

CHAPTER 66 – RECOVERY

Throughout all the battle and crafting, Luke rose through the levels with blistering speed. Those latest kills pushed him over another skill selection hump.

You have defeated [Lupine Beastman - Level 40]. Extra experience gained for slaying an enemy above your level.

You have defeated [Lupine Beastman - Level 41]. Extra experience gained for slaying an enemy above your level.

You have defeated [Leonid Beastman - Level 37]. Extra experience gained for slaying an enemy above your level.

Level Up! Your [Thief] Class has reached Level 35.

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

You have [Thief] skills to select.

Level Up! Your [Human (F-Grade)] Race has reached Level 24.

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

Luke had spent a lot of his free points shoring up his weaknesses. Now that every stat was over 100, he resorted back to increasing his mana.

[High Larceny] was a godsend, but it ate through his mana like nobody's business. If he was ever going to get the most out of it, he would need to have a staggeringly large pool.

Using the detailed view that Alfair had told him about, Luke looked over his stats once more while he ate a simple meal of smoked meat and hard cheese.

It wasn't as good as the strange gastropub style Alfair cooked up with his alchemical skills, but it was hearty fare that filled him up.

Status

Name: Luke Solus

Race: Human (F-Grade - Level 24)

Dunamis Rank: Mundane (9)

Class: Thief (Level 35)

Profession: Shadetouched Runegraver (Level 13)

Vital Resources

Health Points (HP): 252/2,170

Mana Points (MP): 70/2,020

Stamina Points (SP): 50/1,020

Stats

Strength (Base): 177

- (Free Points: +2) (Gifts: +7) (Mods: +10%) (Equip: +8)

Dexterity (Base): 269

- (Free Points: +4) (Gifts: +7) (Mods: +20%) (Equip: +8)

Endurance (Base): 58

- (Free Points: +28) (Gifts: +7) (Mods: +10%) (Equip: +0)

Fortitude (Base): 57

- (Free Points: +23) (Gifts: +7) (Mods: +15%) (Equip: +6)

Vitality (Base): 165

- (Free Points: +7) (Gifts: +17) (Mods: +15%) (Equip: +0)

Perception (Base): 148

- (Free Points: +1) (Gifts: +7) (Mods: +10%) (Equip: +2)

Willpower (Base): 61

- (Free Points: +23) (Gifts: +7) (Mods: +20%) (Equip: +14)

Wisdom (Base): 143

- (Free Points: +34) (Gifts: +7) (Mods: +10%) (Equip: +0)

Arcane (Base): 145

- (Free Points: +5) (Gifts: +7) (Mods: +10%) (Equip: +0)

Fate (Base): 24
• (Gifts: +78)
Free Points: 0

Luke grinned. The additional breakdown of where all his stats came from using the System's detailed view was informative. However, it was too dense for Luke's tastes.

The tracker showed that he had spent the majority of his free points in Wisdom, Fortitude, and Endurance. Gifts appeared to be the flat stat increase given from titles, skills, and his bloodline, whereas mods were the percentile bonuses from similar sources. Equip was quite clearly the stats his current equipment imparted.

Looking at his Fate stat, he wasn't surprised that the majority of it was earned from his [Fate Stealer] title, rather than naturally accrued over time from his race leveling up.

[Fate Stealer]

You have slain a known murderer, stealing their fate like they have stolen another's. Your Marks have been updated. +2 Fate. Whenever you kill a fellow human, you gain half of their Fate. If they are a known murderer, you gain all of their Fate.

Apparently, it was quite uncommon for races to gain Fate per level up, and it was something typically only found in humans across the multiverse.

It was curious that he gained so much Fate from defeating the auditor. He hadn't felt like it came from [Fate Stealer], but rather that defeating an auditor granted a huge amount of Fate itself.

Almost as if he was changing the course of destiny by interfering with a creature that, thankfully, he had not seen again. He hoped his luck would hold.

With his fighting style revolving around dual swords, Luke hoped to find a pair of weapons soon. Preferably curved blades. Using one curved and one straight was awkward, but beggars couldn't be

choosers. Now that he had neither, he would have gladly taken anything.

Feeling pleased with his progress, Luke looked over his additional System prompts.

You have [Thief] skills to select.

[Divest (Unusual)]

(Thief Class Skill)

Thieves are most effective when the deck is stacked in their favor. And nobody knows how to tilt the odds against an opponent quite like a Thief. Divest grants you the ability to weaken an opponent, crippling them and applying a vulnerability stack. Effect is greatly enhanced when utilized with Sneak Attack. Adds a moderate bonus to the influence of Dexterity and Willpower when using this skill.

[Envenom (Uncommon)]

(Thief Class Skill)

Assassins are not the only ones who utilize poisons in their skill set. Thieves are more than capable of adding deadly toxins to their weapons and even slipping a poisoned vial into an enemy's pockets to go off at a later point. Having been exposed to countless toxins, your body can now make its own toxins based on the poisons and afflictions you have resisted. These poisons can be applied to your weapons to increase their damage, provide stacking damage-over-time, and afflictions. Effect is greatly enhanced when utilized with Sneak Attack. Adds a minor bonus to the influence of Dexterity, Arcane, and Willpower when using this skill.

Luke immediately knew what to take. As much as he liked [Envenom] and its recognition of his unique [Poison Eater] title, [Divest] was far too good to pass up.

Title earned: [Poison Eater]

Afflicted with no less than 17 different types of toxins and illnesses ranging from [Knocknees] and [Furry Lung] to [Desiccating Bladder], you have shocked your system with a fusillade of deadly and debilitating diseases and managed to survive. You gain resistance to poisons, toxins, and diseases of your Grade, and immunity to any below your Grade. Effect diminished for each Grade over yours. When you resist an affliction, you gain HP, MP, or SP depending on the affliction type. Your Marks have been updated.
+5% Fortitude.

He could see nearly every one of his skills combining very nicely with [Divest]. It overall increased his damage potential, both burst and over time.

The only potential downside was that it might need to be used in close range. Luke was willing to take it though, because even if that was the case, [Divest] was still incredibly useful.

Since he gained [Sneak Attack], nearly every skill mentioned an increased effectiveness when stacked with it.

Its rarity power was unusual too, which was considerably higher than [Envenom's] uncommon-rarity. His ratking dagger was as strong, and he had picked that up all the way back when he was just starting out as a Thief.

Despite how much better [Divest] was than [Envenom], Luke could also see the two skills having excellent synergy. Perhaps the next time he was able to pick more skills, he would choose [Envenom] over whatever else was newly available.

More and more of his Thief skills, even older ones, synergized with [Sneak Attack], granting them greater effectiveness or bonus effects for stacking them. It made him feel right in choosing it and also confirmed what Alfair told him.

“The System uses what you have to pave the way forward,” the elf had told him one day when they were taking downtime between

searching for nodes and training. *“The earlier you take a skill, the more the System will try to weave its usefulness into the next skill you gain. The more you deny skills along a certain path, the more the System learns to give you less of said skills. So think carefully before disregarding a specific skill line too many times.”*

Having Alfair to give him tidbits about the System and the multiverse’s culture as a whole was more than Luke could have hoped for. The first few days had been tense with each other, thinking that, perhaps, their supposed ally would stab them in the back.

Yindferl had changed all of that. Luke couldn’t fathom anybody who took care of the stoic and proud drake as being a bad person, and Yind helped Luke and Alfair to break the ice.

While Luke wouldn’t say their friendship blossomed overnight, it was a surprisingly fast progression. Largely over a great deal of bloodshed and sweat. Luke lost count of how many times they had saved each other’s lives.

It was the most fun Luke had had since coming to the assessment. Mixing his two favorite things, learning something new, and his latest obsession: fighting.

Gaining more power was just one way of getting stronger. Luke already knew this, but Alfair drove the point home with his Dunamis teachings that knowledge was just as useful. His foundational exercises were key to Luke progressing from Mundane (1) all the way to the peak of Mundane at (9).

The next step, according to Alfair, would be either Mundane (10) or Copper.

Some people could ascend to Copper at Mundane (9), others needed to hit (10) first. Since Luke’s Dunamis skill was still Novice, Alfair was confident that Luke would hit Mundane (10) before he hit Copper.

Luke intended to prove him wrong.

Luke rested and restored, now with renewed determination. He went back to the tiny and pathetic library, at least compared to the one in the Gordian, to study up on some new runes.

The ones he had prepared to tank a deadly attack had been lacking. With his improvement from Mundane (8) to Mundane (9), Luke was hoping he could instill more Dunamis into his runes and therefore enhance their potency.

Once he was satisfied with his studies, Luke returned to the workshop. He had a better understanding of why the rune failed so catastrophically.

There really was no better way of testing runes than in battle. Luke had learned a great deal ever since he included them in his fighting.

They still hadn't found another [Stele], and as much as Luke would have loved to give Alfair a memento of his teacher, he wasn't about to part with his sole crafting utensil.

Scattering threefold flux and touching his fingers to the rune emblazoned on the linen square, Luke used [Instill Rune] to empower the harsh angular rune with Dunamis.

Once it was done, he added another, and finally a third modification, pushing more Dunamis into the rune and watching the flux melt and light up.

When Luke was done, the runes on the page glowed as if they were LED strips with a light diffuser on top.

The rest of his day was spent using restoration runes to repair the damage to his equipment. His swords were a lost cause, so far gone that the System had left them behind in the Gordian.

But the hole in his [Thurskite Scalemail] was another story. He had to strip it off to work on it, and it felt odd to be so exposed and vulnerable even in the little set of rooms that was his refuge outside the Gordian.

Slowly but surely, Luke restored the armor to its original, pristine condition. He wished it had a self-repair enchantment, but Alfair had made it clear that those were quite rare.

Not only were they rare, but they took up another potential enchantment slot. If the System knew you could repair, it often put those potential enchantments at a lower priority, allowing more powerful enchantments to take their place.

The minutiae of the System fascinated Luke. Whenever he had a chance, he poked and prodded Alfair about what made the System work.

Unfortunately, that had a lot to do with Authority levels, so there wasn't much Alfair could tell Luke at the moment. To illustrate his point, Alfair had spoken to him about something that would most assuredly be beyond Luke's Authority level.

All Luke heard was static.

But what Alfair was able to tell him was truly eye-opening. The elf never asked for anything in return. Their continued partnership was enough.

Luke was still so new to runegraving that restoration runes took a lot out of him. They were considered a "simple, utilitarian rune" that any novice should be able to do in their sleep.

If I didn't have the Gordian's explosion bearing down on me, I'd spend more time learning runes, Luke thought sourly.

On the upside, they offered a good chunk of experience, as evidenced by his latest notification.

Level Up! Your [Shadetouched Runegraver] Profession has reached Level 14.

Stat points earned: +9 Arcane, +9 Wisdom, +3 Dexterity, +3 Perception, +3 Vitality, +3 Free Points.

Placing the 3 free points into Wisdom took his max MP up to nearly equal footing with his HP at 2,150. Just 50 points shy of his new HP.

Donning his equipment once more and binding the defensive rune, Luke was ready to return to the Gordian, his [Cipher Sword] held in one hand.