

214: Commissions

It was during Scarlett's journey back from Duke Valentino's residence that another system window appeared before her.

[Side-Quest completed: Ducal favors and manipulations]
{Skill points awarded: 5}

As the carriage swayed gently along the cobblestone streets, she sat in its cabin, considering the message that hovered in the air. She was glad that the system seemed to have regained most of its functionality, but she hadn't expected her dealings with the duke to be considered a side-quest. Not that she was about to complain.

[Name: Scarlett Hartford]

[Skills:

[Greater Mana Control]

[Greater Pyromancy]

[Major Pyrokinesis]

[Greater Hydromancy]

[Superior Hydrokinesis]



[Traits:

[Dignified August]

[Supercilious]

[Cavalier]

[Callous]

[Overbearing]

[Conceited]

[Third-rate Mana Veins]

[Mana: 10346/12084]

[Points: 49]

Looking over her character window, her eyes briefly paused on the bugged skill before dismissing it for now and summoning yet another window.

[Skills Menu:

Upgrades

[Superior Pyromancy] (25 points)

[Argent Pyrokinesis] (100 points) (LOCKED)

[Superior Hydromancy] (25 points)

[Major Hydrokinesis] (50 points)

[Superior Mana Control] (25 points)

New skills

[LOCKED]

This placed her skill points at almost enough to upgrade hydrokinesis, if that was what she wanted. [Superior Mana Control] was also quite tempting, and she had considered simply taking it on more than one occasion. However, doing so at this point would make her long period of saving points somewhat pointless.

Perhaps she wouldn't even have to make that decision in the end, though. The system seemed to be rewarding quest completion rewards as they came right now, and she strongly suspected this wouldn't be the last notification she got in the near future. Before reaching any conclusion regarding upgrades, she at least wanted to see how many points she had by the end of this.

Which reminded her. She had been so caught up in the events that had transpired in Crowcairn and surrounding Anguish that she had nearly forgotten checking up on one of the first things she'd done upon arriving in Bridgespell. Maybe it was time to see how things were progressing on that front before she returned to the inn and the others.

After mulling it over for a moment, Scarlett shifted over and knocked on the wooden latch located on the cabin's front wall, which opened out to where the coachman sat. She provided him with revised instructions for their destination, then settled back into her seat, observing the buildings and people passing by through the carriage window. Perhaps something like this was what they needed after the action-packed days they had experienced.



The sun had already long since dipped below the horizon, casting a glum darkness across Bridgespell's streets as Scarlett finally returned to the Golden Griffin Inn. It wasn't particularly late, but the days grew shorter and shorter the closer winter got. Technically, winter had probably arrived in some parts of the empire, with December well underway, but Bridgespell still clung to some of the lingering warmth of autumn.

Fortunately for Scarlett, most of the establishments she had visited hadn't entirely shut their doors by the time she arrived. Some had clearly started turning customers away, but a noble lady retrieving her order was a different story. They had even offered to deliver her orders to the inn, but Scarlett had declined. She had brought the [Bag of Juham] with her in the carriage just in case, which made it far more convenient to carry everything herself.

With the coachman handling the carriage, Scarlett entered the Golden Griffin Inn with the odd-looking bag by her side. The staff greeted her with polite smiles as they guided her to the section of the inn she had rented, inquiring if she required anything else for the evening before retreating when she said no.

As Scarlett stepped into the foyer of their lodgings, she was surprised to find that every member of her party except Rosa was present. Shin sat in a corner, engrossed in a book as usual, while Allyssa and Fynn were engaged in a board game at a small table near one of the walls. Fynn wore a deeply focused expression as he studied the board between them, meticulously considering his next move, while Allyssa appeared slightly exasperated by his deliberation.

Scarlett briefly eyed their appearances. They had all cleaned up while she was gone, now dressed in plain clothes that *didn't* make it look like they'd been battling their way through hordes of demons recently. Not that they had looked overly disheveled before, either. Scarlett had ensured that her group had maintained a reasonable level of cleanliness during their journey through Anguish's citadel, if only to spare herself some discomfort.

"I see that you all appear to have seamlessly transitioned back into a semblance of normalcy," she remarked as she crossed the foyer, heading towards a larger table a few meters from Fynn and Allyssa.

Shin lifted his gaze from his book to acknowledge her, and Allyssa diverted her attention from the game.

"Not much else to do here," the girl explained with a sigh. "I haven't been able to work on my alchemy since we left Freybrook, and there's no point in trying to coax Shin into doing anything other than read like eighty percent of the time."

Across from her, Fynn finally extended his arm to make a move.

Scarlett scrutinized the board for a moment. She wasn't familiar with the rules of the game they were playing, but it wasn't too dissimilar to chess.

Allyssa blinked, staring at Fynn's move. "Why'd you do that?"

"It prevents you from sacrificing your pikeman," he replied.

"But you just forfeited your Shielder for barely any gain. Am I supposed to be offended?"

"You intended to trick me into compromising my fort, didn't you? This stops that."

Allyssa remained silent for a few seconds, then threw her hands up in the air and pressed them against her head. "Aagghh! This is impossible. Why are you *good* at this?! It's supposed to be your first time!" Her head swiveled towards Shin, shooting him an accusatory glare. "Confess. You taught him how to play just to mess with me, didn't you?"

Shin merely shook his head. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

Allyssa redirected her glare to Fynn. "He did, didn't he?"

Fynn nodded. "Yes."

"I knew it!"

"It's your turn."

"I know! Don't rush me!" Allyssa's expression transformed into one of intense concentration, and she leaned over the table, carefully analysing her options.

“Where is Rosa?” Scarlett asked, diverting her attention from the unfolding drama. She placed the [Bag of Juham] on the table before her before pausing briefly as she noticed Shin’s gaze on her. “What?” she asked.

His eyes lingered on her for a moment before shifting to the bag she’d put down. “Nothing. Rosa has been in her room since you left. She said she was still tired and needed more rest. I believe she has woken up now, though. We heard music from there earlier.”

“I see.” Scarlett’s gaze moved towards the hallway connecting to the foyer, leading to the area where their rooms were situated. “Then I will deliver these to her after I have presented the rest to you.”

Now Fynn looked away from the board game and at her. “Present what?”

“Do you recall that, upon our arrival in Bridgespell, I arranged for each of us to visit local artisans to measure and commission equipment specifically tailored for you?”

“Yes.”

“Those.” Scarlett dipped her hand into the [Bag of Juham] and retrieved a pair of steel bracers. Their silvery steel surface was finely polished and held clear patterns in it, shimmering with a mesmerising glow under the ambient light in the room, with ash-colored scales seamlessly integrated into sections of the steel through some unknown technique.

[Draconic Embrace (Epic)]

{Forged from high-quality steel and the shadowed scales of an ashenwraith dragon, these bracers bestow upon their wearer the elusive strength and agility of one who hunts dragons, weaving their protection through the scales that are part of it}

Fynn’s eyes narrowed as he saw the items, and even Allyssa’s attention turned from the game board. The girl’s eyes widened as she spotted the bracers.

Fynn stood up and approached Scarlett, examining the bracers closely. “Are those for me?”

“Yes,” Scarlett replied. “I understand that you prefer to have your body unburdened in combat, but I believe these are an acceptable compromise and will aid you greatly. Your particular abilities were also taken into consideration in the design.” She gestured towards the bracers’ ends. They extended all the way to the fingers, covering the topside of the hands, but near the knuckles, there were tiny slits that would still allow Fynn to summon his claws.

The white-haired young man inspected the bracers for several seconds, then he lifted them up and put them on before finally giving a nod, an impressed expression on his face. “I like them.”

“Good,” Scarlett said.

She would have been disappointed if he hadn’t. Just those bracers alone were exorbitantly expensive, all things considered. She *had* splurged on all this, but they were still talking about sums that she was pretty sure exceeded what some baronies made in one year for just one item. If she wasn’t anticipating significant earnings from selling the materials from the

ashenwraith dragon that Empress had killed, she wasn't sure she would have afforded to spend this much.

"Now then, shall I present the rest?" she asked, turning her gaze towards Shin and Allyssa.

"Erm..." Allyssa suddenly looked hesitant, but Shin didn't seem to share that uncertainty.

"Alright," the man said as she put down his book and walked over to the table.

Scarlett pulled out the next object.

[Ashenforged Battlemail (Epic)]

{Born of ashenwraith dragon scales and enchanted iceweaver silk, this mail embraces the wearer in a dance of ash and steel, spinning protection that blurs the lines between armor and elemental force}

It was a folded piece of banded armor, composed of steel bands hidden beneath layers of blue-ish grey fabric and dark, ash-colored scales that blended perfectly into the design. Scarlett offered the item to Shin, who received it with a slightly surprised look. Scarlett then once again dipped her hand into the bag.

[Umbral Veil (Epic)]

{Woven from shadowspider silk and nightwind moth threads, this veil intertwines its wearer with the silent dance of shadows, granting the power to merge into obscurity. The ashen scales concealed within also provide protection from those who would do harm}

Outwardly, the next item looked like a simple grey cloak, but on closer inspection, it seemed to glow slightly with a disguised energy. Scarlett placed it on the table in front of her. "This is for you, Miss Astrey. As I am aware that you are somewhat uncomfortable with the price of these items, perhaps your concerns will be mollified slightly if you consider that they are on loan for the time being."

Instead of focusing on the girl's reaction, Scarlett retrieved yet another item.

[Ashenwraith Elegance (Epic)]

{Born of the hides of elusive dragons, this piece of clothing serves as a silent ally to its wearer, protecting its master and harnessing the inherent magic of its draconic heritage to amplify their power}

It was a refined ensemble tailored specifically for Scarlett, blending both an adventurer's attire with that of a noble lady. Crafted from the resilient hide of the ashenwraith dragon, it also incorporated materials from several other creatures Scarlett and her party had felled, along with valuable materials acquired by the artisan. The attire featured a lightweight design that wouldn't restrict Scarlett's movements, boasting a rich ebony hue with traces of dragon scales integrated into parts of the fabric, lending a subtle gleam when viewed from certain angles.

Following the [Ashenwraith Elegance] were a pair of delicate white gloves.

[Emberflow Gloves (Rare)]

{Woven from fireflowers and graced by enchanted river pearls, these gloves fit for a noble lady's hands cradle within them a touch of elemental finesse, each gesture unveiling a hint of the mystical synergy of two opposing forces}

Scarlett considered both of the items for a moment. The gloves had been more of an afterthought when she originally placed her orders, with her asking the workshop if they could create something that would be of use to someone utilising both hydrokinesis and pyromancy spells. They had expressed some uncertainty upon hearing that, advising her to not expect any particularly powerful enchantments, but what they had produced was certainly better than nothing. She was curious about how noticeable an effect these would have.

Similar curiosity piqued her regarding the [Ashenwraith Elegance]'s effects. She had commissioned it solely with the intent of having another set of equipment to wear over her [Garments of Form (Epic)], not expecting it to necessarily provide any other benefits. However, it seemed the dragon aspect of the material held more influence on the end product than expected.

Holding both items in her hands, she focused for a moment. The effect of her [Charm of Expeditious Change] activated, causing both items to vanish into whatever spatial storage the artifact used before reappearing moments later on her body.

The difference was felt immediately. It was as if the connection between her and whatever source she called her magic from strengthened slightly, and there was a latent power now encompassing her, as if waiting for her to unleash her magic to join it. Was that from the armor, then?

After spending a short while acclimating to the sensation, she eventually dismissed the items and donned the dress she had worn previously.

"The more I see you do that, the more jealous I get," Allyssa said, the young Shielder finally having moved over to start inspecting the [Umbral Veil]. "I would give up Shin if it meant I didn't have to bother with putting on my clothes myself ever again. Just 'poof', and it's done."

"I'm not an object," Shin stated, in the middle of inspecting every piece and section of his new armor.

"I'm sorry. I can't hear you over the sound of my broken heart after having been betrayed by my closest friend."

"It is indeed quite convenient," Scarlett said, picking up the [Bag of Juham] again. "Perhaps were we to decipher the enchantment employed, I might inquire into obtaining more items of its type." She glanced at Fynn, who was experimenting with his new bracers, summoning and dismissing his ethereal claws above his knuckles as the wind around him stirred. "These were not the only items I commissioned, of course, but we will have to wait a bit longer until the rest are finished. By then, we will likely have returned to Freybrook."

She had also placed orders for some minor enchanted objects that she thought might be convenient to have, along with some other equipment that might take longer to craft. Fynn certainly deserved more than just a pair of bracers, for example.

Admittedly, she was impressed that the workshops had completed this much, considering not even two weeks had passed since their arrival in Bridgespell. She *had* paid them to prioritise her requests, but still, their speed and quality were surprising.

“Now, while you familiarise yourself with your new possessions,” Scarlett announced, walking towards the border of the foyer, “I will be seeking out Miss Hale to present her with certain articles as well.”