

CHAPTER 146: GODLY HEALTH

“Sam,” Komachi began, pawing his shoulder. “What do we do about the rewards from the Aker Academy?”

Sam rubbed the stubble on his chin thoughtfully.

“What if what we pick turns out to be Profession gear, instead of Job gear?”

“Is that so bad?”

“I dunno,” she admitted. “There’s no changing it now, is there?”

Sam, feeling strangely better despite his HP still well under half, reached over and ruffled Komachi’s fur. “It’ll be fine either way. Once I’m able to fully move about, I’ll help get the Mana Engine set up, and we’ll go from there.”

“Would be cool if you get Swordsman gear,” Komachi mused, purring. “And you can improve it through your Smithing. Is that somethin’ you can do?”

“Some of my tools do mention they provide ‘refinement’ whatever that is, but currently I don’t have any abilities that suggest I can improve an existing piece of equipment. Then again, there’s no harm in trying, is there?”

Komachi nodded, seeming excited to see what he could do.

He had to admit, he felt similar about Smithing.

“Refinement could be ingredient processing,” Raiko suggested half-heartedly, looking over the crafting tools arranged around her. “Ore to ingots. Herbs to... no, I suppose that’d just be potion making. So maybe not.”

“Presumably you could grind up the herbs into a powder or paste,” Sam offered. “That would still be refinement, wouldn’t it?”

“Yes, you’re right. It’s strange I didn’t jump to that immediately. I hoped that I’d start with Artificer or Enchanter.”

“What are you again?” Sam asked, hoping she hadn’t already told him because he had totally forgotten if she did.

“Alchemist,” she said gloomily.

“So am I!” Matt said, barging in. “We can be Alchemist duos! You can clean my vials and I can make the money. You can be a SAHA!”

Raiko groaned.

“A... what?” Sam asked.

“Stay At Home Alchemist!”

“I will kill you slowly,” she whispered with alarming intensity. It didn’t sound like a joke.

“Please don’t.”

She glared, mulling it over.

Matt was joined a moment later by Lenal, who peeked through the screen of bamboo sheepishly with a leather-bound book held tightly to her breast. “Am I interrupting?”

“No,” Sam said.

“You’re probably saving Matt’s life,” Komachi put in.

“I can come back then,” Lenal said, giving Matt some bombastic side-eye.

Raiko began to ease her katana out of her scabbard, darkly grinning.

Without even meaning to, Sam could see a web of blue-laced cracks across the side of the blade, clustering along the edge.

“Oh shit,” he said, nodding at her sword. “Those are some serious cracks on your sword, Raiko.”

Frowning, she glanced down at the weapon. “It doesn’t seem to want to take my mana particularly well.” Vaporous blue mana leaked out of the edge, reminiscent of [Nature Crystals].

“Can you still murder Matt with it, though?” Komachi asked, rubbing her paws together mischievously. For a moment, they looked like otter limbs.

That in itself, was particularly jarring. Nobody else seemed to notice.

Komachi shook her head, sleek brown fur shifting back into a downy blonde.

“More than likely,” Sam said. When Matt looked at him for some sort of help, he felt compelled to add, “You’re on your own with this one. I’m not getting out of here until I’m pruned up or I’m mostly healed.”

“Then we’re all doomed,” Matt said softly. “Because there’s that big—”

“We’re aware,” Sam told him. “It’s far enough away for the time being that we don’t have an immediate threat, but I sure as hell hope I’m not forced to stay in this spring for days.” Sam looked at Raiko as if seeking her opinion.

She shrugged. “It’ll run out before then.”

“Is that a good thing or bad?” Sam asked. “I’m not even at half health.”

“It means the tree’s runestones don’t have enough energy to fully restore you.” Raiko knelt by the spring, touching one of the unlit and drained runestones. “Essentially, the tree has been running low

for too long and hasn't caught up to your level. It needs time to replenish."

"What *is* your HP, anyways?" Matt asked.

"Over 6,000."

"How the heck am I going to be able to heal that?" Komachi asked, bewildered. "Even with Light mana."

Matt choked and had to smack his chest a few times before he could talk. "Good god, though I guess I should say 'good gods' now? How the hell—no, you know what? I'm not going to ask. Incarnate shenanigans are not my purview. I just came to say that now that I have a Profession, I wanted to get the ball rolling on power leveling it."

Sam shrugged. "It'll get worse now that I have Blacksmith. It also gives Vigor with each level. Not as much as Swordsman... but not that far off, either. I wonder how long it'll take me to hit 10k HP."

Komachi laid down on her side, defeated. "Machi needs healing potency modifiers *bad*."

Sam smoothed down her fur with a wet hand. "It'll be okay, Komachi. The more HP I have, the less I'll get hurt, comparatively. If something did 100 points of damage to me before and it made me bleed, it probably wouldn't do more than bruise me now."

"Plus," Matt put in, "I can probably make some tinctures or potions that can not only help offset your healing, Komachi. Or I might be able to augment it. After the possession deal, I learned a lot about making potions and figure I'll specialize in that since they also can make poisons effectively too."

"Been trying to stack healing effects, switching my [Regen Paeon] over to Light mana and getting [Healing Aria]," Komachi explained. "Somethin' like that would help lots."

Matt gave her a cheesy thumbs up. “You can count on me, cat. Especially if you’ve got any cool bits and bobs. You know, ingredients, that I could use. I... don’t have much and I don’t fancy looking around in the forest for things that might work.”

She nodded. “I got some stuff. So does Chompers.”

“There’s much to find out in the Skyshard,” Raiko said, sheathing her damaged blade. “Though I don’t plan on staying an Alchemist for long, I’ve the eye for it now. But we need to do something before any power leveling, unless you in particular want to shirk your duty.”

“What’s that?” Matt asked, clearly finding anything that wasn’t power leveling to be less than worthy of his time.

Raiko began putting away her crafting tools into her Inventory while she talked. “We need to check the Mana Engine, make sure it’s fully operational and has enough fuel. Then the [Spirit Lantern] needs to be fed, and the Skyshard needs to be scouted. I haven’t seen *any* dullahans or mandragoras.”

“That sounds like—” Matt paused himself at the warning look from all in attendance, “—very important things that need to be done by all. I’ll go find Kai and we’ll grab the Mana Engine.”

“That’s a good idea,” Sam said, feeling relieved that he wasn’t the one throwing out all the orders. “because Kai went out looking for Lenal earlier. Tell him you found her and she’s safe.”

Lenal blushed. “I didn’t know you worried over me... I merely wanted to get some things from my dorm.” She stared at her shoes.

“No one was sure if you were safe. But... that’s another important thing,” Raiko said. “Though perhaps less pressing? Collecting useful items from the academy. The lantern, while it was in an unusable state when I found it, was one such thing.”

“I could be in charge of that,” Lenal said enthusiastically. “I know the place very well, and with Professor Nihl’s help, we could make sure that anything useful is rounded up. Aker Academy is eternally in Sil’mara’s debt, after all.”

“Please, that would be very helpful, Lenal. We’ll also need to talk about Aker Academy’s position with Sil’mara later. We’re not leaving your home behind.”

“I had hoped to speak with you about that,” Lenal said sheepishly. “But I can see that now is not the time. It is a relief to hear that my home is not going to be left to rot, but I would also like to preserve as much as possible. I think the professors agree with me on this, and maybe... with time and effort, we could refurbish it, bring it back to its former glory, and use it as a school to teach things that were lost from our homeshard.”

“Komachi would like that!” The cat wove in and out of Lenal’s legs affectionately.

“That sounds like a great idea,” Sam told her. “Too bad there’s nothing like that for Earth, but it’s not like we had a storied history of magical schools or anything of the sort that wasn’t make believe.”

Raiko cleared her throat for some reason.

Sam leaned back and thought for a moment. “How badly damaged are the buildings?”

“The damage is extensive, I’m sorry to say.” Lenal shuffled a bit. “To tell the truth, the defenses are in a fine state now that there isn’t a Dungeon Core usurping command of the Skyshard. And I know all involved would feel much better if you were to claim it properly and attach it to one or both of the Settlement Cores in your possession.”

“You mean adding it as part of the Kingdom?” Matt asked. “It would be pretty prestigious to have our own Academy, wouldn’t you think?”

“I was thinking more along the lines of a mutually beneficial arrangement,” Sam said, head still tilted back, eyes closed. A private screening of potential futures danced before his mind’s eye. “If the damage is severe, we could repair it. I’m sure there would be a need for most of our Professions in the reconstruction process. That would probably help us to level them, while also repairing the Academy.”

Lenal’s eyes lit up at the prospect.

“Komachi will bribe the walls to stand up straight,” she announced to the world as if it were a challenge to the gods themselves.

Matt looked around at the group. “So I’m an Alchemist, Sam is obviously a Blacksmith, Raiko is also an Alchemist, Komachi... is a Moneylender?”

“Merchant!” Komachi growled.

“Okay, okay, Merchant,” Matt corrected. “And Lenal is an Analyst. That just leaves Kai, doesn’t it? Does anybody remember what his Ghost Daddy and/or Ghost Mommy was?”

“I’m *temporarily* an Alchemist,” Raiko added with a wince, finding the need to reinforce that point. “It’s the Nomad Job for me all over again. Customizing it in hopes of a favorable evolution.”

“Please do not call them that,” Lenal snapped at Matt. “They are distinguished professors!”

“Heh, daddy,” Komachi whispered.

“Fine, fine,” Matt said, hands up in surrender. “The point still stands. We have two doubled-up Professions—which I’m assured will be temporary—but that still leaves *a lot* of needed roles

missing. We could definitely use a cook, somebody who could build, do... things with wood, the list goes on.”

“A chef?” Raiko asked in dismay, touching the otter doll at her hip. “I know someone who can. There is no other better.”

As if I need another reason to rescue Haman, Sam thought.

“Maybe Kai works with wood?” Sam suggested. He couldn’t remember either, considering he was quite busy trying his best not to die at the time.

“That still means we don’t have somebody who works with stone—” Matt said.

“Stone mason,” Sam filled in.

“—or somebody to build homes and stuff. I mean... we have buildings now if you count the Academy, but we can’t make any more. And I don’t know about you, but I’d like to have a home that wasn’t a repurposed dorm room where some grisly murder happened.”

Even Sam knew that was definitely the wrong sort of thing to say.

“Should Komachi start the hiring process?” She held up metallic pieces of rel in her paws, oblivious as to what Matt was talking about.

“I’m sorry Lenal, he doesn’t mean to be a callous idiot,” Raiko said, full of sympathy.

Looking down, Lenal went very still. Those grisly murders were her friends and family, after all. “If there is nothing you need from me, I will go back to the Academy and speak with the professor.”

At a nod from Sam, the Academic scurried off rather faster than she normally did.

Matt sighed and raised his palms up before Sam could say anything. “I’ll go apologize. You know, I don’t *mean* to be a callous idiot, I just *am* sometimes.”