

In the end, I sold everything but the Contract Scroll and the Shadow Silk for almost twenty gold. The Contract Scroll immediately went to the bank with my other one, and the Shadow Silk was sent to Hammerhead, together with a request to create new equipment for Diane.

As for the two of us, we decided to wait until the next morning to leave. Diane only had a couple more hours for her daily playtime, and she wanted to start training her new skills as soon as she could.

In the process of her training, she informed me what the Living Shade skill was. Essentially, it gave the user a semi-corporeal body while they were in shadows, slightly reducing the damage received. That could prove useful at higher levels, but the fact that it was a Magic skill would have made it a pain for me to train regardless.

While she was working on her new skills, I kept practicing with Fire Projection and Water Projection. I was determined to increase the grade of these two skills as much as I could. They were the closest I could come to truly feeling like a mage, after all.

The next morning, we set out from Daggerloft, spending just half an hour to make our way to Manamill. Now... *this* city certainly differed from the last two that we had visited. While it was built around an oasis, the entire oasis was floating more than a thousand meters in the air, with pillars of rock hovering around it. Water poured off the side of the platform that the city was built on, streaming towards the ground and forming misty clouds.

I was shocked when I first saw Manamill, able to make it out from the distance not long after we left. Down below the floating platform, I could make out a short-range teleportation circle, with guards standing by to collect fees from anyone who wanted to visit the city.

Naturally, we didn't need to pay that toll, since we could directly fly into the city by riding on a projected path in midair. Though, as I was on my way up, a skill notification startled me, nearly making me lose focus of the path I was making. "Everything alright, Drake?" Diane asked curiously, noticing my momentary lapse of focus.

"Yeah, I just got the Driving skill, so I was surprised." I pointed out, and Diane blinked. I was surprised that I was only just getting the skill *now*, after we had driven most of the way across Ilsan. However, after considering that it might have been based on the amount of time spent driving, rather than the distance, it made more sense. Each trip by bike was drastically shorter than it would be if I were driving a carriage.

"Huh. Didn't know that was a skill. Now I have to wonder what *that* evolves into." She said with a slight chuckle. "Anyways, eyes forward. We're almost to the platform."

I nodded my head, looking forward and driving us down onto the edge of the city's platform. There wasn't a wall here, though there were still guards patrolling in case of flying monsters. When we suddenly appeared in front of them, stowing the bike in our inventory, the guards

seemed suitably startled. There likely weren't many people who could just fly into the city like we did. And those that did likely weren't under a stealth effect when they arrived.

I waved politely towards the guards, showing that we meant no harm. The guards hesitated, before returning to their patrols. Afterwards, I looked back at Diane. "I assume that the dungeons here are as packed as the one back in Daggerloft? Your Chosen told me about Mana Breathing."

Diane nodded her head. "That's right. And, I did a little more digging. The dungeon I want to visit for my Chosen is called the Ember Flight. It's considered a highly difficult dungeon both because of the terrain and the monsters involved. Like Manamill, the entire dungeon is a series of floating platforms, connected by small bridges."

"The dungeon is split into five regions, similar to the typical floors of a normal dungeon. However, most people don't have the ability to go beyond the third region, because there are no bridges beyond that point. And supposedly, there aren't even any platforms in the fifth region, aside from two, one which holds the boss chest, and the other that holds the normal chest of that region."

"Since people can't usually make it beyond the third region, I'm guessing that a flight skill isn't one of the available drops." I muttered, and Diane nodded her head.

"Right. Unless you have your own method of flight, the third region's miniboss is as far as you get. Now, as for the monsters... in the first region, you'll have Wyverns, like the ones you dealt with back in Broken Sands. In the second, they're upgraded to Flame Wyverns. Not much change, other than stronger armor and a breath attack."

"The third region, you have Elder Wyverns, and the miniboss is a Lesser Red Dragon." My eyes widened when I heard this, recalling the final challenge for the butchery trials. "The fourth region has Fire Crystal Spirits and Elder Wyverns. The crystal spirits act as turrets, and will attack anyone not standing on a platform."

"Finally, the fifth region is supposedly occupied primarily by Lesser Red Dragons, with a regular Red Dragon as the final boss." For some reason, my hand started to twitch as I listened, and my head slowly turned to look at Diane.

"In other words, we're harvesting everything we can from this dungeon, right?" I asked, to which she chuckled, nodding her head.

"That's right. Though, just to be safe, I'd like to save the bosses until we've gotten the Mana Breathing skill for my Chosen. Just in case they'd drop them." I had no problems agreeing to that. One or two less dragons wouldn't bother me much.

“Out of curiosity, what happens when you fall off the platforms?” I couldn’t help but ask this, and for a very important reason. If there was a large surface below the floating dungeons, then those with flying skills would no doubt butcher every dragon and wyvern that they killed.

However, Diane shook her head, dismissing this notion. “Once you go below a certain threshold, you start to suffocate. That’s why most people don’t push past the third region with whatever skills they have. If you die in the void, you can’t recover your body, so whatever was dropped is just lost.”

Although to most, this would be horrible news, it left me grinning from ear to ear. “In other words, most people don’t have the ability to harvest the corpses in the dungeon.” If they did, the local market would be completely saturated with dragon materials. However, without that ability, the only dragon that could be harvested, assuming you had a talented butchery, was the miniboss.

Considering the skill level required to properly harvest a Lesser Red Dragon without damaging its materials, it was highly unlikely that most of the parties were able to do so. Instead, they would have to choose between crude, damaged materials with highly diminished value, or whatever could drop as loot.

Diane simply chuckled at my comment, not disagreeing. “Hammerhead’s going to have a field day after this, isn’t he?”

“If he can afford it.” I nodded. “A fully-harvested Lesser Red Dragon in good condition is worth as much as a platinum.” Diane froze at those words, looking towards me with wide eyes. It was only now that she truly seemed to realize the difference in fully harvesting a creature.

“And your new trait that... increases quality?” She asked, but I shook my head. I hadn’t gotten the trait until after the trial with the dragon, so I didn’t know what it would turn into, or what it would be worth. “Have I ever told you that you’re my favorite half-orc?”

I rolled my eyes with a grin, rubbing the top of her head. “How many other half-orcs do you even know?” I questioned, and she glanced away guiltily. “Don’t worry. I got this skill to help you, after all.”

Diane swallowed thickly, nodding her head. When I thought about how this dungeon might be enough to pay back for the bike, I led the way towards the dungeon management office. There, we could see the schedule posted behind the clerk, and saw that the entire day had already been reserved by various groups. And that was even with each group only being allowed a single time slot.

Not only that, but the next day had been reserved in advance, as well. There was only a single slot open for the day after, and it was late at night. Still, seeing someone walking towards the

counter, I used Glancing Steps-X to immediately arrive ahead of them. "I'd like to make a reservation for the Ember Flight on the night of the twentieth."

I could hear the player behind me cursing when he noticed that I had jumped ahead of him. However, I had no intention of waiting any longer than necessary. The clerk glanced at me, nodding his head. "Party name? Please note, due to the high demand of the dungeon, there is a five gold reservation fee."

"Diane and Drake." I answered, using the same name that Diane had previously used at Daggerloft.

The clerk nodded, writing our names down, and the reservation quickly appeared on the board behind him. I turned back, about to head back towards Diane when the player I had jumped ahead of pushed his way in front of me. He was a tall orc. A true-blooded orc, with red skin and bulging muscles. He wore heavy armor, and had a giant axe strapped to his back. "Add us to your party for the dungeon." He demanded, snarling down at me, his tusks pushing past his lips.

"I'd rather not party with strangers, sorry." I said, turning to slip by him. However, one hand came down, grabbing onto my shoulder.

"Add us to your group, or you won't be able to get into the dungeon." He insisted, gripping my shoulder hard enough that the veins on his hand bulged. I winced, feeling the bones shift, and turned back to look at the clerk.

"This counts as a justifiable reason for self-defense, right?" I asked, and the clerk sighed, nodding his head.

"You little runt--" The orc player began, before I activated Ghost-X and Glancing Steps-X, vanishing from beneath his hand. I quickly healed my shoulder, landing behind the man and forming a large blade from Martial Intent-X. Without hesitation, I used Assassinate to slice off his head and then returned to Diane. I would have looted the body, but we were still in town, and that could be considered theft, even though the attack was in self-defense. I didn't drop my stealth until I was already next to her, and she looked at me with an approving smile.

"Not worried that they'll cause us any trouble?" She asked, and I simply shrugged my shoulders.

"He's strong, but he's slow and dumb. Besides, if he wants to cause trouble in the city, it won't be easy for him to get away with it. Though, just to be safe, you should have your Chosen prepare her room well." I hinted, and Diane narrowed her eyes in understanding.

Given that player's attitude, it wouldn't be unreasonable for him to kidnap Diane's Chosen while she was offline, and then injure her enough that she couldn't participate in the dungeon without fully killing her. All they'd need to do would be to break her arms and legs, and keep her from healing.

“Don’t worry. If anyone wants to target me or my Chosen, they’ll just be in for a rude awakening.” She said in a dark tone. It reassured me to see how protective Diane had become of her Chosen, and so I nodded my head in satisfaction.