Chapter 70 (Arc 2 Chapter 24)

When we landed, Mia and the twins rushed back to the barracks. I guessed they were going to tell everyone about the warehouse and their time in Aegis city. It was the second-largest city in all of Skyholme, although the capital was sometimes split into the lower city and upper city when referenced. Either of those partial cities would still have larger populations than Aegis city.

The recent incursion by the Sadians had done a fair amount of damage and caused a fair amount of death in the larger cities. It gave me the opportunity to purchase the warehouse.

I found Gareth in our room studying his dungeon books. He tried to tell me about the training with delve team, but I professed I needed to work on the *lesser restoration* spell. I had a week to learn it, and I was getting close. This was my 11th spell that I was imprinting. I was getting a good feel for the process and knew when I was getting close.

A lot of my spells had leveled, but the only spell that had an evolution was aether shield when it reached level 11, and I increased the diameter of the round shield from 3 feet to 3.3 feet. I spent some time in my privacy bubble updating my sheet on my spells.

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| **Imprinted Spell List** | **Tier** | **Slots** | **Affinity** | **Level** |
| Cleanliness | 1 | 1 | Aether | 16 |
| Mend Flesh | 1 | 1 | Healing | 15 |
| Obfuscate Abilities | 1 | 1 | Darkness | 9 |
| Dimensional Closet | 3 | 4 | Space | 15 |
| Alarm | 1 | 1 | Divination | 14 |
| Privacy | 1 | 1 | Illusion | 10 |
| Neutralize Poison | 2 | 1 | Healing | 1 |
| Lightning Reflexes | 4 | 2 | Lightning/Healing | 16 |
| Arcane Lock | 1 | 1 | Aetheric | 5 |
| Aether Shield | 2 | 1 | Aetheric | 12 |

My awakening had been just under a year ago. This progress for a year was beyond what anyone could expect. I definitely needed to start thinking about offensive spells if I was going to enter a dungeon. I froze…did I really just think I was going to go into a dungeon. I had been toying with the idea of replacing Remy on the first delve for the team to see them in action and cross it off my bucket list, but now I was going to prepare to delve.

Well, *lesser restoration* and *thermostatic aura* were definitely my following two spells. Both would take just one slot on my aether matrix and could add to my survivability.

I looked at my list of what spells I wanted to level. My of my aether was being used to create gold and platinum coins. It seemed I was quite literally the goose that laid the golden eggs. Aether shield would hit level 13 on its own when I went to train at Twin Rocks. Cleanliness was something that I could probably get level by the end of the week to get another evolution. Privacy as well could be leveled just with my current practice.

The ugly duckling on my list was the *neutralize poison* spell. I had learned it so I could avoid getting drunk or at least cure my drunken state instantly when needed. I had told myself to go to the local inn and tavern and cure people but never got around to it.

Finally, I wanted the *lightning reflexes* spell to level 17 as well. I had not been able to practice it because Gareth was coming to our training sessions, and I wanted to surprise him in a bout with the spell. Now that my finances were mostly settled, I could practice the spell again.

I dropped my privacy screen, “Hey Gareth, can you let me train with weapon masters by myself tomorrow night? I want to get feedback on my new sword.”

Gareth dropped his book on the ground with a thump, “New sword? Where is it? Come on, Stormy, you really need to share monumental things like this with me.” I brought the blade from my dimensional space and handed it to him.

He ran his hand along it and was sufficiently infatuated with the blade. “You do remember you promised to make me a magic blade. This one is magic, right? That is an aether crystal in the pummel.”

With some angst in my voice, “No, you can not have my sword!”

“I just meant you can make me a blade as well. The one you already gave me is spectacular with this,” he held the blade, “I can tell is remarkable.” He handed it back to me. “I want a broadsword like the one you made me but slightly longer and heavier. Whatever enchantments you put on yours, I want on mine.” He paused, then slowly asked, “Storme can you make it before the delve?”

“How did you know we were going the next seventh day?” I asked, and his eyes popped. Oops. I guess he had just inferred whenever the first delve was.

“Really!” he exclaimed, and I nodded. He was so excited he just left the room without saying anything else. He probably had to go burn off some energy…or maybe he was going to run out to the farm and tell everyone. That was probably what Gareth would do. I placed the blade back in my space and added even more enchanting material I needed to my list from Instructor Aethon.

I made a second poor replica of my sword before going to sleep. The one at least matched its weight and would be functional to practice with tomorrow.

Gareth didn’t return, and the following day we started our new week. While Aelyn was running conditioning, I noticed she wasn’t quite as hard on Gareth as normal. Maybe the delve team training was getting them closer together.

I started practicing with the replica sword at practice, and both Callem and Gareth helped me learn the new sword forms. I had very little experience wielding a two-handed weapon. The movements were different, and the blade I made should allow me to transition between one and two-handed styles freely. By the end of the two training sessions this day I realized I should have taken the spear as my secondary weapon. A spear was about 80% similar to the staff.

Selina was gone for the day, so I was left teaching the spellcraft class. I assumed she was working with Lana and Remy out at the farm.

Artificing class was mostly me negotiating with Instructor Aethon for all the materials I wanted him to get me. Ultimately, I gave up a 30% stake in my ice cream maker, paid him two platinum, and still owed him seven light globes for his personal use.

That evening I finally passed my Skyholme history and law test, 46 out of 50 correct. The written exam had all new questions, but the twins did an excellent job in helping me prepare.

Out at twin rocks that night, I was surprised it was just me and Callem. He was going to personally tutor me with me new weapon every night. At first, I was worried, but it quickly became evident he was here to instruct and not beat me senselessly.

The week burned quickly; on the 3rd day, I imprinted my new spell, *lesser restoration*. I immediately began using it. There were not as many injuries as the intensity had dropped, but I managed to get the spell to level 4 by the end of the week. I didn’t need to use any evolutions on assessing a person’s injuries as my mend flesh spell could already do this for me. My first evolution was to use the spell on others. The second level was to repair improperly healed bones. If someone didn’t have a bone set or magic healing, their bones would heal improperly. This addressed this. At the third level, my evolution was a flash heal. It was a burst of healing aether that I didn’t direct. Normally healing would take me a few seconds of focus to repair the injury. This evolution was instant and did a fixed amount of healing. Extremely useful in a fast-paced battle.

Also, on the third day, my *privacy* spell reached level 11, and the evolution was a shield from odors. It prevented the smell from leaving or entering my bubble. This was more powerful than it first appeared. Essentially I was sealing myself off from the exterior environment. I was creating an environmental bubble. It meant I had limited air inside but I knew the basics of an air recycling evolution from my *dimensional closet* spell.

On the fourth day, I advanced my *cleanliness* spell to level 17. I had been cleaning everything in sight to get this spell leveled. I choose to invade a person’s aura. I could now clean another person’s clothes…at least on the surface. I couldn’t eliminate the smell or dry clothes on a person’s body. One more evolution for that. Then one final evolution to increase my range, and I would be able to use my *cleanliness* spell on a person’s body like I was doing it on myself. So those were my two evolution plans for levels 19 and 23.

I was shocked when Callem said I had passed my secondary weapon proficiency check. I was much better with the saber than I was with my two-handed falchion. I just accepted it. I actually found the weapon growing on me. With two hands, you had a pivot point and much greater flexibility in your attacks and controlling the tip of your weapon. Callem even helped me push my lightning reflexes to level 17. Giving me an 80.5% percent increase in speed at the normal enhancement and 161% speed in overdrive mode. Overdrive mode at that speed did damage my body more, meaning I had to be careful.

At lunch, on the sixth day, Callem invited everyone’s family to the barracks to celebrate. The food quality had been enhanced by our winnings from the inter-academy bouts. Callem had told me privately that most of the gold coin was transferred to the town coffers for future academies. I wasn’t shocked when everyone was listed as passing the first semester, and no one would need to remain at the barracks for the upcoming off week. A few students had failed one class or their secondary weapon proficiency, but that was not going to prevent them from being listed as passing.

The Gaskill’s practically corned me and hugged me in turn. Mera and Fera looked on at the spectacle. Mera hadn’t made another move since the skyship kiss, so I guessed that was just a thank-you for bringing them to Aegis city. Freya had sourced beef and eggs from them, and they now had a herd of twenty-two meat cows and six dairy cows. They were not a big enough operation to supply the restaurant. They could only sell one cow every month until their herd grew. I doubted the land they owed could support more than fifty cows. It was a profitable venture for them, and we would probably have to source the extra meat from another island. I was handing off the logistics anyway and didn’t focus on it.

My parents were excited for Pascal and me. Mother had passed her master’s test and now had her license. It would allow her to charge more for her services and even take on an apprentice. The news about my restaurant had reached their ears, and they were excited to come and see it when it opened. There was a lot of alcohol being drunk, and I got mischievous. I started liberally casting my *neutralize poison* spell. I walked the crowd, touching people and using it.

With over 100 people drinking heavily, I managed to get the spell up to level four before the end of the night. Some people who I cured of intoxication still acted drunk, which made me laugh. At level two, my evolution was to determine the effect the poison was having on a person, a standard assessment for the spell. The third evolution was another standard evolution, and it was to hold the effects of the poison at bay while constantly using a trickle of aether. This allowed the castor to combat higher-tier poisons the spell couldn’t neutralize. You just either had to hope the poison had half-life or someone with a stronger spell could reach the patient.

A few people noticed the lack of drunk people and blamed the tavern owner who supplied the barrels of delivering water down ale. No fights broke out, just some very lively discussions at my antics. Well, it was a hard spell to level, and I was glad I took the opportunity. As the night wore on, I was asked to dance by a dozen women, and I obliged each one. Mera was one of them, and I thought for a moment I was going to get a second kiss, but I switched to dancing with her mother before it happened.

The barracks was almost completely empty that night after the party. I observed that Gareth had left with Brianne to rekindle their brief affair, probably in celebration. They were stealthy about it, but Monty had tried to herd Gareth back to the party, so I noticed their attempt to escape unnoticed. I wanted to get some sleep as tomorrow was going to be a long day. I set my privacy bubble and alarms up and fell into a deep sleep.

My alarm woke me, and I became instantly alert. The spell sent me the image of the intruder. Mia had opened the door to my room, stepped inside, and stopped. The alarm didn’t make any noise to her, and my privacy shield was up. She lingered for a good ten minutes, uncertain of her next move. I thought about dropping my screen and confronting her. As my indecisiveness played out, Mia retreated and softly shut the door.

I thought about pursuing her but cleared my head, reset my alarms, and returned to sleep.

I was up in a few hours prepping. The crate of enchanting supplies was in the artificing classroom, and I moved it to my dimensional space after confirming everything was there. I spent time working on Gareth’s new sword, just starting the basics of it. My own sword had taken me about five hours to complete, and I assumed this one would be the same.

Before finishing it I made my way to the skyship platform. Remy, Lana, Sammie, Aelyn and Gareth joined me before liftoff. Gareth had a self-satisfied grin on his face. I was surprised when Mia joined us; she smiled, and during the trip, she began to talk about who she decided to ask to join my building guards. I didn’t bring up her entrance into my room last night.

Mia was planning to ask four of our classmates and five others she knew from growing up in Solaris city. I was disappointed that she didn’t select everyone from our academy class, but I did put her in charge and would trust her judgment. The cost for the city guard academy in the city was four gold per year for non-future city guards. The problem she was having was if everyone she hired went to the academy, then who was left to watch the warehouse during the day? And if they went to the academy during the day, they would be too tired to watch the warehouse at night.

I admit I hadn’t thought it all the way through myself. So if I paid for ten people to attend an academy at four gold each year, for seven years…280 gold. I didn’t plan on being in Skyholme seven years from now. “Mia, you can attend any academy, and I will pay for it. But you need to hire guards that can start working immediately. I want to rotate out my current guards as soon as possible.”

She looked hugely disappointed, so I thought of a compromise, “Hire nine experienced guards immediately. I will budget enough for you to send four people to the guard academy in Aegis city. They can work during their weeks off from school.” It was just over one platinum, and I think I was only doing it to keep Mia happy.

Mia seemed happy and then asked, “So I could attend the dungeon academy if I wanted to?”

I nodded, “Sure. Why not.” It cost a lot more, but money was an issue for me.

When the ship landed, we all walked to the warehouse. All of the second-floor windows were in, and some of the third-floor windows were in. My two massive windows remained open to the elements.

I gathered my dungeon crew around me just outside the doors, “This building is our base of operations. When the restaurant opens, you will be able to take all your meals here for free. The apartments upstairs will be assigned to you. They should be ready in a week.” They all looked in awe at the massive building. I noticed my thirty-some-odd staff were all inside and not doing much other than talking.

I got my delver’s attention, “I am sure Gareth told you that you have your first delve tonight in the Icy Vault dungeon. Go and see Gimble in order to prepare. I will be there to see you off tonight!”

Everyone except Mia left, Gareth leading the pack with enthusiasm. I went inside the restaurant and noticed my motley crew. Everyone was wearing mismatched clothes. “Ok, all servers, dishwashers, and the two bartenders, come over here!”

I soon had nine women and eight young men standing before me. “Ok the first thing we need is uniforms. You.” I pointed out the oldest woman. She looked to be in her early thirties. “You are to take everyone here to a reasonable tailer. I want everyone in the same black plants and black long sleeve button-up tops. The buttons are to be shiny steel buttons. You are to have everyone sized and get everyone five pairs of pants and five tops each.” She nodded but looked like a deer caught in the headlights. I ran the math, 170 pieces of clothing at a fair price of four silver per piece…about 7 gold. I handed her one large gold coin. “If you have enough left over, try and get everyone black socks and shoes as well.” I waved my hands for them to get moving, and they shuffled out.

I was left with six cooks and one baker. I asked where the eighth cook was, and someone said he had left to go home and sleep off a hangover. He was fired on the spot. Best not to show too much leniency with your staff. I started writing out a long list of ingredients for this group to go and fetch. I was going to spend my afternoon teaching them how I wanted them to prepare the menu. Each burger and sandwich would be named after one of the paintings. The artist wasn’t here, but he had 16 of the panels up and completed, so he was getting close to finishing.

I had one young man volunteer to be responsible for the coin. I announced on the spot that he was now one of the two head cooks, which shocked everyone. His pay had just tripled. I told the group that I would promote one more person to head cook based on their ability to replicate the dishes. The man with the coin started giving orders, and I could tell I had made a good choice.

Mia was the only person left. I looked at her and asked, “Are you going to go and look for guards?” She shook her head, nodded, and left. I went into the kitchen and brought out my enchanting materials. I finished the walk-in freezer, a second large griddle, and one of the deep fryers. I wasn’t sure I got the temperature right on the deep fryer, so we would have to wait and see and make adjustments.

The cooks and bakers came crashing back into the kitchen, weighed down with food. We started by heating the lard and trying the four types of potatos in the fryer. A little salt and the samples were well received. I showed them my best imitation recipes for BBQ sauce, ketchup, thousand island, mustard, mayo and thai sweet chili. I had them make more fries and use the fries to try out the sauces. I think I had won them all over. I stepped back and let them practice while I took my baker aside and started to work on rolls. He actually knew more than I did, and I explained what I wanted, and he worked on samples.

I wanted a white sesame seed bun. We had seeds that were similar to sesame seeds. Our seeds would be browned to add a light nutty flavor to the bun. The next was a pretzel-style bun. He already knew the perfect recipe. The final was a buttery brioche bun. The last was going to be used in the breakfast sandwiches, so it had to be perfect.

Although I was excited about starting things up, and the cooks were even more excited to be using enchanted ovens, stoves, and fryers, I was wearing thin. I was constantly trying to assert the importance of maintaining a clean kitchen. One young man ran my patience too thin, and I gave him three large silvers and fired him. Everyone else quickly got in line after that.

I left the group working on the fries, sauces, and bread. Tomorrow we will try the burgers. I let them know the freezer was active, and I charged all the aether crystals before leaving. The first ten feet of the walk-in should be just about freezing if I set the runes properly. I guess I will find out tomorrow.

I moved over to the warehouse and made a lot of copper pipe. I asked the guards to carry up a few crates of copper to the roof for me, and they looked at me like I had two heads. Yep, definitely needed new guards. The cooks were eager to help, and soon I was on the roof making my large 2,500-gallon water tank. The hot water tank would be adjacent and would be only 250 gallons, but that was for another day. I needed to get water to the kitchens, and it was getting late in the day.

The copper tank was made under my privacy spell, and it took me two hours to get the runes correct. I had to have the references open next to me because I was not familiar with nine interconnected runes condensing water. The runes would turn off when the water level reached a certain point. I created the hot water tank but didn’t work on those runes. It was time to go meet my delve team for the first foray into a dungeon.

The shop that I purchased my scabbard from was closed when I checked on my way to the Guild Hall. It was late, and many people in the city were out drinking. I took the opportunity to remove the alcohol poisoning from a few people I bumped into. One person tried to find my purse, but all my coins were in my dimensional storage.

I entered the hall and found my entire team anxious but ready to go. Surprisingly Gareth looked the most nervous of the bunch. Gimble was calm and asked, “So we can only take six in. Who am I leading?”