

## Chapter 42 - An Opportunity

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**Author's note:** I'll try to set up a discord this weekend. If you see a post it will be for that. It's still a work in progress, so I make no promises. In any case, it will only be opened for Patreon members for now.

Thank you all for the comments, here is today's chapter, enjoy.

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It took two more days for Kea to learn Mana Sense. Kai had to promise to help her both in the morning as soon as he woke up and in the evening when his mana regenerated.

Maybe it was because her stats and race were lower that it took longer, but the most likely reason was that she didn't have the patience. Tapping nervously with her foot a second after they began.

By the end, Kai wasn't sure who was more happy to be done - him or her.

*If this doesn't add a few hundred points to my score for best brother, I resign from the role.*

With all his mana monopolized by his sister, he had not been able to practice alchemy or his mana exercises even if he wanted to. Helping Kea get the skill could also be considered some kind of training, but not a very efficient one. His mana ran out incredibly fast when clashing against hers.

With nothing better to do, he had delved deep into his father's notes and books. Learning more about the Vastaire language and trying his hand at directly deciphering the engravings his father recorded. He had a long way to go, but he was making good progress.

After the governor mined the ruins for stone, his father's recordings were probably the last copy of these texts. Kai planned to publish the book Rellan wanted when he got the chance. It probably was not going to be a great success, but he would feel better knowing there were more copies out there.

He knew his dad would have wanted to make sure their history was not forgotten. His work would stall when he got back to the estate, but he was going to do this no matter how long it took.

If possible he also wanted to visit a few of the remaining ruins in person. There were not many left, but one of them still stood on Yanlun. It was almost at the exact opposite end of the island, so that was something for the future too.

Today Kai had different plans, he wanted to take a break from his father's notes and visit the market. He had barely left his house in the last few days apart from the morning training, but that wasn't the only reason.

It was hardly an hour after dawn when he was already walking towards the market in *old town*. There were few people around, mostly sellers setting up their shop.

A middle-aged enforcer stumbled out of a tavern, his uniform full of wrinkles, his baton lost somewhere. From the way the man covered his eyes with a hand as if the sunlight was unbearable, he was suffering from a hangover.

Kai stayed far away from him. It was a sad and pathetic sight. He had been in town for less than a month and he had already lost count of how many times he had witnessed a similar scene.

They truly only reserved the worst of the worst for Greenside.

Checking with a glance, the man looked to have an Orange ★★ race and type 3 profession. That appeared to be the minimum requirement for enforcers. Their profession was never lower than that, but a couple had a race of Orange ★.

For an islander, it would have been a great achievement to reach those levels before old age. The standards for the enforcers were different since he had been stationed in this forgotten corner of the archipelago.

His lack of professionalism and ability might also have something to do with his current assignment. But Kai was sure that if the grade of his race and skills were considered high by the Republic, he would not be here no matter how incompetent he was.

*Probably they have a way to quickly level their profession, but their race is left behind up to them.*

Kai would have liked to take a peek at the enforcers from Higharbor, who came during the purge of The Voice of the Ancestors. He did not have Inspect yet at the time and they had all left as soon as they completed their sweeps and achieved whatever their goals were.

Looking around at the market streets slowly coming to life, his patience was finally rewarded. He had spotted his target, better yet he was giving him his back. Kai used Sneak to get closer.

"Hi, uncle. How're you doing?" Kai greeted the hunter. To his disappointment, Muoi showed no reaction. He must have heard him coming.

His dear uncle had been quite hard to track down. He rarely manned the stall and most of the time he was out hunting. Kai had considered waiting in front of his house, but he didn't have the patience for that.

Instead, he had inquired with other sellers and asked around. While only one person attended the meat stand, the other hunters often came to bring their goods personally. With a few more questions, he had managed to narrow down Muoi's preferred time.

*No, I'm not a stalker. I'm just determined.*

The big man gave him a brief glance, before going back to speak with the hunter in charge of sales for the day.

Kai hadn't noticed him at first, hidden behind Muoi's large figure. It was a scrawny fellow that hardly looked of age. Most islanders didn't grow many facial hairs, but this guy must have drawn the short straw, his patched stubble was worse than average. A failed attempt to look more mature, he would have done better without it.

Kai empathized with him, he was also looked down upon—both literally and metaphorically—because of his age. He threw the teenager a knowing glance and waited by the side for Muoi to finish setting up his goods.

The hunter finally turned towards him, "Do you need something?"

Kai wore his most charming smile, "Do I need a reason to see my favorite uncle?"

"I guess not. Now that you've said hi, you can go then." Muoi started walking away.

*Damn, he's learning fast.*

Kai scrambled after the hulking man. "Wait a moment uncle! I was just curious about a couple of things. You don't mind answering a few questions, right?"

The hunter shrugged a tacit approval.

"Is that scrawny guy a hunter too? Isn't the jungle like crazy dangerous?" Not really what he came here to find out, but a good way to break the ice.

"He's still taller than you, shorty." Muoi chuckled at him. "He's the apprentice and son of a friend of mine, he just needs to put on a bit of muscle and he'll do fine. Hunting in the jungle is as much about knowledge and traps as physical prowess. It depends on what you prefer. There is no wrong way as long as you bring home your prey."

Kai nodded thoughtfully, in his head he had imagined a hunter wrestling with an enormous anaconda. A camouflaged person waiting for his prey to fall into a trap worked too.

"Anyway, uncle, I was also wondering if you had more mana herbs collecting dust somewhere. You brought out several orange-tier herbs with the merfolk merchants, but I've not even seen even a red-tier herb at your stall."

Muoi gave him a suspicious look, Kai responded with an angelic smile, "Obviously I'm going to pay for them. So have you got some?" Maybe he would haggle the price down a tiny bit.

Muoi stared at him for a moment longer, not finding any flaw in his act or words.

“My deal with the other hunters is only about animal-related materials. So I have a deal with another merchant in the market for herbs. I don’t have the time or the knowledge to sell them myself. If you want I can introduce you to her.”

Kai got a bad feeling. “Her? Don’t tell me you’re talking about old Sally?”

Muoi looked amused by his reaction. “Yes, Selia. Do you know her?”

*And to think the old hag assured me she personally harvested all her ingredients. I should have known she was lying.*

“I know her... She sure knows how to sniff a bargain.” Kai already had enough deals with that old scammer. “Don’t you have anything else stashed somewhere?”

Muoi shook his head. “No, I focus more on hunting beasts and in the thick vegetation it is not easy to recognize valuable plants. The orange-tier plants were an exception. Even I could tell how valuable they were from a mile away. Since there wasn’t anyone interested in buying them for a decent price in Greenside, I kept them.”

Kai hung his head low, here went all his hopes for cheap materials.

*No point crying over spilled milk...*

“Don’t you have Mana Sense to find valuable herbs?” Kai asked to keep the conversation going.

“I got offered the skill, but I didn’t take it. I have other methods to identify valuable natural treasures in the jungle. Mana Sense is too distracting to use in such a dangerous environment and its range is too limited.”

Kai couldn’t help but grit his teeth in frustration. Did truly nobody recognize the value of Mana Sense? They all got scared by the initial grind and missed out on a myriad of possibilities.

“After you train it a little, you can eliminate both the restriction on your focus and range. I don’t get why people don’t take it.” He complained.

Muoi gave him a long look. “If by ‘a little’ you mean years of work, then yes, you’re right. I like my current skills more.”

A few years for a lifetime of benefits, that was a bargain! Sometimes he truly didn’t understand other people.

Kai continued to follow him, lost in his thoughts. Ignoring his sulky mood, Muoi took care of his business around the market, running a few errands, and buying groceries and other supplies he used for hunting.

It soon became apparent Muoi got way better deals than him. It could be that he was a frequent client, but in a town of less than two thousand people, most people were 'trusted customers'. Kai would put his bets on his intimidating aura being the true reason.

"You know, uncle, it's not really fair to use your presence to intimidate other people into getting better deals," Kai said, still a bit disgruntled.

There was no immediate response, after a while the hunter muttered, "It's not like I do it on purpose, it's just how I am."

*Did I hit a touchy subject? He seems very self-conscious about it. But he is kinda doing it on purpose.*

Kai wondered if he should abandon the topic, but he had never been one to mince words.

"Uncle, you know that your *presence* is more than just your ugly muzzle and cold gaze staring at people. The main part it's your mana bearing down on them.

Muoi stopped in his tracks and turned to face him. "What do you mean?"

As if on cue, Kai felt the hunter mana stir, turbulent with various feelings. The air turned heavy with his presence. Kai stared up at him trying to look casual.

*No way he doesn't know. Is it truly possible to reach this level unconsciously?*

"You're releasing your attuned mana all around you and it amplifies your presence. It's even worse if there is a clear intent behind it. I'm used to similar presences, but most people will feel an innate desire to get away."

Muoi stared at him blankly for several moments, "That can't be it. People would know about this if that were the case."

It was indeed weird, but Kai soon thought of a reason, "Well, you know that your race is well..." He lowered his voice to a whisper. "At the peak of Orange and higher than almost anybody else around.

"So your mana and aura are stronger than anybody else. I'm not exactly sure how this works since I don't have enough mana to do it myself. Your stats probably affect the situation too. I'd bet the higher they are the worse it is."

As he finished his explanation, Muoi's face blanched. Kai got on the tip of his toes to put a hand on the shoulder of the big man. "Come on, it's not that terrible. You just need to learn Mana Manipulation and it's an easily fixable problem."

The hunter recovered a little, nodding to himself. "Yes, I already have the skill in my archive."

Kai was surprised. Mana Sense was one thing, but he had never heard of someone getting Mana Manipulation by chance. Even he had to work hard to obtain the skill. His uncle got it for free and didn't even bother to learn it.

"Just for curiosity's sake, how long have you had the skill?"

Muoi shrugged, "I don't know, a few years maybe?"

Kai let out a sigh of relief in his mind, his pride was safe. For a moment he had thought Muoi would say he got it in his teens.

"Well, uncle, you must have some talent for mana. Maybe this is another reason why you have a presence problem. Even without the skill, you're unconsciously manipulating your mana to a significant degree."

Done with the explanation, Muoi got lost in his thoughts and Kai smelled an opportunity. He was going to help him regardless, but why not get something out of it?

"I could give you a couple lessons in Mana Manipulation if you're interested. If you only care about keeping your mana inside your body it shouldn't be difficult or long."

Kai's pitch immediately got the attention of the hunter.

"You can do that?"

Kai kept smiling but was internally peeved. "Of course, I can help you."

*Why does everybody keep doubting my skills!?*

"You know I'm a mage apprentice, we'll figure it out in the blink of an eye with all my experience and knowledge."

*Okay, now I'm just boasting. Maybe if I did that more often people would take me more seriously.*

Muoi considered his offer for a few seconds before accepting. "Thank you."

"No problem uncle. What else are nephews for? Does tomorrow morning work for you?"

"Sure, I would prefer early. I was planning to go hunting."

Kai nodded, "An hour after dawn sounds perfect. I'll knock on your door. But if you really insist on repaying me, you can give me a tour of the jungle while you're at it. I'm sure we'll have a lot of fun. Now I really gotta go. Bye!"

With one last grin, Kai waved at Muoi who still looked a bit confused at what had happened.

*You are learning, but I am too.*

Disappearing among the growing crowd of the market, Kai was very satisfied. It had gone even better than he imagined. He would get a of the jungle for free, more time to ask questions and even the chance of showcasing his amazing knowledge as a teacher.

Since he was already here, he opted to take a look around. Maybe old Sally had something new on sale.

The old hag gave him a grandmotherly smile when she saw him coming. "He's my favorite client. Come here, dear. I just harvested a few herbs that might interest you this morning. I'll give you a special offer on them."

There were many responses swirling in Kai's mind. Call her out on her multiple lies. Tell her he was going to cut her, buying directly at the source. Or run away screaming she had cursed him.

They were all tempting options, but for now, it was better not to reveal his hand. Kai looked at her stand and started to inspect a new purple-leafed plant. He was still evaluating it when a shadow fell over him. He turned to see if someone was standing behind him but soon realized the true reason.

*Another eclipse, let's hope it passes quickly.*

With six moons hanging in the sky, it wasn't uncommon for one of their trajectories to coincide with the sun. There was at least one a year, usually more. The first time it had been fascinating, but now it was more of an annoyance since he didn't even have the means to look at it properly.

*Clearly, this is an omen I shouldn't buy from her.*

He hang around her stall for a dozen minutes, acting as if he was very interested in purchasing her plants.

"I'm not sure, maybe next time."

With that, he turned around and left without another word, smiling when he heard old Selly's desperate pitching sale.

Tomorrow was going to be a very interesting day.