Chapter 56

Getting ready to leave took two days. I was waiting on a supply of potions from my alchemist, Tonna, and upgrading my gear in the player auction house. At night I made copies of drafting plans, and during the day, I made stone with my aether and shopped. When I finished, my gear was much improved.

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| 15 | *Emerald Ring of the Earth Mage, +10 Magic, +5 Earth Magic Skill when casting* |
| 18 | *Ivory Ring of Deep Magic, +8 Magic, +2% total magic pool increase* |
| 20 | *Black Wyvern Hide Armor (Chest), +20 Strength* |
| 20 | *Black Wyvern Hide Armor (Arms), +20 Constitution* |
| 20 | *Black Wyvern Hide Armor (Legs), +20 Dexterity* |
| 20 | *Black Wyvern Hide Armor (Feet), +20 Speed* |
| 15 | *Black and White Leather Belt of Channeling, +15 channeling* |
| 20 | *Bracelet of the Kahn, +5 strength, +5 Constitution, +5 Skill to Leadership* |
| 11 | *Jeweled Trader’s Brooch, +5 Charisma, +3% better selling prices* |
| 15 | *Wyvern Hide Leather Gloves, +5% poison resistance, +5 constitution* |
| 5 | *Mask of Sullen God, +3 to all stats; all attempts to analyze you will fail* |
| 20 | *Unique Bear Cloak, Weight 20 lbs, +5 strength, +5 constitution, +5 stamina, +5 charisma* |
| 21 | *Fiery Black Steel Two-Handed Axe, +15 strength, +12% burn damage* |
|  | \*\* Set (4/5) Black Wyvern Hide Armor +8% to Stamina and Health Pool |

The armor was a decision to improve my defense even though my offense was mostly spell based. It was the only armor set being manufactured and sold by a player in my level range. I kept the mask of the sullen guard in my ensemble so I could travel in anonymity. The mask was a white oval with two slits for your eyes, but you could make it invisible in the player settings.

I found my bodyguard could wear five pieces of armor, one ring, and equip his two hands. Because his weapon was a glaive, he only had one weapon. He was easier to outfit as most of the testing players were selling older gear that aligned closer with his level. For Yorric, I had him equipped as follows.

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| Yorric (Level 32 Elite Bodyguard) | |
| Head | *Red Steel Helm of Foresight, +10 Intellect, +10 to Intuition Skill* |
| Arms | *Black Steel Bracers of Shielding, +25 Constitution, Cast Negate Damage Every 10 minutes* |
| Body | *Red Iron Breast Plate of Stoutness, +10 to all stats, Negate 10% of physical damage* |
| Legs | *Black Dragon Leather Pants, +12 Strength, +20% bonus to stamina pool* |
| Feet | *Red Chitin Boots, +10 Strength, +10 Stamina, +10 Constitution* |
| Ring | *Leopard’s Ring, +25 to Agility* |
| Weapon | *Stalwart’s Glaive of Reckoning, +20 Constitution, 10% of damage reflected at attacker on a successful block* |
| Off Hand | NA |

Mad Dog had helped me sort through everything available in the auction house for my best cost to benefit. Yorric was equipped as a tank. He was an elite NPC and had the skills to match. He should be able to hold a pair of players off twice his level without difficulty for a short time. Hopefully, I wouldn’t run into any situation where I was fighting other players.

I needed to reach 100 charisma to add a second bodyguard. Bodyguards could be hired at charisma stats of 50, 100, 250, 500, 750, and 1,000. They were slightly different than companions in that you had to pay them. But they occupied a companion slot when you adventured. Six was the maximum number of companions/bodyguards a player could adventure with. It gave players the option of going solo and building their own party of NPCs to play with rather than actual people. The downside was the investment in raising your charisma that high and paying the bodyguards.

Yorric had a small bag of holding as well for his food and potions. We each had 100 health and stamina potions. I had 150 magic recovery potions as well. They were all recent brews of our alchemist Tonna who had gained five levels since arriving and was currently level 49. Savannah, the elf girl apprentice alchemist, was already at level 11. If she ever passed me in levels, I would just be too embarrassed.

My send-off was a massive party put on by the entire town. I couldn’t believe how much my heart was aching to be leaving Jaesmin. I was planning to be gone for an entire month. She came and kissed me a half dozen times throughout the evening.

When the party calmed down, I entered the portal stone with Yorric and our two mounts. Titan was excited to get out and run. He would be disappointed as we would be flying in skyships for the next week to reach the city of Thira. Then I would be dungeon-delving there to power level. Mad Dog said this dungeon allowed mounts, so my cheat of being able to round up and group monsters and then use area of effects spells to kill them in batches would be very effective inside the dungeon. I had to use five spell upgrades in order to be able to cast my spell from a mount, but it was going to be worth it.

We ported to Crystalhelm city. Jorric was immediately on guard as the city watch waved us off the platform. According to Mad Dog’s skyship schedule, I had an hour before catching the skyship to Dragon’s Tooth departed. Dragon’s Tooth was a city at the top of the Spine of the World. The Spine of the World was a massive mountain range that split the beginner lands from high-level zones intended for players over level 200. The trip would be two days. We wouldn’t be headed to the high-level zones. We would just be heading south from there to reach the city of Thira.

Yorric was a mountain shadowing over me, and he got a lot of looks as we walked toward the water. I noticed a player running further into town, probably on a quest. This would be a common occurrence once the game actually launched. Having plenty of time, I examined the storefronts as we walked. It was a healthy mix and variety. The stores were a collection of everything from flowers to armor to bakeries. No at all organized like Malcum. It was a crazy hot mess. I really appreciated Breda’s efforts and organization within our districts after seeing this.

The NPCs constantly eyed Yorric suspiciously, and two younger guards followed us to the docks. A booth by the moored floating ships was selling tickets. The tickets for two persons and two mounts were quite steep. I paid, and we made our way down the docks to the largest ship here. It had seven decks above the waterline, and I was curious to find most of the crew looked to be dragonkin. They were the first dragonkin I had seen in the world, and they were fascinating.

A lizardman looked closer at a human with scales and a tail. These beings had the head of a lizard and varied in coloring. We climbed the ramp, and I felt like I was entering Noah’s ark by the sheer scale of the ship. We walked to the stables inside the massive ship and left Titan and Yorric’s mount. We then went up on the top deck. It was some 60 feet above street level and gave a great view of the city. A blue-skinned dragonkin in robes was walking the deck.

“Excuse me,” I stopped the dragonkin, who was obviously female, by her busty chest. “My name is Tallis, and this is my first time on a skyship. Is the entire crew dragonkin?”

The woman bowed slightly, “Lord Tallis, a pleasure to meet you. Yes. The crew is all dragonkin. Our kind crew all the Mammoth-class skyships. Dragon’s Tooth is our home port. Almost all Mammoth skyships are owned and operated by the Dragon’s Wing Guild.”

“Did you just use an assessment skill on me? I didn’t tell you I was a lord,” I asked curiously.

“I did, Lord Tallis. My name is Miriam, Lightning Mage, First Order,” she bowed respectively again. “I am one of the twenty-two mages on board to defend this vessel during the flight.”

My assessment skill was too weak to work on her. She seemed a possible fountain of information, though, “Miriam, if you have time, I would love to purchase you a meal in the dining hall during the trip.”

Her unblinking eyes studied me, and then she gave a curt nod, “Once we reach cruising altitude, I will be on the foredeck. Find me there.” Miriam bowed again and walked away.

Yorric and I walked all the way to the bow and waited. Soon a horn sounded, the deck lurched beneath us, and the ship started to rise. I looked across the deck, and no other players were in sight. Portal stones were much quicker and probably cost the same—or maybe less than this trip. I guessed skyships were more of a novelty unless you were going somewhere that didn’t have a portal stone or it was your first time going there.

It took nearly an hour of climbing before the ship leveled, and we were cutting the clouds. Miriam approached and motioned for me to follow her. The dining room looked like a high-end restaurant. The servers were elves and humans.

Miriam explained, “We own and operate the skyship. We hire people to work as the support staff for dealing with passengers.” I nodded in understanding.

The food was expensive, and I ordered what Miriam suggested. It wasn’t as good as Fareth’s cooking, but it did give a 10% buff to my health pool for 24 hours. Our conversation focused on skyships during the meal. The enchantments and magic investment made these large ships prohibitive to operate for most kingdoms. There were four dragon cities in the corners of main playing field of the game. These cities served as home ports for these massive ships. Dragon’s Tooth city was the largest city currently in the game.

Dragon’s Tooth had over 5,000,000 NPCs. According to Mad Dog, that made it a World Capital City. The city was primarily a transition zone for players going into the high-level lands beyond the mountains. Miriam thanked me for the meal, and I talked to her a few more times during the trip. I managed to find a few easy quests on board. Nothing took more than an hour and offered no more than 50 experience. Carrying barrels, delivering messages, and creating stone in the hold for a trader who needed a trade good.

I worked on leveling my other spells and practicing my combat skills with Yorric. It was slow growth, but it was still growth. It was painful to be using these six days in travel, but I realized it was important for the future. When I did need to travel the game world, adding these portals to my network would make it quicker.

My biggest regret in this journey was not locating quests to complete between the cities. With the distances I was traveling, there had to be some quests out there that would have been lucrative.

I did have one quest in the city of Thira.

*Release the Sullen God, Travel to the city of Thira, and meet with the Priestess of the Sullen God*

It was tied to the mask that Mad Dog had given me. A long, tedious chain quest, according to him. I wasn’t sure if I needed to bind my faith to the Sullen God to continue the quest. Every time I put on the mask, I was asked that question.

*Do you wish to bind your faith to the Sullen God?*

I just didn’t know much about the gods, and after meeting the war god in disguise as Manto, I didn’t know if I wanted to become involved in the faith system.

When we approached Dragon’s Tooth, it was as advertised. A massive mountain above the clouds was shaped in a sharp triangle. As we got closer, the entire mountain was covered in tiers like a wedding cake. Each tier had buildings wrapping the mountain. Actual dragons flew around the peak. Miriam appeared at my side. The Council of Five rules the city. Each is an ancient dragon. The last time the city was attacked, the Council burned all twelve cities of the attacker’s homeland to the ground.

I would have loved to explore this city. I couldn’t even see the base of the mountain from the ship. If the mountain was covered in buildings and the interior of the mountain had its own cityscape, a player could spend all their time here adventuring.

Miriam was off to her duties as we docked, landing on a large flat platform. The wooden ship groaned as it settled on the hard surface. We retrieved our horses and bought our next skyship tickets. I went and looked for the portal stone to link it to my network. It was just one of many portal stones in the city, but at least it was close to the upper-city skyship docks. These ships were all Mammoth-class and traveled the greatest distances. Our next trip would be three days south on a much smaller skyship. There were no stables either, which meant we had to pay the ‘centaur rate’ for our horses. This was triple the rate of a person.

I watched Dragon’s Tooth disappear behind us as our new transport took off a few hours later. The massive city expanse behind us didn’t make Malcum feel small to me. Instead, it made me want to make Malcum into something that matched its majesty.

This skyship was crewed by beastkin bulls and beastkin wolves. They were much less talkative than the dragonkin. The three-day trip was long and tedious as there was nothing to do. No minor quests to do. No talkative NPCs. Players would probably log off for the trip—I didn’t have that option. The only interesting event was a massive air elemental attacked the ship mid-voyage. I was too busy drafting plans below deck to respond in time to take the quest to assist in repelling the assault. Titan was wounded in the attack as he was on the deck. I healed him but still lost some relationship points with my mount.

I did wonder if a skyship could crash or be destroyed in the air. How were they replaced? Maybe a player could hijack one of the skyships? How would that affect the NPCs? All questions I was sure were going to be answered when the game launched.

The city we landed in surrounded a large crescent-shaped bay. It had a salty and fishy smell as we exited the ship. The citizens looked to be a mix of humans, beastkin, and halflings. There were other races, but not in any quantity. I found a portal stone and linked it to my network. Unfortunately, it was not powerful enough to reach Dragon’s Tooth. It took two hours and a lot of questions to find the only portal stone capable of getting us back to Dragon’s Tooth.

With that done, I examined my options from here. We could take an ocean-going ship two days to Thira or ride our horses 200 miles down the coast to the dwarven city of Silversalt. From there, it would be a short half-day trip on a ship to Thira, an island city. I decided Titan needed to run, and adding another portal stone to my network would be good. It would mean I couldn’t draft and stockpile more building plans being in a saddle. But after days of creating copies of building plans, I needed to get out and adventure.

I had checked in with Mad Dog regularly, and nothing exciting was happening in Malcum. The only interesting game event was the city of Mistbreak was attacked by six different NPC factions to kill the sectoid race queen that took it over during the incursion event. The queen had been slain, but some of her powerful lieutenants were scattered to the winds to cause mischief.

We rode south on the road and met two different bandit groups. They were both under level ten and were no challenge to us. It only took a day to make the miles at a steady gallop as we fed the horses stamina potions. The dwarven city was on a peninsula and had gray stone buildings reaching into the sky. This was not Breda’s home, and the dwarves appeared to be mostly fishermen. Large fleets of small fishing vessels were mingling in the ocean below.

When we rode in, and found the portal stone immediately in the center of the city. I asked about the fishing vessels. They were not fishing but diving for pearls. The dwarves in the boats were fighting underwater creatures and harvesting along the ocean floor. This was something else I wanted to check out when I had time.

We made our way to the port and got passage on a dwarven trader to the city of Thira. It was a sailing vessel and not a skyship. The dwarves were very friendly, at least during the half-day trip, but the horses did not like the rolling waves. Yorric was stoic but also had a green face from riding the crests and troughs of the large waves.

When the city of Thira was finally in sight, I was underwhelmed. It was a massive sprawl, but the buildings looked weathered, and none were more than three stories. The dwarf sailor on the deck explained, “The city of Thira was once ruled by the followers of the Sullen God but was destroyed when the other gods imprisoned her. It was a titanic fight with monumental magics and large sea serpents. The city has been recovering over the last few centuries. It does boast a number of profitable dungeons, though.”

I nodded in thanks to the dwarf NPC. I suddenly felt like maybe the Matriarch had guided me here. Maybe I wasn’t going to have a choice in the quest to free the Sullen God.