

Chapter 7

The Haunted Mansion

Arthur froze. On the bed was the skeleton of what appeared to be a small person. He didn't exactly have experience with skeletons, but this one couldn't have belonged to someone older than ten. He couldn't imagine what could have happened here for someone to have left a child this young on their own to die in this room. Shortly after that thought, he saw the bloodstain on the chest of the tattered clothing attached to the skeleton. It looked like someone may have killed this person. That thought just made him angry.

He walked up to the skeleton to get a closer look and to his surprise, found a small blade stuck in the ribcage of the remains. He picked it up and checked it.

Item: Ornate Jeweled Dagger	Attack: 1-2
	Durability: 15/35
	Rarity: Common
	Quality: Well Crafted
	Weight: 1.0 kg
	Slot: Main Hand/Off Hand
	Traits: A decorative dagger inlaid with jewels.

The dagger didn't look very useful, to be honest. The blade was rather dull, but it was clearly used to kill this child. There were even still bloodstains on the hilt. His anger seethed in him for this injustice. He wished he could do something about it, and just as that thought came, so did a notification.

Justice for the Slain I	
Requirements: Level 5 Rewards: 800 experience	Description: You have found the skeleton of a murdered child in the abandoned manor. Find someone that can provide details about this murder to help find the culprit.

His anger cooled a little bit, seeing he had found another quest and better yet this quest was for precisely what he already wanted to do. With this quest, he decided to keep the dagger because it could provide clues to the murderer. He also noticed that the box the notification was in wasn't blue like the last one had been. He wasn't sure what that meant, but he was starting to suspect the quests had rarities just like items did.

He dropped this dagger into his bag and looked around some more. Nothing he saw piqued his interest in any way, so he decided that the tour of the upstairs was complete. He worked his way out of the room and back down the stairs to the main entrance. Now was the time to make a decision again. He figured the best option was to do it the same way as before, so he started with the door immediately to the right, when walking through the front door.

This was a hallway similar to the one upstairs, but it had eight rooms in it, and the doors were closer together. As Arthur made his way through each of them, he quickly realized why. The rooms were much smaller. If he had to guess, he would say they belonged to the people who kept the manor running. Cooks, gardeners, valets, and the like. They looked serviceable enough if you took away the years of rot. There was nothing of interest in this hallway, so he continued back to the main entrance.

He then proceeded to check the door on the left of the entryway. This door was a large double door. When he entered this room, it was a vast, open affair. It had the appearance of a formal ballroom. There was a large dining table in the center of it, but Arthur thought this room might have a different purpose as well. The floor in here was a smooth wooden floor instead of the rougher wood and rare stone he had seen in the rest of the house. If his guess was right, they probably hosted parties and dances here as well. The room had a large window toward the front of the house as well as on the side. The wall on his right had a single door on it that he proceeded to.

He opened this door and entered into what appeared to be a sitting room of some kind. Probably a study considering the bookshelves lining the walls. Most of what was on them looked brown and moldy. The books that he could make out looked like they might turn to dust if touched. Something about the room seemed off, though. The other side of the building all had pretty close to uniform places. Unless the space behind this one that branched off of the corridor near the stairs was also overly broad, then this room was not the correct size.

This thought immediately kicked off Arthur's suspicion. He had seen enough crime-solving mysteries to begin to expect the

age-old hidden room trick. The real problem was, would the usual clichés hold? This world could be very different in its approach. He started searching the bookshelves on the back wall. There really couldn't be much of anything on the left or right walls. One would go directly outside and the other toward the adjacent hallway. They also looked to be the right distance away from the door compared to the previous room. It was the depth of the room that appeared off.

He carefully searched each bookshelf until he was in front of the one almost directly behind the remnants of an old rotten desk sitting in the middle of the room. He could swear there was a visible crack in the wall behind it that looked like one solid and straight seam. The wall itself was made of paneled wood, which was in oddly good condition, but all the end grains of the wood-lined up at this same spot. It would have been odd for them not to have been blended here otherwise.

Arthur decided to just go to the bookcase and use brute force on this section and pull it right off of the wall. The cabinet was rather well attached, and he had to struggle and pull hard. He heard a creak and what sounded like a faint pop, and then the resistance disappeared, and he stumbled back. Looking at the shelf, he realized it was still firmly attached to the wall, but the wall itself had opened. Looking around the backside of the wall, he saw this section of the wall was mounted on metal hinges and that a small metal lock appeared to have broken when he had pulled on the bookshelf.

Peeking into the room, he was in for a bit of a shock. The room itself was pretty well preserved. He wasn't sure how, but the furniture here was still in serviceable order. To his surprise on the wall on the left was a sword hanging from a wooden wall mount. He walked to this first since it was the most obvious place to start. Picking up the sword, he was both surprised and disappointed.

Item: Unknown Steel Longsword	Attack: ? Durability: 55/75 Rarity: Uncommon Quality: Well Crafted Weight: 1.5 kg Slot: Main Hand/Off Hand Traits: An unknown magical
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	longsword. Either use a skill to identify this item or find someone who can identify it for you to discover its potential.
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It was great to finally have a sword but not much use if he didn't know what it could do. Trying to take a few swings with it felt off as well. Every time he did, it felt like the sword was trying to slip from his grasp. He decided to hold onto it until he could find a use for it. He found the scabbard to it leaning against the back wall in the corner. He sheathed the sword and belted it around his waist.

He decided to check out the books next. He browsed through book after book and noticed a few that looked like odd writing at first, but then after looking for a bit, he could read them without any issues. Most appeared to be ordinary books on government and family history. Nothing he could see being important enough to hide in a secret room, but then four books over he found something intriguing. A book title had caught his eye.

Item: Skillbook: Identify Magic	Durability: 45/55 Rarity: Uncommon Quality: Well Crafted Weight: 0.5 kg Traits: A Skillbook that will teach the Identify Magic skill. This skill allows the user to identify magical item's characteristics.
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Arthur couldn't believe it. Could he have been lucky enough to find a skill book this early in the world? Not only that, but for Identify? Just the thing he truly needed for his new sword. He grabbed the book off the shelf and opened it. As soon as he looked at the open book, a notification appeared.

You have opened Skillbook: Identify Magic. Do you wish to consume this book to learn this ability? Yes/No.

Was it going to be that easy? He didn't even need to actually read it but just absorb the knowledge. He immediately

thought of Yes, but nothing happened. Odd, how was he supposed to select things in this world. Maybe there needed to be a bit of a safety measure in this. What would happen if you found something exciting and quickly decided to use it before being one hundred percent sure it was what you wanted? Maybe he needed to confirm it dually.

Arthur decided to focus on the word, Yes, in the notification and then softly said "Yes" out loud. The letters on the page started to cause a small vortex above the book, and the pages began flipping on their own, faster and faster, making the vortex grow larger. The tiny storm absorbed the contents of the book and entered his eyes as a flowing stream of text. He could see the letters as they flew in, but they registered only as nonsense. That did not bother him because his mind was working in overdrive, absorbing the book itself. After the vortex had disappeared, the book slammed shut and crumbled to dust in his hands. He heard a chime.

He ignored the chime, he was getting used to those and knew they typically meant he learned a skill. He would check on them later. He also remembered hearing one when he was fighting the rats outside. He wasn't sure what that one was for, but this time he was pretty sure the reason was he had learned Identify Magic.

Arthur pulled the longsword out of its sheath and used Identify Magic on it. The skill seemed natural now that he had absorbed the details of its use.

Item: Steel Longsword of Minor Beastslaying	Attack: 14-18 Durability: 55/75 Rarity: Uncommon Quality: Well Crafted Weight: 1.5 kg Slot: Main Hand/Off Hand Traits: Longsword enchanted with the skill Beastslaying • Beastslaying: Deals +3 damage against beasts.
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Well, that was one hell of an upgrade. While he didn't have any training with a sword, swinging it around after he had

identified it felt much more natural. If nothing else, he should be able to use it without hurting himself. He put the sword back in its sheath and decided to continue scouring the bookshelf.

He was coming close to the end of the books and was about ready to give up when one more book caught his eye.

Item: Skillbook: Scan	Durability: 25/30
	Rarity: Common
	Quality: Good
	Weight: 0.5 kg
	Traits: A Skillbook that will teach the Scan skill. This skill allows the user to identify information about people and creatures.

It was a great skill to have, but it was rather odd that the book was listed as a low rarity item. Arthur didn't imagine it was that easy to create Skillbooks much less to bother making one of common rarity. Either way, he opened this one up, and it followed the same pattern as the last. The vortex appeared with the swirl of letters and was all absorbed straight into his eyes. Once again, he instinctively knew how to use the skill, and the book crumbled to dust.

There was nothing to be seen on the adjacent wall, so he moved to the desk. The desk was a sturdy and functional design with two drawers on each side of the sitting area. Checking the two on the right contained some random papers which didn't appear of interest. Opening the top drawer on the left side revealed a neat document with official-looking calligraphy and wax seals. Upon touching it, he received a prompt.

Patents of Nobility I	
Requirements: Level 5	Description: Dalia has asked you to infiltrate her family's decrepit manor and recover items that could help prove her status among the gentry.
Rewards: 1000 experience, 1 silver coin, unknown rewards also possible.	
You have successfully fulfilled the required objectives. Do you wish to complete this quest now? Yes/No	

That was odd. It asked Arthur if he wanted to complete the

quest, which wasn't abnormal. The strange part was he hadn't delivered it to Dalia yet. Looking carefully at the description, though, it only said he had to find it not return it. He focused on Yes. He heard the beautiful sound of trumpets from gaining a level, and another window popped into his view.

Patents of Nobility II	
Requirements: Level 5 Rewards: 800 experience, 5 silver coin, unknown rewards also possible.	Description: You have recovered the patent of nobility from the decrepit manor. You now have the option of claiming the title of nobility for yourself or honoring your original agreement with Dalia and returning it to her.
Do you wish to accept this quest? Yes/No	

He quickly selected yes again. With the quest prompts cleared, he was finally able to study the document itself.

Item: Patent of Nobility (Flamekissed)	Durability: 58/60 Rarity: Rare Quality: Exceptional Weight: 0.01 kg Traits: A sealed and certified document used to proclaim nobility for the Flamekissed family.
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Tucking the document into his bag, he decided to hold off on reviewing the notifications and alerts while still in here. Once he got out of here and closer to town, he could sort through all of them.

That last quest prompt was intriguing, though. Looking at the description, it seemed Arthur had a chance to change his outlook in life. It essentially meant he was able to claim the title himself, probably through deceit, instead of handing the patent over. The prospect of it was intriguing, and Dalia had never done anything for him.

That being said, he wasn't sure he wanted that kind of attention this early. On the one hand, it could help him garner some favor and hopefully push his rather vague guidelines from

the Goddess Lianna, but on the other, it could paint a target on his back way earlier than he was ready for. Based on how bad the situation is in this small town, he wasn't sure he wanted that kind of attention on him yet. Arthur thought it might be more beneficial for him to turn it over to Dalia and keep close to her for the power draw he might need. She was somewhat open about her intentions for a reward.

Coming back to himself, he decided it was time to keep moving. Before he left, though, he decided to try the last drawer in the desk. Looking in the bottom drawer on the left, it was empty except for a small golden ring with a red ruby in it. Picking up the ring, he saw what it was.

Item: Delilah's Cursed Ruby Ring	Durability: 28/30 Rarity: Uncommon Quality: Well Crafted Weight: 0.2 kg Slot: Finger Traits: A cursed ring that once belonged to the mistress Delilah of the manor house. This ring cannot be worn without extreme penalties due to its cursed status. ● All primary attributes -5
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That was bad news. The odd thing was that the color of the notification didn't match the standard shade of green as the uncommon quality magic items he had found earlier. Instead, it matched the color of the quest prompt for the murder of the small child. Getting a bad feeling about this, he continued to examine the ring for a few moments and heard a shrill scream coming from the main entrance. The sound sent a chill up his spine and gave him goosebumps at the same time. He could feel an oppressive air around the place now. It was a sense of fear and dread settling onto him.

He decided to try and set the ring back in the drawer, hoping this would go away. To his disappointment, that oppressive feeling didn't go away, so he picked the ring back up and put it in his bag. He decided it was time to face whatever hell he had woke up in the central area. There wasn't any other

way he could have exited, short of jumping out of a second-story window. While tempting, he decided against it. He crept back through the dining room and approached the entryway. The sight he saw on the other side of the door made his blood run cold.

Standing in the entryway, well floating really, was what appeared to be a ghost of some kind. This wasn't one of those ghost hunter TV show ghosts with vague signs of things moving in the dark while running around with poor quality cameras. This was a full glory, spectral white, creature floating half a foot off the floor. It looked like a human woman, but any features were hard to tell with it being partly translucent.

Can't tell hair color when the whole thing looks a pale white color, Arthur thought to himself.

He looked at it, and the box he expected popped up.

Name: Specter of Delilah Level: 5 Type: Spirit Rarity: Uncommon HP: ???/??? MP: ???/??? Stamina: ???/???	
Strength: ? Agility: ? Intellect: ? Wisdom: ? Endurance: ? Charisma: ? Luck: ?	Experience: N/A Skills Combat Skills: Sonic Wail: ? (???/???) Soul Swipe: ? (???/???)

Well damn, Arthur thought. As usual, there wasn't much information, but what he saw concerned him. This one had the full range of characteristics and also had MP, which meant it might have command of some type of magic. It was also listed as a spirit type, and he hadn't encountered one of those yet. The lack of information was rather annoying. If he knew a bit more about where its weaknesses may lie, it could help him. It was at that moment he smiled because he had remembered his new skill.

Arthur focused on the spirit and activated his Scan ability. The result he got back was better.

Name: Specter of Delilah Level: 5 Type: Spirit Rarity: Uncommon HP: 140/140
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MP: 100/100	
Stamina: 60/60	
Strength: 6	Experience: N/A
Agility: 3	Skills
Intellect: 7	Combat Skills:
Wisdom: 5	
Endurance: 3	Sonic Wail: ? (???/???)
Charisma: 1	Soul Swipe: ? (???/???)
Luck: 1	

He was sure the more he used the skill, the more information he could get from it. It might even be able to show hidden things about people or creatures in the future. All of that aside, though, it did give him a bit more to go on. The amount of HP this monster had was a little higher than he wanted to deal with, but he could make it happen. The trick would be damaging it. Arthur had a suspicion this thing was going to be similar to most RPG style games he had seen before. Ghosts usually couldn't be damaged by standard weapons and items. He was hoping his new sword would be able to destroy it.

As much as he didn't want to deal with a ghost, he figured it was time to make his move. He slowly opened the door and started creeping toward the spirit. He didn't make it more than three steps before the ghost turned and looked directly at him. The woman's eyes glowed a bright blue with an appearance that looked like they were flames licking upward on her face.

"Oh shit," Arthur mumbled under his breath.

The specter shrieked at him and then loudly said, "How dare you enter my house without permission. You would dare disturb my son and me in our own house!"

That statement set him back a bit. If he could take this ghost's meaning directly, then that meant the murdered child upstairs is the son of this woman. That led to a whole host of questions that he didn't have the time to answer.

"I will forcibly remove your corpse from this house after I kill you." The ghost proclaimed.

The apparition darted in his direction, and Arthur quickly dropped his bow. The weapon would be useless in this fight and would only end up tangling him up when he tried to dodge. He pulled his new sword up just in time to block the creatures swing. The skeletal hand bounced back from the flat of the blade, not touching him, but the impact was slightly jarring. The speed of the shade was allowing it to knock Arthur off balance. He took a huge step to his right and brought the sword back between them again. For the next swing, he was better braced, and it didn't move him or knock him off balance.

The big problem quickly became apparent to Arthur. This

spirit could attack him fast enough that he couldn't get a swing in or risk opening himself up. He had hoped the creature's low agility would be his key to killing it, but it appeared that the spirit, being incorporeal and having no real resistance to air or gravitational forces, made it able to retain speed with lower agility.

He took five more blows in rapid succession and focused on his health in the same way he did in the fight with the boar. A small box quickly popped up to give him the information.

HP: 145/150
Mana: 100/100
Stamina 115/150

He immediately noticed his health had fallen a bit but figured that had to do with the blow that knocked him off balance. The stamina drain did surprise him, though. He could only imagine that blocking the attacks was draining his stamina. That meant he couldn't just wait and do nothing. He doubted this creature was going to get tired, so he needed to make a move. After considering the situation for a moment, he decided to change tactics.

Arthur decided he needed to knock the ghost off balance while maintaining his guard, and he could only think of one effective way to do it. He had read about the technique many times being a fan of fantasy novels but never had a chance to try it in real life. What he needed to do was parry the monster. The idea of parrying was pretty simple-sounding, but most people didn't understand the mechanics behind it. It required the person to catch the edge of the blade at just the right angle to redirect the force. On top of that, the person parrying needed to apply a small amount of power immediately following the attack to push them into the off-balance state while maintaining this angle.

Every time he had read books, they always just glanced over the details of the maneuver and never really stressed the difficulty of doing it correctly. Sure, you could effortlessly block the attack with an angled blade to glance the strike, but if you didn't successfully apply force to knock them off their swing a little, then you didn't correctly accomplish a full parry.

With this thought in mind, Arthur decided to try it on the next swing. He saw the strike coming on his left and held the blade in a downward angle across his body. He had the hilt in his right hand slightly above shoulder level, and the blade angled down toward his left hip. The strike hit, and the sword collapsed back toward him, causing the edge of the blade to

inflict a small cut on his left arm. The impact had knocked the blade backward, and he couldn't slide the force effectively.

Luckily the damage it caused was minimal, and he still able to block the blow. He decided he would have to brace the blade with his left hand on the flat during the creature's next swing. He wanted to wait until the spirit swung with the right again. He didn't trust his ability to switch his sword to the other hand in the middle of a fight. When the spirit made her move, he was able to catch the attack on the edge of the sword and gave the blade a slight twist and pushed the hand down and across, causing it to slide farther than the spirit wished. This allowed him the chance to take a solid swing right at the creature's chest. The blade came around in an arc and connected directly with the side of the ribcage.

Arthur wanted to jump and holler in triumph at his success. That feeling lasted all of about half a second when he realized it didn't appear to damage the monster at all. He used Scan at that moment to see what he had accomplished.

Name: Specter of Delilah	
Level: 5	
Type: Spirit	
Rarity: Uncommon	
HP: 130/140	
MP: 100/100	
Stamina: 60/60	
Strength: 6	Experience: N/A
Agility: 3	Skills
Intellect: 7	Combat Skills:
Wisdom: 5	
Endurance: 3	Sonic Wail: ? (???/???)
Charisma: 1	Soul Swipe: ? (???/???)
Luck: 1	

Well, that felt like a complete waste of effort. There was no way he would be able to last long enough to kill it with so little health being taken away. He would run out of stamina before then. Arthur was quickly approaching a state of panic. There was no way he would be able to wear this thing down in time. His thoughts had drawn his attention away from the fight temporarily, and the creature landed a hard blow across his left shoulder, and Arthur fell to the ground. His bag had swung with the impact, and he ended up dropping it on the ground. He quickly scrambled back to his feet and got his blade back up to guard. This constant blocking was never going to end the fight in any way other than his defeat.

Arthur needed to move around a bit more to avoid having to

block as often. He took off in a dash to his left, trying to gain some distance from the creature. When he had reached the wall in that direction, he turned to face the spirit. It was quickly approaching him and not far behind. Arthur grinned and decided now was a good time to change things up a bit. He dashed at the spirit and quickly dove to its left. As Arthur passed by, he extended his sword, and it slashed across the shoulder of the creature but yet again appeared to do almost no damage. Arthur wasn't sure what else he could do. Looking toward his bag, he saw the small jeweled dagger that was used to kill the child. Only now, the knife glowed with some unseen power. Could this be his ticket to freedom? Did the blade itself want revenge for the wrong it was forced to commit? He couldn't dwell on it at the moment, but he had a strange feeling that he needed to get that dagger quick.

He decided to try another parry as he had before, but this time he needed to use a little more force. It should give him the time he needed to get the dagger. He readied himself for the attack that was coming, and when the spirit connected with his blade, he pushed with much more force and sent the ghost backward a bit. Oddly it almost looked like the ghost had stumbled, although, with its floating, he wasn't sure how that could happen.

Arthur quickly dashed to the bag and grasped the knife by the hilt, picking it up. It was indeed glowing as he thought it had been. The sight of the dagger in his hand caused the spirit to screech in a fury.

"How dare you disturb my precious boy? I only did what I had to do to protect him. I couldn't take the beatings his father inflicted on us both, and I had to save him from them. I will make you pay for disturbing him in his sleep." The ghost said. The fire in its eyes shifted from a deep blue to a dull orange, and Arthur knew things just went from bad to worse.

He had to end this quickly but needed an opening to use the dagger. It would require him to get closer, but that would be hard to do without making himself a large target. A parry was possible but would be hard to do with timing and the knife itself. Arthur decided to put his faith in speed and the blade. Instead of trying to parry, he decided to wait for the ghost to swing with its left hand this time.

When the ghost committed to the swing, Arthur swung backhand with his sword straight for the arm and at the same time, stepped forward and plunged the dagger directly into the chest of the specter. The creature froze instantly and looked at Arthur in shock. White cracks began to form and spread from the blade, like spider webs. A glowing white light shone from the cracks as they spread to cover the entire body.

"I had to do it to save him. I had to do it to save him. He was my little boy. It was my job to save him from the pain. He is no longer in any pain." The ghost kept mumbling as the cracks spread. The creature finally looked to Arthur, and to his shock, it appeared to smile at him with a look of relief before promptly bursting into tiny fragments of translucent light. Arthur was also surprised to see a small chain fall to the ground that had a key attached to it. Another quiet chime followed.