

## CHAPTER 72 – PREPARATION II

Though Luke originally wanted to use the unusual-rarity plates to create an enchantment, he needed another 128LP first. That way, he could test his theory.

Since a simple augmentation gave him 64LP, the equivalent of slaying a level 25 monster, he assumed it would be a walk in the park to get 128LP.

Luke had turned to creating flux en masse from the storeroom. He quickly found that it was such a small amount of LP that he only received a notification for 1 measly point every 4th use of [Raze]. From items that gave a decent amount of flux as well, according to his [Flux Sense].

### [Flux Sense (Uncommon)]

#### (Apprentice Runegraver Profession Class Skill)

*Flux comes from all things, not just equipment. It is in the grass beneath your feet, the rocks in the hills, and the water that flows through the valley, but breaking down common items for fractions of flux would be a colossal waste of time. Flux Sense grants you the insight to feel the concentration of flux in any given item. Adds a minor bonus to the influence of Arcane, Willpower, and Perception when using this skill.*

Luke's time was beginning to run out. [Raze] was a simple skill, but it would take countless hours and effort to get the 120LP he now needed. And that was after he used [Raze] on the icebox and food prep area in the kitchen.

He lamented their loss, but it wasn't as if he could take them with him.

After a further hour spent grinding out flux from the next level of flux-dense items, Luke gave up after he only received 2LP for his troubles.

He did gain a great deal of flux, that was useful, and he gladly added it to his box where he was collecting a good assortment of flux.

If he ever found another safe place to study and work, he would be able to craft a ton of runes.

In order to get the LP necessary for an upgrade ticket, he needed to grind out something else.

Runes were his best bet.

Consulting the pilfered books from the late August Frendlebren, Luke found a few simple ones he wanted to try out.

There were several runes for increasing speed by amplifying motion efficiency. Given that his reflexes were vastly faster than his conscious motions, putting those runes on his armor would amplify his bloodline's natural ability.

A few hours later, and several black explosive soot stains where the rune had gone critical before he could stabilize it, Luke was ready.

Each [Amplify (Common)] rune was far more complex than anything he had created before. And thanks to the rarity increase from the [Obele Stele], they weren't trashy crude-rarity.

Unfortunately, creating runes was considered less difficult—despite the dangers—than augmenting. Luke reasoned that it was due to the rare materials augmenting required. He could effectively grind out runes all day long, provided he had the flux and a stele to use.

Not so with augmenting.

So instead of the expected—overly optimistic—64LP per rune, he received 16LP. Luke wasn't sure if that was down to the rarity of the rune or not, because even though he sunk hours into creating 8 runes, he was never able to make anything higher than common.

Luke knew well enough that the common-rarity he achieved was only because of his legendary stele's enchantment. He endeavored to find out later if rarity increased the LP gained and whether the System took into account that his enchantment was helping him.

Though he sincerely hoped it wasn't the case, the [Obele Stele] might be hindering his progress. Unfortunately, he had no other stele in which to test against.

By the time he was done, sweat dripping off his brow, fingers cramping and feeling slow and numb, Luke didn't really care whether crude-rarity received 8LP or 16LP. He could finally afford the ticket. With less than 10 hours left before he was booted out of this place, Luke was racing against the clock.

They were now well into the final stretch of the assessment. A little more than 2 days remained. Luke didn't know what he would find out there, but he intended to be ready for it.

He pulled open the Company Shop and quickly bought an upgrade ticket.

For a moment, he was afraid there was something wrong with the shop. It took two attempts to confirm that he wanted to buy the ticket before it finally went through, leaving him with a pathetic 10LP.

**[Item Upgrade Ticket (Epic)]**

**(Consumable)**

*A consumable ticket that increases the rarity by one level of any item, Epic rarity or lower. Onetime use.*

**Price: 400LP**

With that single purchase, he could practically feel his placement in the assessment ranking plummet. He promised himself it was only temporary, even if there were only a few days left in the test.

Without wasting any time, Luke used the [Item Upgrade Ticket (Epic)] to increase the rarity of his [Scout Cloak] to unusual.

Something slightly different happened. Purple and black smoke roiled over the cloak, stinging his hands with burning cold.

When the smoke faded away as quickly as it came, Luke examined the cloak.

**Item: [Scout Cloak (Unusual)]**

**(Armor)**

*A loose fitting, black leather cloak with a deep hood. Designed to keep the elements off the wearer. Lined with improved sealing pockets to store various items without fear of them getting damaged. Bonded during your perilous journey, your Mark of the Shadow Lord has tinged this cloak with power.*

**Enchantments:** Improves your resistance to environmental damage and further muffles the sound of your movements. When damaged, self-repairs. Reduces the cost of bloodline skills.

**Augments:** [Spirit Plate (2/9): -4% Damage taken].

**Requirements:** Luke Solus.

Luke whistled in appreciation. It felt good that a part of his own power affected his cloak during the upgrade process, turning it into something completely unique to him.

He had seen it enough on various powerful items that it was like the System had finally recognized him.

Unfortunately, what he hoped to happen was that the augments would increase in power with rarity.

“Maybe I was wrong about that,” he mused, flipping the cloak around and putting it on again. He felt a cooling sensation, as if he had just stepped into a deep shadow hidden from the sun’s light.

It was comforting. He breathed a sigh of relief.

That meant that what mattered to augmenting potency was the rarity of the materials more than anything. However, increasing the rarity upped the number of times he could augment the item.

Even with just 1 more augment slot available, that meant that at higher rarities, he might have close to 20 slots if it kept increasing per rarity.

Luke pieced together at least 10 rarities from the several books he read while in the library. Apparently, it was common enough knowledge, like Dunamis, that nobody felt it was necessary to explain what each rarity was or did.

Either that, or his Authority level wasn't high enough, and the System was censoring itself. Luke didn't appreciate the implications of that, but it lined up with what Alfair told him.

It was only through reading dozens of books that Luke was able to compile a list of rarities and compare it to the items he had received.

He had been so busy with Dunamis and exploring the Gordian that it had entirely slipped his mind to talk to Alfair about rarities.

They just weren't that important to understand in-depth. There was little he could do to influence them beyond his [Treasure Hunter] skill, which had clearly worked wonders on the Gordian treasure chest.

Simply looking at an uncommon-rarity item, then a common-rarity one would make the difference in power obvious. Even if they lacked enchantments, Luke could feel the difference.

If his guess was correct, that would mean his legendary stele would be able to have nearly double the slots for augments his cloak possessed.

Quickly testing to see if he could augment the [Obele Stele] led nowhere. Luke had the suspicion that it wasn't impossible. His skill was simply too low.

The next two rarities were said to be so rare that the people who owned them were usually well known due to the fame and power such relics afforded.

That meant, as far as Luke could extrapolate, most items would cap out around 15 slots for augmenting.

*Unless, of course, different items have different caps, Luke thought. Then I might as well throw out the whole thing because it would be too variable.*

He hoped that wasn't the case, but then again, if he could increase his damage taken by 2% at his current profession level, that would mean any Master Runegraver should be able to make a single person functionally invincible.

*Which I somehow doubt,* Luke thought to himself. He felt there was something deeper to the underlying mechanics, something he was missing.

*I'll figure it out,* Luke promised.

With his cloak now at unusual-rarity, Luke began graving an enchantment rune upon the armor, using plates from his [Heavy Spirit Plate Pouch].

The crafting process consumed a high amount of flux.

He could only guide the process so far. As the rune took hold, Luke watched with bated breath as the [Threefold Flux] glittered like stardust in the air. It swirled out of the rapidly emptying bags, binding to the rune graven upon the cloak.

The plates melted like hot wax, infusing the black leather with a faint purple-black shimmer.

**Enchantment Success: [Shadow Rune]**

**You have successfully augmented [Scout Cloak (Unusual)]. Extra experience gained for crafting a recipe above your level. Bonus experience gained for first time crafting completion. 128 LP gained.**

### Item Upgrade:

Your [Scout Cloak (Unusual)] has upgraded to [Cloak of Twilight (Unusual)].

Item: [Cloak of Twilight (Unusual)]

(Armor)

*A loose fitting, black leather cloak with a deep hood. Designed to keep the elements off the wearer. Lined with improved sealing pockets to store various items without fear of them getting damaged. Bonded during your perilous journey, your Mark of the Shadow Lord has tinged this cloak with power. Enhanced with shadow, this cloak has become further attuned to your Marks.*

**Enchantments:** Improves your resistance to environmental damage and further muffles the sound of your movements. When damaged, self-repairs. Reduces the cost of bloodline skills.

**Enchantments (shadow rune):** Absorbs surrounding shadows, building a layer of exhaustible defense.

**Augments:** [Spirit Plate (2/9): -4% Damage taken].

**Requirements:** Luke Solus.

Putting the cloak back on, Luke immediately tried out the enchantment.

Shadows were drawn in from everywhere in the room like paint running down a canvas. What was left behind was somehow less substantial, as if the light in the room had increased and the shadows became thin.

In stark contrast, Luke's cloak was deeper than pitch. Despite taking a decent amount of mana to maintain the enchantment,

Luke could tell that if he stood in a corner, he would be undetectable.

There was no way to test the damage mitigation effect, but Luke was happy with what he saw so far. It was costly, however. All his unusual spirit plates were consumed in the process. That was probably a key reason why the enchantment was so strong.

Luke felt that the enchantment perfectly suited his Shadetouched Runegraver profession.

Through the use of it, he also discovered another rune. One that he didn't think August Frenlebren knew considering his interests ran counter to the darker side of things.

As he worked on his last task, instilling and binding the runes to his thurskite equipment, Luke allowed his mind to wander. This was perhaps one of the easier aspects of runegraving, if only because he had already bound runes to this equipment before and doing so again was easier than the first time.

Easier, however, did not mean *easy*. Nothing in runegraving was easy. Everything took a dozen steps and required more control than even his high Dexterity allowed.

Luke's much higher stats were the only reason he wasn't failing every other attempt like he used to. He looked on with satisfaction at a job well done. Something the System agreed with for once.

**Skill upgraded:**

**Your [Novice Runegraving (Common)] Skill has upgraded to [Novice Runegraving (Uncommon)].**

Gaining skill improvements was a hard-fought thing. He could count on one hand the number of skill upgrades he had received so far. Mostly it appeared that the System adapted skills to suit his new capability as happened with his one-handed weapon skill.

With time nearly running out, Luke collected his belongings, and anything that might be of use, stuffing it into the [Runic Box]. The



box had very *clear* ideas of what was and was not considered admissible. Anything to do with rune-graving was okay, up to and including books on the subject.

But things like food and miscellaneous items? He had to use his pockets, shifting applicable contents to the box in the process.

Luke looked over his status one last time. It seemed fitting to compare himself to the man he was when he entered the refuge, and the man he had become as he left it for the last time.

### **Status**

Name: Luke Solus

Race: Human (F-Grade - Level 25)

Dunamis Rank: Mundane (9)

Class: Thief (Level 36)

Profession: Shadetouched Rune-graver (Level 14)

### **Vital Resources**

Health Points (HP): 2,280/2,280

Mana Points (MP): 2,787/2,787

Stamina Points (SP): 1,050/1,050

### **Stats**

Strength: 212 (+8)

Dexterity: 350 (+8)

Endurance: 105

Fortitude: 103 (+6)

Vitality: 228

Perception: 180 (+2)

Willpower: 112 (+14)

Wisdom: 223

Arcane: 185

Fate: 103

Free Points: 0

Once he was done, Luke stood up and strapped on [Hadal's Mirror]. Like his scimitar, it fit onto his back. He patted the figurine of Yindferl in his cloak's breast pocket for good luck. And just to be sure, Luke drew in as many shadows as he could, until he felt there were few shadows remaining in the entire refuge.

His cloak could still hold more, but the more he held at once, the greater the mana drain. As much as he wanted to prepare, he knew from watching the Dragon's history that if he wanted Luke dead, there wasn't much he could do to stop it.

*But I don't have to be defenseless.*

With less than 10 minutes left on the timer, Luke stepped up to the swirling vortex.

It was time to face the Dragon.