

## Interlude - Rewards

Naha looked at her chest. The lock on it had a symbol of a constantly shapeshifting hand holding a dagger made out of shadows. She didn't know if it meant something more than what it was. Was that how the Framework saw her? A shadowy dagger and a shifting hand? It was part of the truth anyway. She opened the chest and then went through the items inside, a reward for a feat that they had achieved. She didn't feel elated or happy, not relieved or grateful. She glanced at Zach, saw him opening his own chest. He was... changed. She had hoped that it was just that the aftereffects of whatever mind attack Hastur exposed them to. That it would go away, but... He remembered everything, and what he had told her...

She and the others didn't remember anything about it, like a dream that had already been forgotten. She had a few... feelings, still left over, but nothing else. For her, there was no time in between passing through the Ethereal portal and waking up trapped. Zach had lived through it all, he remembered thousands of years, so long that he had forgotten his past. He had forgotten her and everything that they had been trying to do.

She... she didn't know what to do with him, how to approach him. It hurt to see him look at her and not know her. Yet... after all that time, after all that he had forgotten, he still remembered her name. That had to mean something at least.

She set those thoughts aside for a moment. They were in a peculiar situation, they couldn't contact anyone in the Empire or the Settled Territories, which was... strange. And Anashi had told them that she is unable to open a way into the Ethereal Realm for some reason.

The others were taking a moment to go through their own loot, hoping that time will change something before all of them had to make a decision. She did the same thing and picked up a rack filled with potions and looked at them.

Eternal Elixir Shadows	Drinking this elixir will boost the effectiveness of Shadow Aspect by 100x for 1 hour.
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Eternal Elixir of Pure Willpower	Drinking this elixir will replenish your willpower to full and increase its effectiveness by 100x for 1 hour.
Eternal Draught of Attunement Upgrade	Drinking the draught will improve the attunement of your choice to the tier equal to the Eternal tier nine Class Evolution choice.

Eternal potions. She had never seen one before. They were... beyond rare. Worth more than she could even imagine. That Attunement upgrade one could buy her whatever she wished. Her and Zach's dream, or perhaps just hers now. She was afraid to talk to him, to learn more. She was afraid that the Zach she knew was gone, and that he would never return again. She knew that she shouldn't, but she just couldn't bring herself to do it.

She shook her head again, focusing on the items.

<b>Ring of True Shapeshifter Identity</b>	<p>+1500 to Intelligence  +1000 to Vitality  +1000 to Endurance</p> <p>The Ring of True Shapeshifter Identity will fully change your screens to those of your form in such a way that nothing will be able to see through the deception. You will also gain access to three of the form's abilities/techniques/skills (Highest tier focus) while in that form.</p>
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With this one thing, she had just gained a way for her shapeshifting forms to be perfect. There were many things that she could do on her own, change a shape, imitate their mannerisms and speech patterns, but she couldn't replicate someone else's powers. Now, she will be able to use at least some of their power, to truly sell the lie. The ring was a shapeshifter's dream. She slid it on her finger, then looked into the chest again.

Piece of Night	Using this item will immediately turn day into night inside the territory you are currently in. It will also bring up the quality of Shadow Essence in the territory to the tier nine. Can be used once every three months.
Advent of Image	Using this item will allow you to create a nascent skill image before acquiring nine tier nine skills, as long as you have all your skill slots filled. The image will not be fully formed and it will be weaker until you reach the end of the skill focus path.

She didn't know what image was, but based on the wording it seemed like it was something tied to the end of the skill focus. It was... important and probably incredibly powerful. The **Piece of Night** orb was... it gave her an incredible tool. Especially since many of her skills were tied to shadows. She had been moving in that direction for a while now, imbuing all of her skills with shadows, where she could at least.

The two orbs were... priceless. She placed them in her storage and looked to the next.

The last item was circlet of red metal, three strains twisted together to make one ring. It had what looked like tiny leaves on top and what looked like teardrops on the bottom. She picked it up and immediately felt

<b>Circlet of True Mirrors</b>	+3500 to Intelligence  This circlet makes all of your attunements twice as effective when worn. You may create up to two true illusions around you. They will appear fully real to anyone looking at them along with full screens, they will have substance
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	and will be able to interact with the world around them. The illusions are controlled by your mind, and they can take any form you can imagine.
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She wasn't quite sure why she was given such an item as a reward, but she could see many uses for it. Distraction and even combat will be a lot easier with it. Especially since the illusions will be real, more like a manifestation of her mind. She wondered how powerful they could be. She would need to test it.

She put it on her head and then looked around. The others were all still looking at their own loot, so she settled in to wait. Once they were done, they would all be forced to face reality—something was wrong, and they needed to hurry and find out what.

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Selia looked at the glowing gate and the tower in the middle of the square. The gate to R'lyeh. She didn't know what it was, but it appeared like an entrance to a dungeon to her. Another test, another obstacle in their path. She shook her head and turned away. The others were looking through their loot and she glanced at the three chests near her. Erdania was looking at her own rewards, her chest already open.

Selia walked over to one of the chests, and looked at its symbol, it was just a black nothingness, a void. It was Ryun's reward. His immortality would've sent his soul to safety to recover, rebuild his body from scratch. It was going to take some time. He had done... more than most of them had. In the end, he had chosen to give Zacharia a chance to kill the Dome Leader, even though it cost him time. Zacharia... she glanced at the man, still feeling the great power of will from him, though a bit more subdued now. She wasn't sure what had happened to him, and there had been no time to find out. She turned away from him, and placed her hand on Ryun's reward and put the chest inside her storage. She couldn't open it, but she could keep it safe for him.

Then, she turned to her own chest. Her symbol was many forged objects floating in a silver sea. Her Path relied on her shaping her Qi into weapons, duplicating and enforcing them with her Class. She used her will to shape and control them, and her Qi improved her ability to do so. She wondered what she had gained.

She reached down and opened her chest, then looked inside at the first of her rewards.

Eternal Elixir of Sanguine Silver	Drinking this elixir will boost the effectiveness of your Sanguine Silver Aspect by 100x for 1 hour.
Eternal Elixir of Pure Willpower	Drinking this elixir will replenish your willpower to full and increase its effectiveness by 100x for 1 hour.
Eternal Drought of Attunement Upgrade	Drinking the drought will improve the attunement of your choice to the tier equal to the Eternal tier nine Class Evolution choice.

Powerful potions, two that were single use, trump cards really. And they lasted for one hour, enough that she could do... Retaking her sect would not be impossible with even one of those elixirs. The last one was incredible too, an Elixir that would improve one of her attunements. Both of her attunements were incredibly important for her build, being able to improve them would be... Though, perhaps she should wait, she did plan on leveling her Class, evolving it further, she could improve some of her future attunements. She would need to think about it.

She wondered what Erdania had gained, she didn't have a Class, so that meant that she was probably granted something different.

She turned her eyes back to the chest and pulled out two orbs.

Shrine of Sanguine Silver	Using this item will create a Sanguine Silver Shrine at any location. The shrine will generate tier nine Sanguine Silver and it will be accessible
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	only to the user and anyone that they deem acceptable to enter.
Will-shaped Cultivation Core	This is a fully functional Cultivation Core. When used, the size of the core will be copied from the user's core. Using will, it can be filled with any type of Essence which it will then turn into Qi of the equivalent tier as the Essence put into it. The user can draw Qi from it when holding it, in the same manner that a Cultivator can draw from their own Core, and then use the Qi for their techniques. Can only be used by Cultivators.

The shrine was something that she had been looking for a while. Her sect had a source of it, but she didn't have one of her own. Without her Sect she had no access to the Essence she needed. Though, she hadn't really cycled in a long time. But she did think that she could figure out how to move to the next Realm, Ryun's ideas had pointed her in the right direction, at least she felt that way.

But the second item was far more interesting. It literally gave her a second core, it would double her Qi reserves. Allow her to create twice the amount of objects. Put together, the two orbs were instantly two of her most valuable possessions. She placed them in her storage and then continued looking.

Next, she pulled out a small ring.

<b>Ring of the Mind Forger</b>	+3500 to Intelligence  The Ring of the Mind Forger increases the efficiency of all your mind creation-based powers by
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	100%. While worn, your overall speed is increased by 80%, and your resource costs are reduced by 50%. Constructs you create have +80% to their durability and their offensive and defensive power is increased by 50%. Once per week, you can create a mind construct free of all costs.
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A perfect item for her. She hadn't doubted that it would be. The Framework's rewards for this feat were... incredible. And she hadn't even had the chance to look through her notifications yet, and there were a lot of them. She had glanced at her Class, and knew that she could evolve it. The Evolution was obviously a direct reward for their feat. It was called—**Glorious Projection Mindsmith**—and was a Relic Class. She hadn't ever heard about Class named Glorious, the direct evolution of her Class was **Grand Projection Mindsmith**. She suspected that it was special version. She would need to try and find information, if there is any, about such Classes before evolving it.

She placed the ring on her finger, which left only one item in the chest. She had left it for last on purpose, it was... a blank face mask. It didn't feel like the other items did, and she had a suspicion as to what it was.

Slowly, almost tentatively, she reached out to it.

### **Awakened Mask — Shard of All Sorrow**

An awakened object. She had searched for a long time, and had never been able to find one that fit her, that she felt comfortable with. She knew that the Framework rewarded them only rarely, but that always they were shaped to fit the one that they were given to, at least at the time they received them.

This was an awakened object that would fit her. And yet she hesitated in taking it up, in bonding it. The name was what frightened her. After all this

time, after all that she had been through, was Sorrow all that she was? She wasn't sure if she wanted to know the answer to that.

She picked it up, but didn't do anything with it, she simply stored it in her ring. This wasn't the time for it. She looked around, saw that the others had finished going through their own rewards, and she could almost feel the looming conversation coming. The thing that they had ignored since they defeated the Dome Leader, the wrongness of the situation they were in, the fact that no one was answering their calls—Selia had tried to call Sigmund, but he didn't answer either. They had taken a few moments to heal and rest, distracted themselves with their rewards, but now was the time for reality to reassert itself. She stood up and walked up to the slowly gathering circle. She did not look forward to the conversation.