

94: Loot and chill

[Quest completed: Cleared The Decayed Catacombs]

{Skill points awarded: 3}

“Well done, everyone,” Scarlett said as they climbed up a set of moldy stone stairs, exiting into a dilapidated old temple. The midday sun shone through parts of the missing ceiling. “This will be the last excursion of this trip. Soon, we will return to Freybrook.”

“Aww, already? I thought we were on a roll.” Rosa displayed an exaggerated pout. “Sure you don’t have any more strange places you want to show us?”

“We do not have the time,” Scarlett answered, watching the bard sit down on a piece of stone nearby. “Passage through the Kilnstone has already been arranged for the evening.”

She shifted her attention and surveyed the area. This temple was about an hour away from where there had once been a minor village settlement, though both had apparently been abandoned a few generations back when there had been rampant monster issues in the region. The catacombs beneath the temple had turned into a dwelling space for the undead after a while, and it had been an easy find with the map Scarlett had bought back in Darkshore.

They’d stayed here in the city for four days now. This was the third dungeon they’d cleared in that time, if you discounted the Zuverian crypt where she found the seal piece. The gains she got from these dungeons were a lot better than the ones in the Freybrook area. Both when it came to quest awards and the artifacts found.

[Name: Scarlett Hartford]

[Skills:

[Greater Mana Control]

[Greater Pyromancy]

[Greater Pyrokinesis]

[Hydromancy]

[Greater Hydrokinesis]]

[Traits:

[Dignified August]

[Supercilious]

[Cavalier]

[Callous]

[Overbearing]

[Conceited]

[Third-rate Mana Veins]]

[Mana: 4635/4635]

[Points: 27]

Twenty-seven skill points were enough to upgrade either her pyrokinesis or hydrokinesis, if she wanted.

She glanced down at her left hand, where there was a thin silver bracelet around the wrist.

[Prayer of Salvation (Epic)]

{The prayers of old linger in this bracelet, bolstering its wearer}

It was an item that, in the game, improved your magical defense. Something which Scarlett lacked the ability to do on her own. As her only real defense was the skill [Sidhe's Flowing Garbs], which she got from [Lifeblood's Eternal Circuit], she could only rely on the set limit of that skill. She couldn't level it up, as it came from an item. And while it took mana to maintain the skill, just increasing her total mana wouldn't make the skill stronger. That's why items like this were important.

Other than this, she had acquired a rusty old dagger from the dungeon they'd visited yesterday, called [Fireguard Knife (Rare)]. It slightly empowered pyromancy spells, though she wasn't sure whether it worked with her pyrokinesis as well. She was planning on trying it out after returning to Freybrook. If it did work, she would have it brought to a blacksmith to restore it. It'd been in a pretty poor state.

She wasn't the only one who'd gotten some new gains from these dungeons, though.

Fynn had a new necklace made of deep black bones—[Dark Wolf pendant (Rare)]—which gave a boost to strength. They'd found it in the first dungeon they cleared, which was the den of a pack of wolves who'd lived in the nearby hills.

As for Rosa, the bard had gotten a bracelet that matched Scarlett's. [Prayer of Devotion (Epic)] was its name and strengthened healing spells. It had been found along with the [Prayer of Salvation], and unfortunately, the two bracelets came as a set. They'd found them just half an hour earlier, but it had already prompted several jokes from the bard, which Scarlett was starting to realize she would just have to live with for a while.

Unlike with Fynn and Rosa, Scarlett hadn't outright given anything to Allyssa and Shin. She had, however, let Allyssa use an old metal crossbow called the [Willow Bolter (Rare)] that they'd found the day before. Apparently it was slightly larger than the normal hand crossbow the young Shielder was used to, but it had an interesting effect where each bolt would build up a sense of vertigo in the victim, which was useful for someone relying a lot on alchemy like Allyssa.

They'd found more than just this, of course—including a bunch of useful materials and resources—but nothing more that particularly fit anyone in their group. The rest would just be sold off.

They rested in the temple for a while longer before finally getting up and ready to leave. For now, all their business in the Darkshore area was finished.



The carriage traveled up the gravel path at the front of the Freybrook mansion, stopping before the archway to the courtyard. As Scarlett and the others exited, they were greeted by Marlon and another servant.

“Welcome back, my Lady,” Marlon said. “I hope your trip has gone well.”

“It has.” Scarlett glanced to the side, where there stood two other parked carriages. She gestured towards them. “Are there guests?”

“Madame Evelyne and Madame Livvi are currently in the parlor, my Lady.”

Those two were here? She knew Evelyne was supposed to have returned by now, but she wasn't expecting the woman to visit the mansion immediately. Especially not with Livvi in tow. Had they just coincidentally visited at the same time?

“I see. Then I suppose I should greet them.” Scarlett walked past the two servants. “Have the other servants handle and catalogue the items that we brought back from the excursion, then bring the bag to my office.”

She saw Shin hand the [Bag of Juham] over to the servant next to Marlon.

As she continued towards the mansion, passing under the archway that connected its two wings, she observed the current state of the courtyard. Most of the damage that had been caused by the Hallowed Cabal had been cleaned up by now, though it had taken surprisingly long to have some of the ruined and scorched stonework removed. Most of the flower beds had been pulled up—even the ones who had made it through unharmed—leaving just bare dirt lining the edges and much of the space at the center of the courtyard. It was much like a clean slate, ready to be rebuilt once more.

The real reparations would have to wait, though. They probably couldn't postpone them forever—Scarlett imagined that wouldn't go over that well in the long run, as a noble—but she at least wanted to have a more clear idea of how much it'd cost, and for them to be as financially stable as possible when they did get to it. She was still considering whether it was even worth rebuilding the fountain, for example. It had been nice, sure, but a fountain wasn't exactly the most basic feat of engineering.

Well, at least the ones back in her world. Maybe they had a better method here, considering magic was a thing.

Crossing the courtyard and entering the mansion foyer, she turned back to the others who had followed her. “We will not be doing more today. Feel free to do with the remaining time as you wish. We will most likely leave on a brief venture tomorrow as well, though not all of you have to join.”

“Are we going back to Freymeadow?” Shin asked.

“Yes, that is correct.”

He shrugged his shoulder. “Then I don't see why we all won't join this time as well.”

“That will be up to you,” Scarlett said. “Simply be aware that I will either be entering by myself or with Miss Hale.”

“...Alright.”

Scarlett looked over at the others for a moment. “Then, we will see each other later.”

She turned around and made for the stairs that led to the second floor, where she then started making her way towards the guest parlor. Eventually, she stopped before a dark wooden door with two tall vases on either side, taking a deep breath as she mentally prepared herself. Then she opened the door.

The evening sun shone in through the large windows at the end of the room, reflecting off the marble floor and highlighting the two women who sat opposite each other in the middle of the room.

Both Livvi and Evelyne turned to look at her.

That familiar feeling of disgust reared its head inside Scarlett. It had been over a month since Evelyne and her last met, so even with her expecting it, the intensity of the emotion almost caught her off-guard. Still, she was pretty sure she managed to maintain a relatively neutral expression as she walked over.

“Scarlett?” Evelyne eyed her as she approached. “You never said where you went, so I honestly wasn’t expecting you to return today.”

“I was in Darkshore, though could say the same of you.” Scarlett sat down in the armchair next to them. She glanced at Livvi. “I was not expecting either of you to be here.”

The bespectacled woman showed a small smile as she cradled a cup of tea in her hands. “Evelyne mentioned that she’d be returning from the capital today, so I thought it would be a good opportunity to meet up. It’s been a while since we last spoke.”

“And you said I could stay here without a problem,” Evelyne said, looking at Scarlett with a slightly peeved expression.

Scarlett raised a brow. “I did not mean my words as a disparagement. I was merely surprised.”

Perhaps she’d sounded a bit more annoyed than she had thought.

Evelyne’s expression softened somewhat.

“I trust you two have had an enjoyable discussion?”

“...Yes. There’s been a lot to talk about.” Evelyne looked over at Livvi. “We were reminiscing a bit before you entered.”

“That’s true,” Livvi said. “We were talking about that time our fathers held that small competition for the local nobles on the grounds of this estate. I still remember that day

fondly.” The woman peered out the large windows that overlooked the back of the mansion. “Do you recall when my brother challenged your father for a chance to sit next to you at the celebrations, Scarlett? I think that was the first time I ever saw him so forlorn.”

“...I do not recall that, no.”

Evelyne glanced at her. “I remember that day, but mostly just the duel our fathers had at the end. That was the first time I really felt like I wanted to be a mage over a knight.”

Livvi laughed. “Don’t let my father hear you say that. He’d be heartbroken if he learned his showing that day discouraged a budding new knight in their ambitions.”

“I don’t think it was his fault,” Evelyne said. “It was just the first time I’d seen my father in actual combat.”

Scarlett noticed Livvi throwing small looks her way, though she wasn’t quite sure what the meaning behind those was. After a while, the woman turned her attention down to the teacup in her hands, staying quiet for a moment as she took a sip. “I have a surprising number of wonderful memories from this place. It broke my heart to see what had happened to both the courtyard and the grounds at the back.”

Evelyne’s face turned ugly at that, and the younger woman turned to Scarlett. “I was informed of the courtyard through letter, but the training grounds came as a surprise to me as well.”

Scarlett froze.

Oh.

She had completely forgotten to mention that, hadn’t she? She’d been so focused on the Fynn issue at the time.

“...I wish you had at least told me about what happened to Garside,” Evelyne said.

“Garside?” A worried expression grew on Livvi’s face. “What happened to him? Is he alright?”

Scarlett glanced between the two. It had been Garside’s own wish that she didn’t tell Evelyne about it, but she couldn’t very well say that now.

“He is alright, yes. There is no need to be overly fretful,” she said. “He was indeed injured during the assault on the mansion. But we had a capable healer nearby that treated him soon after. Since then, he has been convalescing in his quarters, and there do not appear to be any major issues with his recovery.”

“Really?” Livvi let out a breath. “I’m glad. He always used to keep an eye on us when we were younger, but I feel like it’s been so long since I last saw him.”

“You may visit him, if you wish. I do not believe he will take offense.” Scarlett looked at Evelyne. “That goes for you as well, if you have not yet visited him.”

“I did when I first heard the details earlier today, but I might again later.”

“Very well.” Scarlett gave a curt nod of her head, then rose from her seat. “I will leave you to continue your conversation for now. As you can see, I am not currently in the most presentable of states.”

She gestured to her traveling attire. They’d stayed at a relatively large inn in Darkshore these past nights, so it wasn’t as if she’d spent several days out in the wilderness. But she hadn’t cleaned herself since before they cleared the last dungeon, so it would be nice to take a proper bath. She’d just wanted to check what brought these two here, but it didn’t seem to be anything important.

“Wait, before you leave,” Evelyne said.

Scarlett looked at her. “Yes?”

“It’s about the Delmons...” The younger woman paused for a moment, then shook her head. “Actually, never mind. It can wait till later.”

“...If you say so. Then I will take my leave.” Scarlett sent one last look towards Livvi. “Until next time.”

“It looks like I’ll be staying here in Freybrook for a while longer, so I might pay more visits if that is alright.”

“I am certain something can be arranged,” Scarlett answered somewhat halfheartedly, turning around to leave the room.