

CHAPTER 55 – BOSS FIGHT

Examining the creature didn't do Luke any favors.

[Thurskite - Level ??]

Luke didn't like his odds, but he had plenty of shadowy corners and enough room to maneuver that he felt reliably certain he could dodge most of its attacks.

That was until some of the flooding water caused a piece of junk to clank slightly against the wall to his right.

In an eyeblink, the thurskite snapped its long sinuous neck and let out a beam of water so compressed that it looked like a streaking meteor.

The water hit the wall and the nearby stone section cracked and deepened.

Luke let his eyes roam the room, realizing now exactly what had caused those broken walls. The creature let loose another stream of compressed water that crashed into the wall and sent shards of stone flying in all directions.

It let loose an unsettling ululating cry and resumed its search for prey.

Luke could hardly *see* the burst of water it shot out much less react in time. Maybe if his reflexes kicked in, but willingly dodging aside was out of the question.

And while his boots raised his resistance against water damage, he wasn't invulnerable to it. Without testing the enchantment in the field against multiple types of attacks, there was no telling how much it would negate. Additionally, the monster was so strong, he

couldn't see its level, so that put its ability to dish out damage even higher.

Think. There's got to be a way of dealing with it.

Keeping his back to the wall where the shadows were thickest, Luke edged around the room toward the platform. He had the beginnings of a plan forming, and he was starting to wish that he could leap through shadows.

Luke frowned to himself. His bloodline powers were amazing, but not *that* amazing.

Despite the slippery floor, Luke's new boots kept him anchored and surefooted. Using his [Umbral Ring] to create shadows where there weren't any naturally, Luke slid across the edge of the room as a dark moving patch.

Every time the thurskite looked at him, he froze and stopped everything. Its oddly clustered crystalline eyes seemed to focus on the spot, as if trying to determine if it was worth the energy of using its water attack.

Thanks to his profession granting mana, Luke realized he could keep this up for as many hours as it took. Creating and molding shadows around himself took a constant toll on his mana, but with over a thousand at his disposal he wasn't in any danger of running low.

When the thurskite eventually turned away, Luke inched slowly along. He kept going until it turned in his general direction again.

Once more, he stopped and waited until the thurskite resumed looking elsewhere. It wasn't the smartest of monsters, but it was persistent in its search for him.

Luke just had to be patient, and of course, quiet.

He finally made it the last few feet until he was on the platform. Using his dagger, he sawed at the tether of darkness, hoping to sever it and send the thurskite back where it came from.

At first, his blade slipped through the tether as if it were nothing more than smoke. Luke tried again, and again, but it still was having no effect.

Frowning, he gathered shadows around the [Ratking's Ire] in a burst of inspiration. They slipped and slid as if the two forces were opposing in some way, and then suddenly the shadows settled on the metal like they did onto his own body.

The tip of the dagger beaded with a dark, inky droplet of poison. Luke raised a brow at that, but didn't have the time to investigate the unexpected mixture of shadow mana and the dagger's [Poison] enchantment.

He cut the tether clean through.

Thrashing wildly, the thurskite let out another ululating cry. Oil seeped out of its scales and poured down its body, staining the water below. Before his eyes, the monster grew smaller.

It twisted around to face him, but it was far slower now.

Cutting the tether had weakened it. The effect wasn't what Luke was aiming for. Still, that was better than taking the thurskite on in a fair fight.

Luke hoped it lost more than just extreme speed and some size.

The thurskite let loose another pressurized blast of water, this time correctly aimed at Luke. He had to drop the shadows around him to wrap them around the blade, exposing himself for longer than he was comfortable with.

Thankfully, the attack lacked the near instantaneous speed it displayed earlier. Still quick, but slow enough that Luke had a real chance of dodging in time.

He ducked below the roaring jet, falling into a deep crouch before he sprang off the platform.

After cutting that tether, I must have drawn too much of its anger to escape notice now, Luke realized.

Still, it couldn't entirely see him as Luke covered his body in shifting shadows that spread out into his surroundings as he darted in and out of the thurskite's ranged attacks.

One blast deepened a preexisting crater in the wall, and the next clipped him across the arm, spinning him like a pirouetting ballerina. It chunked his HP. A single hit took out a third.

Whatever the dark swirling portal did to the thurskite, it didn't tone down its raw power. The hammering jets of water it shot at him still cracked hardened stone. They were slower, but no less powerful.

He triggered his [Lacerate] skill upon the [Ratking's Ire] dagger, adding the [Bleed] affliction onto the weapon's [Poison] affliction. Even if one of those effects was resisted, it was likely the other would successfully land.

[Lacerate (Common)]

(Rogue Class Skill)

With a slashing weapon, deliver a debilitating blow that inflicts a [Bleed] affliction. Repeated use generates stacks of [Bleed] affliction and lengthens the duration. Increased effectiveness against vulnerable vital points and unarmored enemies. Adds a slight bonus to the influence of Dexterity and Strength when using this skill.

In a fight he wanted over fast, he was fine with wasting vital resources to get the job done.

Further draining his SP, Luke then layered [Barrage] on one of his throwing knives. He let both blades fly. Throwing daggers followed each other through the air, with the ratking blade in the lead.

[Barrage (Uncommon)]

(Rogue Class Skill)

Rarely given to Rangers and Hunters, this skill has been adapted for your use as a Rogue. When you use a ranged weapon, you can attack multiple times at once, expending additional ammunition as you do so until you miss, or the limit is reached. Adds a small bonus to the influence of Dexterity and Perception when using this skill.

Heedless of Luke's daggers, the thurskite slithered toward him, water whipping in its razor-lined maw. It glowed with a supernatural brightness, likely charging up a stronger variant of its attack.

The blades, now glowing a violent purple-red, made a heavy *thunk* as they pierced the creature's sharkskin hide. It let loose a screeching cry, but didn't slow down or relent.

It was fully committed.

In the middle of battle, Luke's heart was beating fast. That sped up the recovery time of his ratking dagger, though the rest would have to be picked up later.

It materialized back in his hand, soaked in monster blood.

Blood pooled and ran down the serpentine creature's body as it darted toward him, light gathering in its maw.

One of the wounds leaked a frothing green poisonous brew. Virulent lines of acid-green branched out from the wound struck by the [Ratking's Ire].

Luke grinned. Both his afflictions had been successfully applied. With more than enough stamina to spare, he began to apply [Lacerate] upon the dagger once again.

His victory was short-lived as the creature, heedless of the blood now pouring in gouts from its open wounds and increased movement, bore down on him.

Luke dodged to the side, keeping the shadows wrapped tight around him, but something was different. The creature whipped its head

around with only a mild delay and let loose a hammering blast of water.

Up close and already moving, Luke didn't have any chance of dodging it entirely. Thinking furiously, Luke shed the shadows clinging to his body and hastily assembled them into an Echo.

[Echo (Rare)]

(Unique Class/Bloodline Skill)

Your power over shadow grows. By taking the child-like misdirection of Feint and adding in your Bloodline's unique capacity with shadows, you are able to create Echoes. Echoes look and act identically to you. They are capable of carrying out attacks, interact with the world around you, and to take damage in your stead. An Echo's strength is increased the more shadow you use to create it as well as the available shadows in the immediate vicinity.

Adds a major bonus to the influence of Willpower, Arcane, and Wisdom when using this skill.

Shadows flew together, forming the Echo's body, who materialized already saluting.

It knew what was coming.

The body of the Echo was obliterated by the hammer wave of water, but it softened the blow enough that Luke wasn't outrightly demolished.

Every rib flexed, bent further in agony, and then shattered as he was hit with the force of a semi-truck hurtling down the highway.

Only Luke's equipment and his desperate last bid stopped him from dying outright. He crashed into the ground, bounced painfully, and continued to roll as the thurskite turned on him for the kill.

Now that its prey was disabled, it could eat in peace.

Towering over him with crystalline eyes glittering maliciously, the thurskite surged toward him with its ringed maw of fangs ready to tear him apart.

Luke rolled to the side at the last moment. The pain in his ribs was unreal, but he forced himself to stay conscious despite the rapidly constricting view.

Darkness gathered along the edges of his vision as the thurskite struck face-first into the stone, its teeth burrowing into the hard material as if it was soft chalk.

With a surge of pain-soaked determination, Luke summoned another Echo. This time, it wasn't saluting. It unsheathed a blade of fuming darkness, a mirror of Luke's weapon.

Joining the Echo's motion with his own, Luke whipped free his falchion and together with the Echo's slicing attack, created a scissoring attack that cut through the thurskite's exposed neck.

The blades clanged together as they sliced through half of the creature's long, rubbery neck. Luke writhed on the ground as the Echo completed the cut and the thurskite's long body spasmed.

By a stroke of luck, it didn't crush Luke with its tree-like bulk. That would have spelled the end for him. His HP was a red sliver, flickering madly in the bottom left corner of his vision.

With a parting salute, his Echo vanished after the attack. He barely had enough shadows gathered to make it in the first place and it was held together mostly out of spite.

You have defeated [Thurskite - Level 35]. Extra experience gained for slaying an enemy above your level.

Luke rode the torrent of level ups as his own personal anesthetic. The warm glow of so much improvement helped to battle back the gut-wrenching pain.

Level Up! Your [Thief] Class has reached Level 20.

Stat points earned: +4 Strength, +6 Dexterity, +2 Perception, +2 Vitality, +2 Free Points

Level Up! Your [Thief] Class has reached Level 21.

Stat points earned: +4 Strength, +6 Dexterity, +2 Perception, +2 Vitality, +2 Free Points

Level Up! Your [Thief] Class has reached Level 22.

Stat points earned: +4 Strength, +6 Dexterity, +2 Perception, +2 Vitality, +2 Free Points

Level Up! Your [Human (F-Grade)] Race has reached Level 15.

Stat points earned: +3 All Stats, +1 Fate, +2 Free Points.

Level Up! Your [Human (F-Grade)] Race has reached Level 16.

Stat points earned: +3 All Stats, +1 Fate, +2 Free Points.

You have [Thief] skills to select.

Shadows unfurled from his outstretched hand, consuming the thurskite's body as he looted it.

A small pile of glittering treasures appeared where its body had once been, but something else beyond the loot dragged at his attention.

Luke twisted his head around to find the source of his distress.

The swirling dark vortex that summoned the thurskite and empowered it was now pulsing and growing. A thin smoky tendril spiraled off and began to make its way toward the pool.

The monster was reforming.

No, no, no, no! Luke flopped onto his side. With a choked-back scream of agony, he dragged himself toward the platform. If he didn't stop it, he was dead.