

## Chapter 259 - Rescue

His hands clawed the water for the surface. No matter what spell or skill Kai tried, he was always dragged back down, plunged into depths without escape. His chest scorched by the need for oxygen, he hung on to consciousness by a thread, just enough to prolong his suffering.

A distant voice whispered of rescue, offering him a glimmer of hope. Then it was gone, and he was left alone in the bottomless abyss.

*No!*

Kai jolted awake, heaving for precious mouthfuls of air. He swung his arms wildly to free himself from the white linen sheets and reach the light. The sun outside the porthole illuminated a curved plank ceiling.

*How did I get here...?*

Heart still pounding, he touched the bandaged lump on his head with a grimace. A piece of the *Intrepid* had nearly cracked his skull. There had been a storm, pirates that weren't really pirates, and a crazy bastard intent on choking him. Then...

The memories were fuzzy, muddled by his throbbing headache. There had been blood and perhaps a voice, or was that a dream?

*Someone or something killed the pirate...*

The gentle rocking made clear he was on a ship. From the plain room and lack of intricate enchantments, it wasn't the pirates' vessel—they wouldn't have left him unshackled in a room.

*Guess the Fulcrum wasn't done with the surprises yet...*

Kai was relieved to notice the disturbance obscuring Hallowed Intuition was gone. Fighting deadly duels without the skill wasn't an experience he wished to repeat, ever. He wasn't going to compromise that veil of protection again, though there were more pressing issues.

*Where am I?*

Whoever rescued him must have some morals since the silver ring was still on his finger. He was debating the risks of using Mana Observer when the door flung open.

Flynn barged inside—a smile split his face. "You're awake." Before Kai could fit in a word, his friend had already thrown his arms around him. "You were barely breathing when they fished you out. No one could tell me when you'd get better."

"I'm fine... ouch." Kai grimaced when the teenager brushed the lump on his head. "I'll be fine." If his Constitution hadn't cured him, it must have been quite the wound.

*I should still have the balm from the Sanctuary...*

"Let me help you." Flynn snatched the jar from his hands. "The captain was too cheap to use any decent potions. I lost most of my money when the *Intrepid* sank. And I had to use everything to get this cabin," he grumbled while undoing the bandages. "Don't squirm so much."

"If you'd be a little more delicate." Kai scowled, forcing himself to sit still on the cot. "Wait! Where are we? And who fished me up?"

"Oh, right... This is the *Melenia*." Flynn gestured to the plain cabin with a flourish. "The apex of luxury and high-living on the Vanean Sea, at least according to the captain. I think it was just an excuse to spill us of anything of value. It looks more like a retrofitted fishing vessel if you ask me. The passengers aboard..."

Kai cleared his throat to bring him back on track. "And *how* did we get..."

"Sorry, that captain just makes me..." His hands clenched around the air. "The *Melenia* was sailing the coast when the captain *claims* she heard a cry and hurried over to help." His tone oozed with skepticism. "As if you can hear a voice miles at sea. It would have been more believable to spot the wreckage, but she couldn't even bother to come up with a believable story."

Kai nodded along, piecing together the situation. "So, there are more survivors...?"

"Fifty-three got to the *Melenia*, including us. There could be more who got blown in a different direction by the storm."

*Fifty-three... so I only killed a few hundred...*

"Ahi!" Kai jerked away from the spike of pain. "When did you get so clumsy?"

"I was trying to push the stupid thoughts out of your skull." Flynn gave him a long, meaningful look. "Don't deny it. I can read them all over your face."

"I— I caused the mana storm."

"And saved more than fifty people with it. If you hadn't used the Fulcrum, we'd all be dead or taken by the pirates."

"We don't know what could have happened. Maybe... maybe the pirates would have left after they got what they wanted. Or kept us alive."

“Do you *really* believe that?” Flynn held his gaze. “Would you do things differently if you could go back?”

“I...” Kai bit his cheek. Whether this was the best outcome or not, he couldn’t celebrate their survival after so much death. “No...”

“Mhmm... glad you haven’t lost your last speck of common sense.” Flynn finished changing the bandages. “It will scar, but it shouldn’t be visible beneath your hair.”

“What about the pirates? Some got left behind on the sinking ship, they could have also been hidden in the wreckage. I—”

“We’re safe. Despite being a miser, Captain Karin isn’t a fool. She wouldn’t allow anyone suspicious on her ship. The five or so raiders they found in the wreckage were all dead. Probably some fluke of Fate...”

A double knock came from the door. “Sorry. I hope I’m not disturbing you.” A young stranger stood in the doorway. His short hair was already white, though he couldn’t be much older than him. “I heard your friend finally woke up. I wanted to see how he was doing.”

“And you are...?” Kai turned to Flynn since he appeared to know the intruder.

His friend stared at the newcomer with a slightly stunned look. “Uhm... this is Oraine. He was a passenger on the *Intrepid*. And the one who pulled you out of the wreckage before Captain Karin found us.”

*Him...?*

“I’m so happy to finally meet you, Matthew.” Oraine offered his hand with a polite smile. “Flynn was so worried you wouldn’t wake. You must be great friends.”

“Yeah...” Kai stiffly shook his cold hand.

There was something magnetic about the teen that made him unable to avert his gaze. It was more than the fact he was annoyingly handsome, or that his pale hair reflected a blue hue—probably for the light reflecting off the sea.

*Is it some kind of social skill?*

“Thank you for saving my life then... I don’t remember seeing you aboard the *Intrepid*.”

“Uh, I get that a lot.” Oraine scratched his neck with an awkward smile. “You see, I’m not a fan of crowded spaces. I stayed in my cabin sleeping for most of the journey. It’s a little embarrassing to admit, but I only realized we had been boarded by pirates when the sound wards failed. By then it was too late to do much.”

Flynn gave him a pat. "You did the best you could."

"Mhmm... thanks." Oraine nodded weakly.

*Isn't that awfully convenient?*

"Did you see a pirate when you rescued me?"

His platinum eyebrows formed a small crease. "A pirate...?"

"Yeah," Kai pushed through the headache to recall the nebulous details. "A man dressed in black was trying to choke me. Then someone slit his throat... was that *you*?"

*Being convalescent should give me a pass on social etiquette, right?*

"I didn't see anyone else near you." Oraine gave him an apologetic look. "The sea was full of debris and bodies when the ship broke. Your head was also bleeding pretty badly. Is it possible you misremember what happened?"

"I—" Kai wished to say he was certain of what he saw. Was he really? "Maybe you're right."

*I don't remember everything, but the crazy murderhobo definitely followed me...*

"Well, I should let you rest. Let me know if there is anything I can do to help. Flynn has told me some very interesting stories about you. We can talk more when you're feeling better." Oraine dipped out of the cabin with an unnatural grace.

*What's his grade*— He froze in shock, uncomprehending. What Mana Observer told him didn't make any sense.

"He's a pretty great guy, isn't he?" Flynn grinned. "He also convinced the captain to not take your ring in exchange for the bandages. I would have gone crazy if he wasn't there to listen to my rants."

"Oraine is at the peak of Yellow," Kai stammered, still dumbly staring at the door. His voice choked an octave higher. "He can't be much older than you."

"He's sixteen. Less than a year younger than me." Flynn said as if that were nothing special.

"How— how can he—?"

"C'mon, don't be jealous. You'll always be my number one pupil." Flynn lightly slapped his back. "We knew there would be kids with high grades on the mainland. From what Oraine told me about his family dramas, they aren't ordinary people. I think he ran away or something. And he most definitely wasn't born at the bottom of red."

\* \* \*

**New Feat: Thrill Chaser - As if a crew of shady pirates wasn't enough, you've called upon a mana storm and still lived to tell the tale. You are awarded: +3 Favor!**

*Why are the descriptions getting more impertinent?*

The wording of the Guide should be based on his experiences and mature as he grew up.

*Well, it doesn't matter as long as I get the same reward.*

Kai rested his chin on the railing of the quarterdeck. Undulating waves tailed behind the *Melenia* on a blessedly peaceful sea and a sky without a cloud in sight. If the pirate fiasco was anything to go by, 80 Favor wasn't infallible.

*Perhaps 100? Or were the other people with high Luck among the raiders?*

Despite years of testing and research, the workings of Fate were not much clearer than the day he gained his first point. Virya had warned him the seventh attribute was notoriously unreliable. He could enjoy the good Fortune that befell him, but he should *never* rely upon it, lest it shall fail him when he needed it the most.

*Playing with Fate is like asking to get screwed.*

He summoned his status to raise his mood.

- Name: **Kai Tylenn (Matthew)**
- Race: **Yellow ★** – 343,188 > 370,588 / 500,000 XP
- Profession: **Favored Son of the Isles lv7 > 9** – 147 / 14,000

#### **Body stats**

- Strength: **36**
- Dexterity: **37**
- Constitution: **41.5 (38+3.5) > 42.5 (38+4.5)**
- Mind: **49 (42+7) > 51 (42+9)**
- Spirit: **55 (48+7) > 57 (48+9)**
- Perception: **36.5 (33+3.5) > 37.5 (33+4.5)**
- Favor: **80 > 83**

**Boons:**

- **Gifts of the Earth**
- **Kahali's Retribution**
- **Spatial Attunement**

**Profession Skills:**

- **Natural Prodigy (lv63>93)**
- **Rippling Echo (lv61>78)**
- **Astral Pathway (lv4>47)**

**General Skills:**

- **Hallowed Intuition (lv76>77)**
- **Mana Observer (lv38>40)**
- **Body Augmentation (lv34>36)**
- **Mana Analyst (lv27>28)**
- **Mana Weaving (lv23>25)**
- **Mana Engraving (lv21>22)**
- **Water Magic – Advanced (lv16>19)**
- **Split Mind (lv16>19)**
- **Arcane Enchanting (lv9>10)**
- **Elemental Swordsman (lv7>8)**
- **Hobbes (lv5>10)**
- **Runic Scholar (lv4)**
- **Nature Magic – Advanced (lv4)**
- **Space Magic – Advanced (lv1>3)**
  
- **Herbology – Advanced (lv96>99)**
- **Alchemy (lv84>88)**
- **Blessed Swimmer (lv73>78)**
- **Shadow Magic (lv38>43)**
- **Earth Magic (lv40>43)**
- **Advanced Hunting (lv31)**
- **Treasure Sense (lv23>25)**

He wasn't entirely sure what the domain of Favored Son of the Isles was since the fight against the black raiders earned him over three thousand XP.

*Perhaps the spirits like me stomping on murderous miscreants. Those guys did mention something about a god and a spy...*

It was obvious they hadn't been simple buccaneers but part of some larger organization. Not that it mattered. Kai had no intention of crossing paths with those psychos again.

*There is enough to explore on land.*

The domain XP had pushed him a single step from evolving his profession. He wasn't sure what kind of options he would get, but three skill slots and boons were a permanent benefit he would carry to whatever he chose.

Being two grades higher also eased the effort of raising his profession skills. Once they all reached level 100, there would be nothing stopping him from advancing Favored Son of the Isles. He'd finally be able to face threats on an even playing field—he was sick and tired of being the underdog.

*My next enhancement isn't that far either.*

He had kept up a light training routine in Sylspring, though it was the storm that had tipped many skills to the next level. As always, the Guide rewarded extreme circumstances.

"Meow!" Hobbes rubbed against his inner leg to be picked up.

The familiar had been more affectionate since he woke up yesterday. Kai cradled and scratched the silver furball, his violet eyes studying the blue expanse with open distaste.

"Mrooow."

"Just endure it a little longer." He wasn't surprised the teleporting feline had managed to follow them on the *Melenia*, though His Majesty was less than satisfied with the food on board. Kai's snacks, clothes and a large share of the alchemical tools had sunk with the ship, and he was among the lucky ones.

*I can rebuy everything once we get on shore. I got off light, considering anything I care about is stored in the ring.*

Captain Karin had taken them on board as by the unwritten law of the sea, though she wasn't above fleecing them of every valuable they had on them and put them to scrub the decks.

*She did save our lives...*

"Mrow." Hobbes glared at the white-haired teen. Oraine chatted with a group of young women, who giggled and smiled at anything he said.

*I agree, Kai petted his familiar's neck. Something's off about him.*

Hobbes liked the boy even less than him.

For someone who didn't like crowds, Oraine had already charmed everyone on board—Captain Karin included. Half the women were already swooning after him—and some of the men too.

*It must have been him who killed the surviving pirates... But why would he lie?*

Despite being at Yellow ★★★, Oraine's profession looked in the early stages of Orange. He couldn't have defeated every raider by himself, could he?

*He was simply born with a better starting point. His skills can't be higher than mine.*

"You'll get cross-eyed if you keep glaring." Flynn mused behind him. "You know just because someone is more handsome and stronger than you, it doesn't mean they're evil."

"It's not that."

*He's older, I've got plenty of time to catch up to him.*

Flynn arched an eyebrow with an amused look.

"Fine. It's not *just* that. I've asked around. I've talked with almost twenty survivors from the *Intrepid*, and none of them remember seeing him board the ship."

"You've *investigated* him?"

"Of course. Lower your voice," Kai hissed. "Can't you see how suspicious he is?"

"He saved your life. I saw him pull you out of the sea myself."

*And he also went out of his way to kill half a dozen pirates and lied about it.*

"I'm grateful for his help, and I'm not saying he's a bad person. But he's hiding something," Kai whispered. "Did you notice anything odd about him when he pulled me out of the water?"

"It was dark. He left you on a piece of drifting wood and dove again. Probably to save more people."

"Did you not see him reemerge or where he went? Was he holding any weapon?"

"You're not going to drop this, are you?" Flynn sighed audibly. He didn't wait for an obvious answer. "I'll help you look into it, but if there is nothing, you promise to let this go?"



“On your life,” Kai vowed, a hand resting over his heart.

Flynn shook his head with a rueful smile. “I don’t know if anybody told you, but that’s not how promises work. Anyway, I’ve spoken with someone who recognized Oraine from the *Intrepid*. So we can drop that thread.”

“Really...?” His eyebrows climbed in surprise.

*Wait! Were you investigating him too...?*

Flynn innocently ignored his glances. “It was that girl over there.” He pointed to one of the women who were chatting with Oraine earlier. “She remembered him quite vividly.”

“You mean the one with the reddish hair?”

“Yep.”

“That’s not possible. I talked to her this morning. She was also surprised to not remember him.”