

110: Confounding discrepancies

“Well done, both of you,” Scarlett said to Fynn and Shin as what remained of their target scattered into non-existence with one last blast of her pyrokinesis. She walked up to the center of the spacious lounge they were in, kneeling down to pick up the thick, rusty key from where it was nestled between a pile of slightly glowing iron chains.

[Chains of beleaguerment (Rare)]

{The chains shaped by one cursed by the burden of their loyalty}

She looked up at Fynn and pointed towards the chains. “Place those inside the bag.”

The chains weren’t an item per se, but they had been a crafting component in the game. Not something she was likely to need, but anything that could be sold was useful.

Fynn walked over and picked it up, corralling the bundle of chains into the [Bag of Juham]. Scarlett stood up and scanned across the room. A small mess had been created from their fight, but nothing too bad. The [Custodian] they had been hunting down had proven an easier target than expected. Not only had Fynn been able to locate the ghost with relative ease, but the fight itself had also turned out rather anticlimactic. Fynn himself had, of course, been part of the reason for that, as had Shin, but what had surprised Scarlett the most was how effective her magic had proven against the ghost.

It had been unexpectedly powerful against most things they’d encountered in this mansion, really. It helped that none of the enemies up till now seemed to have passed the level 50 breaking point that made her [Charms of Apperception] ineffective—though she imagined they were all close—so that she could also see their weak points.

Still, she supposed that having [Superior Pyrokinesis] was the main reason behind this obvious difference from her previous experiences. Although, she thought she’d already gotten a decent handle of the skill’s power before coming here. Perhaps there was something else behind it, as well? It did seem as if both her hydrokinesis and pyrokinesis were particularly useful against the ghosts in this place—the dolls they’d encountered could take a bit more damage from her—so it could perhaps be related to some weakness to the ‘true’ variants of those skills that ghosts had?

It was hard to know for sure, considering she hadn’t had much training in understanding that part of her magic yet. It was something she was planning on delving deeper into the next time she returned to Freymeadow, though.

Whatever the reason here was, though, she wasn’t going to complain. She also wasn’t going to let it get to her head. The real dangers in this dungeon lurked in the later sections.

“What are we doing next?” Shin asked as he walked up next to her.

“Next, we will attempt to track down the others again,” Scarlett replied. “After that, we will continue into the next section of the mansion. If things have gone as planned, they should already have dealt with the target on their end, or will soon do so.”

In the game, the two Custodians would just revive the other if you didn't deal with both of them quickly enough. It didn't matter if you'd already looted them or anything like that. That's why she wanted them to split up when dealing with them. It was a lot easier than running around the whole mansion like you did in the game, and considering that this place was *a lot* bigger here than she could remember it being, that had probably been a wise decision on her part. With Leon here, even when split up, neither of the groups would be in any real danger as long as they stayed in this middle section of the mansion.

They would have to move down to the lower section later, though, when they had finished everything else. That was where you originally entered the dungeon in 'Chronicle of Realms', and while it didn't hold any particularly powerful enemies, there would still be some loot to pick up down there. Normally, she would have started there because of that, but it was a lot easier to enter this place through the Withersworth's mansion in Autumnwell, rather than traveling all the way to the mansion by carriage. What was the point of knowing the game's shortcuts if you weren't going to use them?

Scarlett ordered the other two along as they left the lounge room where they'd cornered the Custodian and returned to the mansion's winding hallways. The odd ghost that tried to exit through the various paintings spread about the place was promptly dealt with by Fynn.

Scarlett opted to save her mana as much as she could. Their previous fighting against the Custodian and other threats had taken about a quarter of her stores, which wasn't that bad, really. She'd mostly used variations of her Aqua Mines, since they were one of her most mana-effective attacks at the moment, even if they weren't necessarily as powerful as just blasting her enemies with pure fire.

As they continued down the hallways, now and then, whenever Fynn felt a presence of some kind behind any of the doors, they would stop to see if they were unlocked or not. For those that were, they were often filled by groups of either ghosts or dolls, which Fynn and Shin could take care of with only some basic support from Scarlett. She used some of the concoctions prepared by Allyssa—like the [Brew of Fireworks] which stunned undead, ghosts, and others of their ilk—but there had been nothing too threatening yet. In fact, the relative ease with which they were handling things had provided her with ample opportunity to just stand back a bit and try to get a read of the situations, putting into practice some of the things she'd learned from Garside during their sessions.

Unfortunately, the loot itself from most of these rooms was disappointing. The majority didn't even have any real items in them—enchanted ones, that is—so instead they ended up just bringing along some of the other articles in the room that looked like they could be worth something, like fine cutlery, jewellery, and the odd silver candelabrum. In a way, Scarlett felt like a graverobber with how they were just picking what wasn't nailed down, but it wasn't as if that was going to stop her. She'd already gotten the permission of Lord Withersworth, and even though the man himself had never set foot in this place, he was technically still the mansion's owner.

Now and then, Scarlett checked inside her [Pouch of Holding] to make sure the key she picked up from the Custodian hadn't disappeared, and fortunately, it was still there. That told her the others had probably been successful in their task, which was good.

With them stopping to clear a room now and then, and the mansion's hallways being as confusing and warped as they were, it took a little over an hour before they finally managed to return to the mansion's east wing. From there, however, tracking down the other's location with Fynn's aid wasn't too difficult. Within twenty minutes, they turned down a corner to find Allyssa, Rosa, and Leon exiting one of the rooms, the door creaking behind them as they entered the dim hallway.

The three spotted their group with slightly surprised faces.

Scarlett walked up to them. "It appears you are all in good condition," she said, looking them over. Her eyes stopped on Leon, who was giving her a cautious look. The man had been doing that a lot today. "Can I take it that things went well on your end?"

"We didn't encounter anything that we couldn't handle, if that is what you mean," he answered. His eyes shifted to Allyssa. "As for how things went, I'm probably not the best to answer that."

Scarlett turned to Allyssa, who seemed to shrink a little under her gaze.

"We... We found that custodian you mentioned," the young Shielder said. "But we didn't as much 'take care of him' as we...made a deal with him."

Scarlett stared at her. They made a deal with one of the Custodians? How would that work?

"It wasn't exactly clear what you wanted, so I sort of did what felt right at the time," Allyssa hurried to add.

Scarlett arched a brow. "That is because I did not expect there to be any other alternative than removing it. Ghosts and similar apparitions are not the kind of beings that would allow for any sort of parley with the living."

Barring some very rare exceptions, mostly related to a certain companion, at least. In addition, she was pretty certain that there *was* no 'second' option in dealing with the Custodians in the game. Either you killed them, or they killed you. The Custodian they'd run into in the west wing had been furious upon just seeing them, so she didn't understand how one would even begin trying to speak to it.

Her eyes turned to Rosa. Had the woman done something bawdy to the ghost?

"I think he might have been calmer because I found this strange room," Allyssa said. "I can't really explain how, but the room seemed a lot less...haunted, than the rest of this place. There was this painting of a girl in there as well, and when the custodian ghost man showed up, he sort of mistook me for her. That's why I could talk to him for."

Scarlett frowned. She didn't recognize anything like that. What exactly had they done?

"I convinced him to stop going around and reviving the dolls and whatever he was doing, and he also gave me this key." Allyssa took out a key that looked the same as the one Scarlett had found. "That's what you wanted, right? It didn't feel right to just...kill him. Not after hearing what he said."

The girl gave Scarlett an uncertain look, clearly worried about what her reaction would be. Scarlett considered it for a moment.

The reason she had wanted to take care of the Custodians immediately after getting here was that it unlocked several hidden paths and loot, as well as just making the clearing of this place a lot easier. Not taking care of them wasn't really an option. She wasn't sure about letting whatever Allyssa had done slide if it could put her plans at risk, but... Well, it did seem like it had worked this time, considering that the second Custodian hadn't been revived yet. It *should* be fine.

In the future, she would have to take things like this into further consideration, though, and give more specific directions when needed.

“Very well, then,” she said. “At it does not appear to have caused any issues this time, I see no reason to reprimand you for your actions. From hereinafter, however, if you feel uncertain about something, do not hesitate to ask me about it. I will provide you with an answer if it is within my ability and something I am at liberty to share.”

The girl's expression relaxed a little at her words. “I will,” she said. Then she seemed to remember something as she opened the side of her cape and pulled out an object wrapped in black fabric. “We found a few things that might be artifacts, though I'm not sure exactly what they do.”

She unwrapped the object to reveal a long, curved blade with a silver sheen and strikes of red running through it.

[Life's Limit (1/?) (Unique)]

{A part of a whole, yet it will never be complete}

Scarlett eyed the object for a moment. Right, she had almost forgotten that the first piece of that set was here. It was useless at the moment, but it could certainly prove useful in the future if she got the other parts.

Fynn took the blade and placed it inside the [Bag of Juham]. Allyssa pulled out three items more.

[Tome of Hopelessness (Rare)]

{An ancient tome carrying secrets that should remain unspoken}

The first one was a leather-bound book Allyssa held gingerly at its edge with a piece of cloth. It gave off a dark atmosphere, one that even Scarlett could feel without difficulty. She couldn't know for sure, but she guessed that this tome boosted necromancy spells in some way.

In the game's system, necromancy spells had technically been part of the umbramancy school of magic, but in this world, it seemed to be considered its own school just because of how taboo it was. The people performing umbramancy magic in this world—which included some of the Followers of Ittar—probably didn't want to be associated with necromancy in any way whatsoever.

The tome would most likely fetch a high price with the right buyer just from how rare it was, but finding that kind of person would be hard. Not to mention illegal.

Scarlett glanced at Leon.

Yeah, fat chance she was going to try something like that. Especially not when he literally saw her find the item.

“Sir Leon,” she said. “I presume you understand what this is, as well? It surprises me that you would even allow her to show me this.”

He silently met her eyes.

She clicked her tongue. She was pretty sure he was testing her. “This is not something my family has any experience in handling. Could I leave it to you to ensure it is dealt with appropriately?”

He eyed her for a moment longer, then gave a slow nod. “I’ll do something about it when we’re finished here.”

“Much appreciated.” For now, Scarlett grabbed the tome with her bare hands—it wasn’t as if it was contagious—and placed it into her pouch to give him later. She then turned her attention to the remaining two items Allyssa was holding.

One was a statue looking much like a miniature gargoyle.

[Statue of Longevity (Rare)]

{A statue filled with the vigor of youth, slowly suffusing its surroundings}

This wasn’t something that she specifically remembered from the game—though that didn’t necessarily say much—but she doubted its effects were anything major, considering it was just a rare-grade item and had an AOE effect. But it did sound somewhat useful, at least. Maybe not in a fight, but perhaps she could place it in her office and see if it helped any in making it easier working with paperwork.

[Tablet of Sovegrephor (Epic)]

{Within lies the unbridled power of change, harnessed and controlled}

Scarlett smiled as she looked at the last item. It was a finger-sized metal plate, with its center being made of a glass of some kind that had a mess of colors swirling within.

She’d been hoping they would find this here. In ‘Chronicle of Realms’, [Tablets of Sovegrephor] weren’t artifacts in the normal sense, but rather items for upgrading your existing artifacts. They were rare and limited in quantity, so you had to use them carefully.

They also had their limitations. A tablet of the epic-tier, for example, would only work on items that were epic-tier or lower. If it was lower, the tablet would upgrade the item to a lower epic-tier item, which was in the 40-50 level range. This included scaling any effects those items had that might have been locked to lower levels. If the tablet was used to upgrade

an epic-tier item, however, it would only increase the item's stats, and usually not much more than so that it equaled an item of maybe five or so levels higher.

In general, epic-tier items could be found in the 40-65 level range, so in the game, she had always thought it a waste to use epic-tier tablets on those items. Although higher stats were nice, you could always find new items with better stats in the future. It was much better using a [Tablet of Sovegrephor] on low-level items that had rare or unique traits to them you wanted. And it just so happened that Scarlett had an item exactly like that. One that she had neared the limits of for a while now.

"Well done," she told Allyssa and the others as she took the items and placed them in her pouch. "It must have been arduous for you, procuring these items."

They were much better than the junk they'd found on their end. And while she had known there was a [Tablet of Sovegrephor] in this dungeon, she'd been uncertain whether they would find it. The rooms in this part were random, after all, and with the size of this place, she couldn't be sure they would be able to explore every part of it. Allyssa and the others managing to find it so quickly was impressive. If she remembered things correctly, there had also been a pretty strong mini-boss guarding that room.

"The experience itself wasn't nice," Allyssa said with a small shudder. "But we had Sir Leon with us, so it wasn't that hard. Those last two items were also just lying in a chest in the room I told you about, so they were super easy."

Scarlett looked up at the girl. They didn't fight a boss for those?

...Was she misremembering things? Mixing up items, maybe?

"Where exactly was this room?" she asked.

"I..." Allyssa's forehead creased, and she looked around the hallway as she would spot it near them. "I'm not sure? I don't think I could find it again, if that's what you're asking."

Scarlett looked to Leon.

He shook his head. "I'm not the one that found it."

She turned to Rosa, who just pointed back at Allyssa. "It was all her."

Scarlett furrowed her brow. "Are you certain there was nothing more in that room? No ghost or other threat that revealed itself after you found these items?"

"No," Allyssa answered. "But it was like..." Her expression grew more focused. "Well, it's hard to explain, but there was this...connection that I felt to the room, I guess you could say? To the girl who used to live there. And like I said, the Custodian also mistook me for her for some reason, talking to me about some lord."

"If he mentioned a lord, it was most likely Abelard Withersworth," Scarlett explained. "He was a very powerful mage that made his home here before. But which girl are you talking about?"

“Ehm, I think her name was Orelia? There was this large painting of her, and the Custodian was calling me ‘young lady’ and everything.”

“Young lady?” Shin asked, looking at Allyssa.

She grimaced at his words. “It was *weird*, okay? I bet you wouldn’t like being called ‘young lord’ by a strange ghost man, either.”

Scarlett put her hand to her chin as their conversation continued, thinking over Allyssa’s words. She wasn’t quite sure what this meant, but obviously Allyssa had triggered something that wasn’t in the game. Or at least not in a shape Scarlett had encountered it. What the consequences of this were, though... They would just have to wait and see.

It was curious. While there were plenty of things in this world that differed from the game, all of the dungeons they’d been in had fit the game almost to a tee, at least in all the regards that mattered. So was this the first example of something more major that diverged from the game’s setting, or simply a natural consequence of real-world factors interacting with the elements that had already been present in the game?

She would have to keep her eyes open, nonetheless. At the very least until she had a better grasp of the situation.

Turning around from the others, Scarlett looked down the hallway they had come from. The next step, however, was to continue to the next section of the mansion.