get that before it floats away.”

“Oh, right!” This time he truly thought the boat would capsize when his sister reached over the oar.

They sat across each other, drifting toward shore with the rising tide. The impenetrable look on her face broke when she chortled a laugh.

Kai frowned, worried. "Are you alright?"

Did I break her?

"I'm starting to think Kea might have a point, using common sense with you is maddening." Ele shook her head. "I don't know if *Mom* has a yellow-tier skill. Most people don't."

"Really? You just need to push a skill to the peak of Orange and evolve it..." Kai shut his mouth under his sister's judging expression.

It's not my fault if Elijah made it sound so easy.

"The problem isn't pushing a skill to 100, but getting any path forward to reach Yellow." Ele calmly stated. "That's where many get stuck."

Kai tried to hide his puzzlement. Getting the best evolutions could be hard. But none at all? With a bit of imagination, and trying enough wacky stuff, you'd eventually get something.

That's why I always say people should learn mana skills.

"I see." He diplomatically stated.

Ele sighed deeply, piercing his facade. "Just don't go asking around why someone doesn't evolve their skills. People can be very *sensitive* to the topic."

"I know." He wasn't that oblivious. In the last few years, he'd been working hard to see things from different perspectives. The solution might seem obvious to him, but he hadn't led an ordinary life, and had access to a much greater pool of knowledge.

"It shouldn't be that hard for most skills, if people really look for a solution." Kai couldn't help himself.

"And some do," Ele confirmed. "I know many people with a yellow skill. I think Moui also has a few. I'm just warning you not to take that for granted. *Now*, do you need any advice on your skill?"

"I should just take it, shouldn't I?"

Kai gave her an edited explanation of Hallowed Intuition. The description was already cryptic, and he'd rather not get into his Favor stat. His sister had enough surprises for one day.

"The Guide offered to switch it for Danger Sense. So, I don't even have to think what to discard..."

Instead of the immediate answer he expected, his sister looked thoughtful. "It sounds like it could be useful, but you are afraid to lose the benefits of your current skill."

Right on the mark.

“Yeah.”

“If it were any other skill, I’d say to take the evolution immediately, but I can’t tell you to abandon Danger Sense. It makes me feel much better knowing you have it. While higher grade skills are stronger, they can also be different.”

“Though I can’t tell you not to take it either.” Ele looked at the waning sun reflecting on the waves, conflicted. “This is a chance more unique than rare, even for you. Capable people evolve skills to Yellow, and almost no one gets offered one directly. I’m sure you’ll make the best choice.”

Yay!

Danger Sense might not be the most flashy or glamorous ability, still it was a fundamental piece in keeping him alive. Even though Hallowed Intuition sounded strong, maybe overpowered, was it reliable?

A way to actively use Favor with no drawbacks was too good to be true. The stat was unpredictable by definition, and words like *whisper* and *ineffable* didn’t bode too well. Yellow was the peak grade of the archipelago, though Kai didn’t believe it was enough to subvert that law.

“You should also remember you won’t be able to discard such a high-level skill for a very long time,” Ele went back to rowing. “I would normally say forever, but we both know you are good at subverting expectations. Still, keep in mind it will be a long-term commitment.”

Looking in the other direction, she couldn’t see him pale. Usually what she highlighted wouldn’t be a problem, but Ele only heard an edited version of the skill.

What if the drawback to Hallowed Intuition is that it drives people mad? With that description and Favor in play, it doesn’t sound too far-fetched.

Peeking into the future always had consequences, and going crazy was a common one in his literary experience.

Getting stuck with a skill that slowly drives me mad, and that I can’t discard without the risk of permanent brain damage, would be peak irony. I’d laugh if we weren’t talking about my sanity.

With the docks growing closer, Kai moved back and forth between various arguments.

Who am I kidding, there is no world in which I don’t take it.

The increased effectiveness when his well-being was threatened staved off most of his fears about losing Danger Sense capabilities. As for his mind, well... he’d just have to cross his fingers and hope for the best. The Guide always warned him when there were potential side effects.

Please don’t screw me over now.

Ding

Congratulations, *Danger Sense (lv17)* has been moved to the Archive, *Hallowed Intuition (lv1)* has taken its place.

Kai gritted his teeth and closed his eyes. His mind didn't immediately explode in psychotic whispers. He let out a relieved breath. So far so good.

He focused on his mind to see if he heard anything. Nothing. After several minutes, still nothing. Even using Attuned Meditation brought no result.

Guess we can scrap insanity from the drawbacks for now. Hopefully, it doesn't end up in the impossible-to-use camp either. If it doesn't react when we get to Sylspring, I'll need to put myself in danger to verify how it works. At least I got the consolation prize.

Ding

New Feat: Yellow Pioneer: For obtaining a yellow-tier skill before the unlocking of your Second Seal, you are awarded: +1 Favor!

Sweet!

Elijah's gift, *Mysteries of the Guide*, had already informed him this would happen, but it was nice to get confirmation.

"We're almost there." Ele glanced over her shoulder. "So, you took it?"

"Yeah."

"What's it like? Do you feel any different?"

"No, not really. Despite the name, it's not a very intuitive skill."

The bustle of the sailors grew in volume as they neared the harbor. Ele guided them away from the larger ships. "Do you mind giving me the mana pearl till we're home?"

"Sure," close to the town, Kai put his hand in a bag before taking it out of his spatial ring and passing it to his sister. "Want to win that annoying guy's bet?"

Ele hid her grin. "Well, I want to avoid any problems. You need a permit from the Republic to go pearling. Apprentices get a freebie, but if you bring this one. They might apply the full tax for unauthorized plunder, which is 50% of your findings." Her fingers caressed the golden surface.

Avid bastards! Take your grubby hand off my money!

"I hope you don't mind if I take credit."

"Absolutely not. Should I also give you my other pearls?" Kai was already emptying his loot in her satchel.

"I don't think that's necessary if you keep them in your bag." She hinted at his ring. "They won't care about those. But the mana pearl will attract attention if you try to sell it later."

He left his loot in her bag and only kept a few clear water pearls in a separate pouch, in case the clerks got extra zealous and wanted to see his findings.

They barely had time to secure the boat to the pier, when Sabe appeared in front of them. Kai looked at him with schadenfreude.

“Had a fruitful venture? I just came back too.” From his proud smile, it was obvious he couldn’t wait to show them what he found.

The guy kneeled and took the rope from Kai’s hands to correctly tie the knot. “You need to fasten the loop like this if you want to find your boat in the morning.”

I don’t remember asking, and I would have got there if you had let me finish.

“Thanks.” Kai squeezed every ounce of sarcasm into the word.

“No problem. It’s hard to get it right in the beginning.”

It was my first try.

“Kai, why don’t you go ahead and call the dock chief supervisor to register our findings,” Ele said with a quiet smile. “She’s the woman in uniform with the bronze pin, you can’t miss her.”

“Okay.” Kai hardly resisted shoving Sabe into the water as he made his way up the berth.

Like his sister said, it was hard to miss the chief supervisor. Marching down the dock and looking at the passersby they were all wanted thieves she stood out like a red shell on the empty seabed.

“Excuse me, ma’am.”

The middle-aged woman slowly turned toward him with a severe expression. Her brows furrowed when she noticed his lack of reaction.

“What is it, kid? If there was another brawl, go tell somebody else. I can’t babysit every overgrown man in this port.”

Okay...

“No, ma’am, my sister needs to register her findings, she’s a pearl hunter.”

The woman scrunched her nose. “Cause the chief supervisor doesn’t have anything better to do, right?”

“I—”

“Lead the way, kid. I hope it’s worth my time.”

Feeling her piercing gaze on his back despite having lost Danger Sense, Kai walked quickly.

Ele was politely smiling at Sabe, who was showcasing a pearl with a proud look. It was the size of a ping pong ball, though not perfectly spherical. It shone with subtle rose shades. But it was no mana treasure.

“Decent catch, Mr. Seruilo,” the supervisor scribbled something on her notepad. “I imagine you were coming to register it right now.”

“Of course, officer. I was on my way.”

“What about you, Ms. Tylenn? Your brother insisted I come personally to see it.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Ele picked up her bulging satchel, attracting all the eyes. All except Kai’s, his attention stayed on Sabe.

Kai made sure to savor every moment as the guy’s smug expression crumbled at the sight of the shimmering golden treasure—stupor, awe and finally crushing defeat when his eyes fell back on his measly find.

Spirits, I’d feel bad for him if he weren’t trying to show off all the time.

“That’s an impressive find, Ms. Tylenn.” The supervisor moved closer to observe the alluring shimmer. “The Republic would be willing to pay ten silvers for it.”

His sister took the pearl back. “It’s a generous offer, but I must refuse.”

“Fifteen silvers?”

“I’m sorry, ma’am, I’ll keep it.”

The middle-aged woman scribbled on her notepad again. “If anybody asks, I fiercely haggled for over half an hour. Now, my dinner break is almost up. If you have more notable finds, ask another one of the junior officers.”

With that, the supervisor marched off, mumbling something about fried chicken.

“We better go,” Ele waved at Sabe, who looked ahead with a soulless look.

See you next time, Mr. I’m the greatest pearl hunter.

After some more pointless bureaucracy, they could finally head home.

“Do we really need to tell Mom?” Kai pleaded with his sister. No amount of Acting seemed to be working this time.

“You are covered in cuts, I don’t think she’ll miss that.”

Thanks to his balm, the wounds looked a couple of days old, but they were pretty hard to miss. His body had been spotless this morning, Alana was bound to notice the difference.

Kai tried to slip into his room unnoticed. Their mother already stood there waiting when the door opened.

“How did it go? Did you two have fun?” Her bright expression quickly froze, her eyes scanning him from top to bottom. “Kai, what did you do?”

“Why do you already assume it was my fault?”

Ele cleared her throat, giving him a look.

Guess, that's fair...

“I was attacked by a greedy and angry clam. No need to worry, she wasn't very smart. I only got a few scratches.”

“A clam?”

“Well, it was a very big clam, who might have awakened. But hey, do you want to see the pearl I got? It's super shiny.”

The allure of the pearl didn't work as well as he hoped. Alana wasn't easily swayed like Ele.

“What did you say that clam was?”

“Doesn't Kea hunt beasts too?”

“That's not the same thing.”

The sole reason he wasn't being grounded was that his wounds were already healing, painting a far rosier picture of what happened. Alchemy had saved him once again. Moui also intervened on his behalf to placate the situation.

Kai wasn't sure if the hunter wanted to win more brownie points with him, or if it was in solidarity since he also battled dangerous beasts in the jungle. After a hearty dinner, and the help of his mana treasure, his mishaps were mostly forgotten. Kea struggled to keep her eyes off the pearl.

“Can I come with you to Veeryd one of these days?” Kai asked as they were clearing the table. “You don't mind, Uncle, do you?” It had been a while since his last excursion with Elijah.

His mother pressed her lips in a thin line, and Moui alternated his gaze between them.

“I really want to see what you and Kea do.” An angelic smile shone on his face.

He had a skill to test and a sister to impress.