

## Chapter 138 - Pick One

The midday sun made sea crests sparkle like diamonds. Kai lost track of how far they walked. The sandy beach had morphed into a rocky cliff. Sylspring was barely visible, a hint of the wall and a few buildings peeking in the distance over the palm trees. It was just them for miles.

*Should I tell him?*

Flynn peered at him with a curious glint in his green eyes. Kai had been too swept up in his profession choice and let slip more than he intended.

*He did put his own neck on the line for me. And he knows about the spatial ring, but no one has come to mug me yet...*

Flynn had helped him escape from the rebels though he was also responsible for the kidnapping, albeit involuntarily. Still, he didn't have to save him from Tridel or follow him into Sylspring while the raiders pillaged the streets.

Swept by madness and worry, Kai hadn't stopped to consider Flynn's help then, or in the days since. The pirates had thrown his life upside down and, before he could breathe, the dilemma about his profession came up.

*I did thank him, right? I'm sure I did. He did look a bit grim earlier...*

Kai scoured his brains, the memories of that night were pretty messy. He couldn't say for sure—which was answer enough. He had taken his help for granted and pulled him into a deadly situation for his sake. If he had gone alone, he wouldn't have stood a chance of defeating two pirates and saving Ele.

Flynn broke the questioning stare first. "Well, we should head back. You've dragged me quite the distance. Though I can't really blame you, we'd be swarmed in moments if people knew I was sharing my deep knowledge."

*No, this is not right. He should insist more till I reluctantly give in.*

"I've broken my Second Seal early," Kai blurted out. "Now I'm deciding which profession to pick."

Despite the crashing of waves and chirping of birds, the world appeared to turn silent. Flynn froze in his tracks and looked back at him, coming closer and closer. He studied him an inch from his face for several seconds, searching for something he couldn't find.

"You are not joking, are you?" He stepped back, still intently watching him. "If you are, you've got me. You can laugh at me *now*."

"I'm not. It wouldn't be a very funny joke, would it?"

Flynn scrubbed a hand through his hair. "I had heard it was possible, but... I didn't actually believe it was true."

"It's nothing extraordinary." Kai shrugged. "I did the same with the First Seal."

"No." Flynn shook his head, lightly slapping his cheek as if to wake up from a dream.

"Yes, I did, stop being so dramatic. You just need to unlock Favor early for the First Seal."

*I'm not boasting, I'm being honest. The fact he looks so impressed has nothing to do with it.*

Flynn's eyes widened, brows furrowed, and his jaw mouthed a jumble of questions at the same time. Finally, he took a deep breath, pulling himself together. "Are you sure it's a good idea to pick a profession early?"

*Probably. Hopefully. It's too late for regrets anyway.*

"I plan to discard it and pick another at fourteen. So, it's not a problem."

To Kai's disappointment, Flynn must have gone through his whole stockpile of shock for the day. The boy just looked at him blankly. "I've heard that's extremely dangerous."

"There are ways to reduce the risks," Kai patted him on the shoulder, putting a silver mesar in his hand. "Anyway, you're right, we should head back. Just keep this information for yourself."

It was going to be hard to keep his profession a secret. He hadn't broken any law, but the less people knew, the better. He needed time to come up with a plan to mitigate the risks of the attention he would get. Reishi had already given him some ideas...

"Wait!" Flynn woke from his stupor, throwing the coin back at him. "You can't just drop that and leave. I can help you choose if you give me more information."

"You've already told me everything you know about professions," Kai pointed out. "It was a very nice lesson, quite informative."

Virya had taught him as much, but her standards were *unconventional*. What was normal for her was *very* different from what was normal for ordinary people. Flynn's knowledge gave him a realistic view of what to expect from people in the archipelago and the Republic.

"Come on. You have to tell me something, pretty please."

Trust was one thing, but what if the next time Flynn got drunk, he slipped something? The sure way to keep a secret was if no one knew. Telling his options was an unnecessary risk that would force him to reveal more secrets, like his Favor and the blessings from Yatei and Kahali.

*Though some general snippets can't hurt. It's a bit cruel to dangle the fact before his face and walk away.*

“Promise not to tell anyone?” It was nice to share information once in a while and he could relate to the curiosity burning in the boy’s eyes. Nothing to do with boasting.

“I swear on my life,” Flynn solemnly proclaimed with a hand over his heart.

*So theatrical, a simple yes would have been enough.*

“Whoever told you that you can’t get boons from a red profession duped you.”

Kai could see the obvious conclusion flashing through Flynn’s face, maybe he hadn’t scraped the bottom of his shock stockpile after all. Kai checked his neck to see if he had grown a second head. No such luck, sadly.

“Now we should go. I’m getting hungry.” Important decisions were better on a full stomach.

“Can’t you give me one more hint?” Flynn scrambled to catch up with him.

“I’ve yet to decide what to pick. There is nothing more to say.”

“How many choices did you get?” Flynn pleaded with his eyes. “I won’t ask anything else. I had three myself, it was the highest anyone in my year got.”

Kai glanced at the rocky beach. The path back to Sylspring was long, it would be more pleasant if Flynn didn’t pester him till the southern gate.

“Fine. I got seven, happy? Now close your mouth before a bird decides to build a nest in there.”

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In his own room, Kai stretched his neck, it was time to tackle one of the most important decisions of his life thus far. He was jittery, his hands faintly shaking. He hadn’t managed to eat much, but he couldn’t feel hunger either.

*I’ve got all the information I can get my hands on.*

Nervous and excited in equal measure, he summoned the Guide with a thought. The words appeared in cursive calligraphy on a scroll.

**\*Ding\***

**Do you wish to select a profession?**

Yep.

Seven pages hung before him, he had already read them enough times to remember them by heart. He checked for any change, each word was still the same. He'd already somewhat narrowed down his options, but Kai decided to go through them all one last time. He wouldn't forgive himself if he missed something.

Profession: **Sword Apprentice**

Main Requirements: **Swordsmanship – Advanced lv10+; Defeat 10+ opponents stronger than you with a sword.**

Description: ***You've wielded your sword from a young age and never let go of its hilt. Embark on your journey to become one with the blade and cut down your foes.***

Attributes: **1 Strength, 1 Dexterity, 0.50 Constitution per level.**

Boon: **None**

Skill slots: **1**

Sword Apprentice gave more than decent attributes, 2.5 for each of the ten levels of Red. Though to counterbalance it gave little of everything else. No boon and only a single skill slot. The raw power of the stats was tempting, not enough to make up for the drawbacks.

He had learned the sword to shore up the weaknesses of magic until he grew more proficient with casting. The path of a pure swordsman wasn't terrible, but not something he wanted for himself. He hadn't trained his mana skills to pick this.

*Maybe if it was a magic swordsman...*

Waving his hand through the scroll, Kai dismissed it.

*One out, six to go, yay!*

Profession: ***Splinter in the Dark***

Main Requirements: ***Assassinate a stronger target without getting caught; Ambush and kill 10+ enemies stronger than you; Improvisation lv1+.***

Description: ***You've masked your true strength under a veil of deception and lies to let your enemies underestimate you. Hidden in plain sight or in the shadows, no one will suspect your true capabilities until you strike.***

Attributes: ***0.5 Strength, 0.5 Dexterity, 0.25 Mind, 0.5 Spirit, 0.5 Perception per level.***

Boon: ***None***

**Skill slots: 1**

*Fuck no!*

Splinter in the Dark would probably count as a rare profession, though it only gave one skill slot and the attributes were worse than Sword Apprentice. The only good thing he could say was that the stat distribution was more balanced, which would help if he planned to discard it later.

*No, thank you. I don't want to be an assassin or a spy, running through the night wearing edgy black leather.*

Striking from the shadows and hiding in plain sight did hold some appeal, but if things went his way, he wouldn't need to do that anymore. He was going to grow powerful enough to defeat any opponent that stood in his path head-on.

With this, the two easy rejections were out of the way. Another dismissal and five options remaining.

*Let's get to the fun stuff.*

Profession: **Blessed by Waters**

Main Requirements: **Blessed Swimmer lv30+; Water Magic lv30+; Blessing of Kahali.**

Description: **Embraced by the waters and recognized by the Great Spirit Kahali, you're at home among the waves and beloved by the sea. The Shallow Sea is your treasure trove and your companion to explore.**

Attributes: **0.25 Strength, 0.5 Constitution, 0.5 Mind, 1.5 Spirit per level.**

Boon: **1**

Skill slots: **2**

Profession: **Veeryd Progeny**

Main Requirements: **Nature Magic lv30+; Blessing of Yatei; Defeat 10+ Red beasts and 3+ Orange beasts.**

Description: **Accepted by the land of the islands and blessed by the Great Spirit Yatei, you have no fear for the wild and untamed Veeryd. The jungle is your hunting ground, offering you shelter and its bountiful resources.**

Attributes: **0.5 Strength, 0.5 Dexterity, 0.5 Mind, 0.5 Spirit, 0.5 Perception per level.**

Boon: **1**

Skill slots: **2**

Two solid choices anyone in the archipelago would pick without a second thought. Blessed by Waters gave slightly more attributes while Veeryd Progeny had a more balanced distribution. Both were rare professions that offered *two* skill slots and *one* boon.

*Thank you for blessing me.*

No doubt this was another benefit of receiving the blessing of the Great Spirits. Only they knew how people would react if he showed them off. It wasn't just gold plating either, they both sounded powerful in their own right.

Blessed by Waters would be a water mage profession with major advantages in the sea. Since he lived in an archipelago, that would be an easy condition to satisfy. He'd be able to explore the depth of the ocean to his heart's content. Spirits only knew what treasures he would uncover.

*I should go visit Mama Clam, I'm sure she must miss me dearly.*

Then there was Veeryd Progeny, a hybrid profession that would make him a hunter with a sprinkle of Nature Magic on the side.

*Even Uncle Moui would turn green with envy if he knew I got this.*

Its description also talked about *bountiful resources*. A wealth of mana herbs waited for him in the jungle, which would help his Alchemy too.

If he had to think of one drawback, these two professions might not work as well outside of the archipelago. Anyway, it wasn't truly a problem since he planned to discard them before sailed for the mainland.

*Damn, it's such a shame not to take them. If only the other ones weren't so good.*

They were great options, but the last three professions were better still. With a weeping heart, Kai forced himself to dismiss them.

*Four out, three to go.*

Profession: **Promising Herbal Alchemist**

Main Requirements: **Alchemy lv40+; Herbology – Advanced lv40+; Modify 10+ recipes.**

Description: **You have expert knowledge of herbs, of how to process and combine them to brew something superior to the sum of their parts. You are no stranger to finding and harvesting your ingredients or growing them with the help of your magic. Push your limits, build on what you know to expand the boundaries of your knowledge.**

Attribute: **0.5 Dexterity, 1 Mind, 1 Spirit, 0.25 Perception per level.**

Boon: **1**

Skill slots: **2**

*I wonder which one Reishi would like me to pick...*

Kai chuckled to himself. The merman would never shut up about why that was the best choice.

*I'd probably wake up chained in a basement with a cauldron and an infinite supply of herbs.*

Promising Herbal Alchemist gave great attributes, skill slots and a boon he had earned himself. It was every bit as good as the previous two, with one *crucial* advantage: a clear path to practice.

After the breaking of the Second Seal, there was no more general Life Experience to reward his actions. He would need to practice the domain of his profession to gain XP.

Blessed by Waters and Veeryd Progeny would require him to go out in the sea and jungle to progress them, probably risking his life against unknown dangers. With an Alchemy profession, all he needed were ingredients and a cauldron.

*I might take up Reishi on his offer and lock the chain on myself. I do get into a lot of trouble...*



Adventure and battles could always wait till he had grown up. He could hide himself in a cozy basement and brew potions for the next two and a half years. No worries and no risks. The merman would supply the recipes and ingredients he needed, and he could grind away in peace.

Exploring the archipelago had its appeal, so did spending some carefree time. The death of the night of the raid was still fresh in his mind. He'd much rather wake up in a comfy little house, away from other people and problems.

Kai couldn't banish the idea of waking up drinking a nice tea and reading a book. The sun was shining from the window, thick walls reinforced with steel and enchantments kept him safe and hidden.

*No, that's not weird at all! It's not a kidnapping if I go of my own free will.*

With a deep sigh, Kai pushed away the daydreaming. This time he didn't dismiss the scroll page.

*Maybe that's the right choice...*

Profession: **Mana Child**

Main Requirements: **Mana Sense lv50+; Mana Manipulation lv50+; Runes lv20+; Less than 12 years of age.**

Description: ***You've delved into the arcane from a very young age, and never stopped digging to uncover the secrets of the Essence of the World. As your skills grow, you won't grow complacent but continue to widen the scope of your knowledge.***

Attributes: **1 Mind, 1.5 Spirit, 0.5 Perception per level.**

Boon: **1**

Skill slots: **2**

*Yeah, it can never be easy.*

Mana Child had the highest attributes among the seven options. They were divided among only three stats, true, but that wasn't necessarily a downside. While Strength and Dexterity were cool, mental stats were better for magic.

Mana Child was a general mage profession that didn't limit him to any single field of the arcane. It might not have a path of progression as clear as Promising Herbal Alchemist, but it was a close second. He could pursue anything as long as he made use of mana.

He could fight to the death using Empower and Water Magic or peacefully carve runes at home. Alchemy would count too, though it would probably give less XP than if he took a specific profession.

*Hard to find any weakness with this one except spreading myself thin. But I might be wrong depending on the skills and boon.*

Most of his general skills were mana-related and would benefit greatly from this choice. It was also interesting to see that Mana Child had an age restriction. Maybe choosing a profession early wasn't only a disadvantage.

*And this makes two serious contenders.*

Profession: ***Favored Son of the Isles***

Main Requirements: ***Blessing of Kahali and Yatei; Favor 30+***

Description: ***Son of a distant world, you've been adopted by the Great Spirits of the Baquaire Archipelago who have bestowed their blessing upon you. Become one with the islands and sea, read the will of the Great Spirits in every wave and blade of grass.***

Attributes: ***0.5 Constitution, 1 Spirit, 0.5 Perception per level.***

Boon: **2**

Skill slots: **2**

The last one, though certainly not by importance, Favored Son of the Isles was the most intriguing profession. If he were to pick based on his curiosity alone, it wouldn't even be a contest.

Virya had told him boons were rare and he *would* only get one at Red, and the mage was *never* wrong. On top of that, the requirements mentioned Favor.

Everybody knew that a profession couldn't grant even a scarp of the seventh stat, but what about helping him gain more or make use of what he had? What would those *two* boons and skills do?

The description mentioned he might become some sort of mediator for the Great Spirits, but it was otherwise vague. If Favored Son of the Isles showed him how to gain more feats, it wouldn't matter if he later discarded it, those would stay with him.

The attributes weren't too great compared to his other options. Still, two stats per level was extremely good according to Flynn, and an extra boon more than made up for the difference.

*If only it wasn't for that one damn flaw.*

Steeling his will, Kai waved the page away.

*I hope the spirits won't take it personally.*

Even if it wasn't clear what he would need to do to gain XP, he could figure that out with time. The true problem was that it offered no Mind, not even a quarter of a point, nothing.

One of the main reasons he broke the Second Seal early was to solve the riddles of Virya's cube and obtain the prize hidden inside before the timer ran out. Spirit would help, Mind was fundamental.

*It sucks, but it might also give boons and skills that are useless to me. That would leave me with nothing.*

Certainties before vague hopes. That was what Dora and Elijah taught him.

Two pages floated before him. He'd narrowed down his options from seven, now he had to pick one.

They gave the same amount of Mind, so that wasn't going to help. Mana Child granted slightly more stats while Promising Herbal Alchemist would make him rich.

Kai couldn't find any real flaws with either of them. From Flynn's reaction to the snippets, he told him, more than a handful of people would kill to pick either one.

Even if he discarded it later on, the choice held a heavy weight. His fourteenth birthday was years down the line. As the raid taught him, he could never know what life would throw at him in the meantime.

This choice would determine his future. Perhaps save his life or doom it.

His eyes frantically darted between the two pages looking for something to cling to. Panic was slowly rising in his gut like an inevitable tide. Flynn's *words of wisdom* flashed in his mind.

The raw number of benefits was important, so was what the profession actually did.

*What do I want to do? Who do I want to be?*

After the raid on Sylspring, two quiet years were tempting. No sudden dangers or surprises, just a clear and safe path before him till he sailed to the Talthen continent.

**\*Ding\***

**Are you sure you want to select Mana Child for your profession slot?**

*I'm about 73% sure, proceed!*