

## Chapter 69

### An Staging of the Heist

“What have you gotten yourself into now, momma Cass?”

That was the question I invariably found myself asking more and more recently.

As time has gone on, I have found that while at times I can merge my thoughts with my Simulacrum, there is still a sort of slight disconnect between me and her. And my Simulacrum despite all the upgrades, is still limited. Now don't get me wrong, I am very thankful that I have my Simulacrum. Not a day goes by that I don't use and abuse her prowess. Additionally, the insights she has on how to exploit a given situation are phenomenal. That said, there are clearly a few major areas where she is lacking.

First and foremost, she is not able to change her form, yes my **Doppelganger** Trait from my first class **Void Healer** is beyond her comprehension. In a way this sort of makes sense as she is an exact reflection of my soul, meaning she only has the Traits that are associated with my body and my bloodline. Since **Spiritual Doppelganger** is a class related Trait it makes a certain amount of logical sense that she would be denied access to this particular Trait. This is troubling, but not insurmountable. Also, this means that my Simulacrum has effectively taken over most of my, Cassiopeia Spiritlight's, day-to-day operations, with a few minor exceptions.

The minor exceptions being that she cannot cure the *Blight*, nor can she *Resurrect* those that are close to death. This is painful, but not by any means a deal breaker. The other major flaw was the fact that my Simulacrum while able to read, read slowly, so slowly. Rather than being able to enter into a room and just process the words that were on display, my Simulacrum would have to read and then comprehend each word, such a waste of time and effort. To help cover for these flaws, both of my next two class evolutions for **Simulacrum Master**, the ones at level 10 and 25 were both directly related to fixing these shortcomings.

The first *fix* came at level 10, where I took the **Simulacrum Master** skill, *Eidetic Speed Reading*. This was exactly like my main skill *Blind Eidetic Speed Reading*, but rather than only being usable by my **Angel's Sight**, I now could read at roughly the same speed as my main body could, despite not having the scope of vision provided by my **Angel's Sight**.

*New Class Skill Gained: Eidetic Speed Reading has reached level 1.*

*Class Skill Eidetic Speed Reading is a Dexterity, Personality, Sociability, Attractiveness, Perception, Intelligence, and Willpower based skill.*

Why is this important? Particularly if I am in the same field of vision and therefore always able to read the same books that my Simulacrum has access to? Well simply put, if I wanted to leave the Mage Guild and explore, I would need to find a way to read quickly, thus this stop gap for my most obvious issue. Also, we did test, and my Simulacrum was able to both read books while giving us both experience by doing so. Also the skill, just like my own, was based on what was visible in her field of vision. While her field of vision was far more limited than my own, she was still able to both open and read two books at one time. This of course gave her headaches until she fully mastered the skill. Fortunately, she wasn't so inept at healing that she couldn't fix her own headache.

This of course led me to the final class upgrade that I got just the other day. My level 25 **Simulacrum Master** Class evolution was for a Trait called **Positional Switch**.

***Positional Switch:** You and your Simulacrum have become so intertwined that by just willing it, you can switch geolocational positions with your doppelganger regardless of where you two are in the world in relationship to each other.*

Yes, somehow when my secondary Class met the evolution points, I already had the prerequisites met to go for the advanced create a Skill, and create my own class Trait option that I had for my main class. I don't know if this is a matter of what I did or was able to accomplish during this time, or if my soul itself had just been marked with these changes and thus any unique class I got would be afforded these same distinctions. Regardless of the fact, I did not want a third class, at least not for the time being. As it was leveling these two classes were exceptionally difficult.

Over the last two and a half months, since I passed my audit and avoided a bombshell by getting the guild members to deny the Auditors the right to come to the Guild Hall, I had been extremely busy trying to level, and complete as many quests as possible. During this time, I earned a total of over sixty thousand experience, but that only translated in my main class **Void Healer** going from level 27 to 37. While my Secondary class saw the most improvement, going from level 6 to level 25.

This of course had a profound impact on my bonuses assigned to my Attributes, though I will have to admit I spent the entire time grinding my skills to their maximum.

	Base	Bonus	Social	Base	Bonus	Mental	Base	Bonus
Physical Strength	53	17	Personality	77	52	Perception	117	48
Dexterity	83	39	Sociability	72	52	Intelligence	119	63
Endurance	78	17	Attractiveness	61	68	Willpower	102	127

I even finally too the time to use up my fourteen remaining Free Attribute points and split them evenly between Strength and Endurance. While I find Endurance more useful overall, I found that I have so few skills that directly affect Strength, that having an additional seven points in Strength might prove useful at some point in time. Also, unless I found another way to increase my Base Attribute cap, it seemed that I would soon be nearing a bottleneck for my Mental Attributes here shortly, as they would all cap out just like my skills at 125, at least that is what I am led to currently understand. I'm hoping that by level 50, for my next class evolutionary marker, I will be able to get something that increases my base cap for both Attributes and Skills, making me ridiculously powerful when using skills. Granted Skills are often an overlooked aspect of the game, but they are one that I have found to be exponentially important, and I feel fairly safe in admitting that I would not be where I am today if it weren't for my constant grinding and trying to find new and unique skills.

So why all this emphasis on having it so I can switch places with my Simulacrum at a moment's notice? Why the need for my Simulacrum to be able to read the same as me? Well quite frankly there are still an estimated million or so experience points just waiting to be read in the Mage Guild Library. Additionally, I am at that point where my tethers to Crossroads are soon coming to an end. My guild quest with Lenny has finally ended, meaning I no longer have to act as his number two stool pigeon.

Nor am I particularly bound to the Crossroad Mage's Guild. Yes, they are a constant source of experience right now, and for my intents and purposes that is all I see them as. Not a long term solution, just something I need to get by at the moment. Once I or my Simulacrum finish reading all the books within the hall, I will consider my time at the guild hall officially over. Again, there are over an estimated one hundred thousand books at the guild hall, and despite our best efforts I only managed to make it through a few thousand of those books within the past two and a half months, but that is neither here nor there. As I have already spent too long being here, and over the last two and a half months I have focused on just one goal and one goal alone, stealing back what is mine.

What do I mean by this? Well simple almost three months ago now, the traveling Poker Tournament stole close to a quarter million in experience from me. I have spent the time since then preparing for the moment I would both earn back my experience through thievery, while also having a perfect alibi. In this case, my Simulacrum will pose as the alibi, healing people as needed, while being constantly visible to anyone who enters the guild hall.

Meanwhile, I will pose as one of my **Doppelganger** forms, as I first gain access to the Golden Train, a super elite form of transportation that is meant to help the super-rich and affluent bypass mundane needs like traveling through floors that have already been cleared. Of course, the fact that I don't have money will not stop me from entering the train, it just means that I will need to first sneak aboard the train, and then find a cover. But first thing is first, finding the right train and then making my way aboard.

Oh, it goes without saying that taking the Golden Train to its final destination will also help me finish a quest that I have had for the past six months.

***Hidden Quest Updated: First Arcanarus Tower Climber:** Your goal of getting a recognized degree from Arcanarus University has been noted. Explore the tower, reach the fiftieth floor and receive the reward that you seek. Reward: Experience, Arcanarus University Diploma, Title: **Arcanarus University Graduate**. Floors completed (2/50).*

Now that the Golden Train is finally here, I feel slightly nervous, but I am more than ready to go through with my plan.

How do I know the Golden Train is also the same one that will host the Poker Tournament? Simple it is posted on the side of the Train, in what has to be the most obvious attempt to get me to target the train.

*World Poker Tour All Stars: Follow Us to New Adventures on the 50<sup>th</sup> Floor of the Arcanarus Tower.*

For this operation, I decide to go with the form of Tobias at first. Then if needed I will switch out to Sabrina or someone else if I need to re-enter the tournament on the Fiftieth floor. Hopefully I won't need to wait that long, but this will be a good chance to use the system to help me cheat.

During this time, I will let my Simulacrum deal with my daily quests. As for the reading to the blind, well now that I have *Eidetic Speed Reading*, getting new material to my Simulacrum will be easy. Also, I do know all of the *Rahul and the Maiden* books by memory and can recite them verbatim. As for getting paid what I deserve for healing, well my Simulacrum has access to all of my spells. Then for the spells that she still cannot master like curing the *Blight*, or *Resurrection*, I do have the ability to **Position Swap** with her, making it so I can fill in for those operations. Also, I should be able to swap back to take care of operations as the guild master as well, should any circumstance arrive, though I have been doing more and more to be more of a recluse than usual, even Hilda has given up her chances at dating me as I have destroyed more than my fair share of her office when she asks me to come over and demonstrate my new spells. Honestly, I think she is jealous of my destructive capabilities more than anything.

Again, the plan is simple, my Simulacrum will be here providing a clear and obvious alibi, while I go out and explore, and hopefully get my revenge.

Changing quickly, I pull out a black cloak, put on my EGGs again, as apparently my eyes are still the same vibrant green in any of my **Doppelganger** forms, meaning that will be a clear giveaway of crimes I commit. That and the fact that I am still a strobe light for magically sensitive people. Yeah, no stress.

Though honestly, despite being slightly nervous since my last major caper, I can't help but feel the thrill of excitement that such an operation causes within me. I mean I love healing, don't get me wrong, but there is something entirely different from going out committing a crime and outwitting dozens of people that have a vested interest in stopping you.

For the role of Tobias, I go with the EGGs, my Apothecary gloves, and decide against any of my Mage Guild cloaks. The reason is that being linked to two Guilds, the Mechanics and Apothecary guilds are not that bad. Then to pull off the persona for Tobias, and why I would be traveling as him, I also decide to go with my Adventurer's necklace on full display, why those three guilds? Well, I figure it would make more sense for Tobias to be a traveling adventurer than anyone else. Mages are generally squishy and prefer not to travel alone, mechanics generally prefer to tinker, and Apothecary, well they do travel out to get odd plants. Finishing off the look, I go for a cheap but elegant black bowler hat, a nice white dress shirt, black pants, and a broken fancy watch. Why a broken watch? Well it wouldn't really matter if I could read the watch, also the fact that the watch is broken considerably decreases its overall value, making it so I can keep it with my shoestring budget for props and the like. Using my Simulacrum's eyes I check out myself, then realize I need to use a vest, nice but worn shoes, and a cheap cane.

Now the cane looks like I could use it for attacking, but it is so weak that any strong hit will likely cause the entire thing to break. Again, going for cheap items that *look* right, versus functional items that *are* right. Still, if I get to the point where I need to defend myself, I have a few ways I can do this, and honestly I still don't want to get into the idea of defending myself with violence.

While it might seem like putting on such airs would be time consuming, I am able to get it done relatively quickly.

*WhooWHOO.*

In fact, by the time I am done, the train is just pulling away from the station. Normally this would be bad, but this is perfect, as it means I can **Teleport** onto the moving train with little to no issue.

“Good luck.” My Simulacrum and I say to each other simultaneously. We both smile at that, we have been getting better at being on the same wavelength recently, which is why I don’t feel any hesitation when I realize it is time to go.

*Poof.*

One second I am in my guild office, the next, I am on a moving compartment of a rather large train. Fortunately the train, while being a rather large one will take a long time to build up momentum. This means that I only slid a foot at most from my intended landing spot. Landing, I realize I am out of practice and figure that I might need to practice the art of **Teleporting** onto and off of a moving train, and yes it is an art.

Now that I am actually on the train, details of my **Angel’s Sight** begin to shrink down, so that I am just able to focus on the forty-eight odd cars that are all attached, the ten that are seemingly blocked off with heavy warding and magic schemas, and then the other thirty odd passenger and entertainment cars. One thing to point out is that while this tower exists solely in the spirit realm, this golden train appears to be completely pressurized and able to resist the normal spiritual forces of the outside world. This means that everyone on this train is a true living breathing person, and not just a ghost or spirit as one might expect.

From a glance, in addition to the wards keeping the cars safe from the external forces, ten cars in particular have extra wards and protections carved into them. It is almost too obvious that these cars with extra warding are the ones where the tournament has taken to holding their prizes and fees. There are just a few problems, the first is that there seem to be armed guards on duty in all the money cars, and that most people would need to charge through car after car of fully armed mercenaries, before getting to the prize cars. I can of course bypass all of the mercenary cars, and head straight to the pay day cars, but I decide to wait. I have time. Also, right now, it would behoove me to stay on this train for as long as possible, while I wait to get to floor 50. Well more importantly, until I get to the city on floor 50.

Now there is of course one problem that I have in my plan. I do not have a ticket, nor can I afford one. For me going to a floor I have never gone to, let alone forty-eight additional floors would be an astronomical price. The game would let you cheat or take shortcuts, but they were costly. This meant that I would have to play keep away from the ticket inspectors. It would also mean that I would likely have to blend in as one of the passengers. This will be a fun role. Normally, when I previously had to do

similar heists, I went as the *Missing my mommy* approach, where I would find a vulnerable older woman who had clear maternal instincts to protect me. I would come up with a story about how my mom told me to get on, but then left. I would even do a frantic scream at the window as we left the station. The elderly woman would take me in and provide comfort to me, while we waited to go back around. Meanwhile, I would go to the privy, before teleporting where my mark was, pop in steal the item, then double back, finish my alibi, then leave before anyone noticed. That's what I would do as myself, or as regular Cass. I will admit that approach has been getting harder, but I doubt anyone will think that a fully grown, if slightly immature Tobias would be missing his mommy. That or if they did, they likely would treat him with derision and ridicule. No, for this role, I would need to do something that I always wanted to do, but never felt comfortable trying. For this one, I think *Strangers on a Train* would be the way to go. I could also test out the prowess of my new *Seduction* skill, and see just how powerful the skill is, and find out once and for all if Trista and Amelia really were smitten, or if they were just trying to pull the long con on me, as the Guild hall leader.

Now that I have decided on my course of action, I need to find an appropriate target. Again, in this case, I am not looking at stealing from this individual, but rather, I am using them to provide cover and a potential alibi for me, as we make our way through the various floors of the tower.

In all there are ten targets that all seem viable, that is they are sitting alone in a booth. Five of them I instantly dismiss as they are males. Not that I would be ashamed to seduce a male as a male, but I don't think this sort of relationship will harbor the result I want. I want a female, preferably younger, as I would want someone who would think that Tobias would actually be willing to have a long term relationship with them. The reason being, I want someone who would lie for me, or at least be more willing to cover for me. Not that women are more gullible, but women are more willing to take a chance than men often would. At least, that is what I have noticed about this game world. In the end, men if you build up enough of a relationship with them will cover for you and even pick a fight for you, but that level of bonding takes months if not years, while I only have minutes.

Looking at the different cars, and the five female candidates, it looks like only three are within my age range that I am looking for, early twenties to mid-thirties. Had I still been in my Cass body, I would have gone with the two elderly candidates, but this is new, and if I dare say fun.

Ultimately, all three look like good choices, but I decided to go with the one that has a mid-level magical ability. In this case, I am banking on my flaws to be a boon, basically a giant billboard sign that gets her to at least look at me and to give me a chance. After that, it will all be based on my words, my actions, and most importantly how well I pull off my Tobias persona. While the real Tobias was never a ladies man, I think I will try to fix that perception of him.

“Pardon me, but is this seat taken?” I ask in a deep rich baritone that is similar to my *Rahul* voice, but much more believable coming from the younger Tobias. Yes, while I know how I ultimately want Tobias to sound, right now, he is young, inexperienced, lacking in worldly knowledge, but she can fix it, at least that is what I am going for.

The woman pauses, and looks at me. I can tell from the slight twitch of her head, that her initial response was to be a no, but she turns to face me. Then as she does, I do something completely stupid, well at least stupid for keeping my anonymity in the long run, but for now, for this role it is drastically important. With a faint gasp of my face, I pull off my EGGs and stare at the woman, letting my electric green eyes shine for a moment. Our eyes connect, and I can feel the moment I have her complete attention, as she uncontrollably shivers at my stare. We hold that moment for a heartbeat, then forcing myself to break the spell early, I shake my head, and then sit down, despite not getting an answer from her.

“I am sorry. I don’t know what’s come over me. My legs feel weak all the sudden.” I say as I sit down next to her.

“No, it is quite alright.” The woman says, as she shifts her body position to stare directly at me. This is good, as it means I have succeeded in gaining her full attention. A few other biometric scans prove that I am having an effect on her as well, her heart rate is increasing, her eyes are dilating, and above all her magic is surging? I am not used to the magic surging part, but maybe this is a direct relation to my new bloodline flaws.

Looking at her, I can’t help but wonder if part of my success with Trista and Amelia was due to my now activated bloodline. I do remember the way people were gawking at me when I began the process and went to the Thieves Guild, but I had dismissed that. Hmm, if this is the case, then my blending in might be easier than I first thought, and I might not have to try so hard. But before I can even think about going easier, I first must seal this deal.

“I’m so sorry, where are my manners. My name is Tobias Spiritlight, and I must say it is truly a pleasure to meet you.” I say, taking off my bowler hat, and giving a slight bow. Why Spiritlight? Well simple really it is a title I have, and therefore is almost impossible to hide, so I might as well go with it. Of course, this will eventually lead back to me, but that is a problem for a different day.

“No, it is I who has the pleasure here.” The woman begins, a smile filling her lips as she begins to blush brightly. “My name is Lady Constance Legrand, and it is a pleasure to meet you.”



At that, I feel a slight twist, as I know the name Legrand, and sadly it takes me almost too long to remember where it is from, but quickly I realize where I heard that name before. "Legrand? You wouldn't by any chance be related to King Legrand, of the Legrand Empire?" I ask, somewhat confused.

There is a slight pause, as I see her shift her weight slightly as she looks like she wants to say something. Then after a second, she takes a deep breath and answers. "You are referring to my uncle Richard. Yes, I am related to the same," she pauses as I suddenly realize why this booth is so empty. I mean there are males in multiple groupings around her, and I can tell now that they are all suddenly curious about how I managed to suddenly *appear* out of nowhere.

Seeing this, I can't help but think that this suddenly got a lot more complicated than I had wanted. Especially as I just wanted a person to shield me from being outed for not having a train ticket. But here I was, talking with a duchess in waiting for the Legrand empire, the very kingdom that my home country, the Maltese Empire, was currently at war with. At least, that was what I last heard, though anything could have happened over the last few months. I am about to ask, when the girl looks at me, with sudden suspicion in her eyes.

"Let me guess, you didn't happen to sneak past my armed guards, by chance. And this whole encounter was your intention from the very start?"

And just like that, what started as a simple *Strangers on a Train*, so I could have an alibi to steal back my stolen experience, suddenly got a lot more complicated, just like that. This is the problem with such high profile heists, you can always expect the system to throw in a diplomatic hiccup like this for no clear reason.