

CHAPTER 48 – LIMIT BREAKING

Rolling up his linen sleeves, Luke poked his head into the Gordian's room to check on its progress. Judging by the pale barrier of excited electricity leaking out of the Gordian sphere, he still had time before it was even halfway through the room.

At the moment, the expanded sphere of magical destructive power was just a little bigger than an over-inflated beach ball.

Turning back to the room he once thought of as a simple storeroom full of junk, Luke took the lid off the first crate and peered inside.

Most people would say what he found was junk. Rusted plate mail, corroded jewelry, and all manner of used but still functional equipment.

Every single one was an item he could examine. They each gave stats to one degree or another, and Luke had to fight his greed for a moment before he regained control of his faculties.

These items were not for him to wear, they were for him to [Raze] so he could collect their flux to craft. As with all System skills, Luke understood some of the deeper workings of the skill.

While he could use [Raze] on a simple piece of lumber or a brick, it would produce very little flux. And the quality of that flux would be quite low.

The better sort of items he [Razed], the better the flux he gained. It was a direct correlation between the power of the item and its mana within. A very powerful, high rarity item would provide a great quantity of high grade flux.

Luke picked up a gauntlet that had clearly seen better days but was nevertheless still useful.

[Raze] worked differently than the rest of the Runegraver skills. He didn't need a table to work at, or additional resources. Just his own mana.

Focusing, Luke bent his will upon the gauntlet and used [Raze]. He could feel the mana building up in his arms and hands. It released into the gauntlet with a surge of power that made his whole body feel tingly.

For a brief moment the gauntlet was limned in a strange green-purple light, then it broke apart into tiny grains of colored sand. Three separate spraying arcs of sand rushed out between Luke's suddenly empty and lightened fingers.

He realized his mistake immediately and tried to scoop up the flux, but only managed to mix the three types together.

Shaking his hands free of the silky grains, Luke grumbled to himself and returned to the workshop. He pulled open the drawers at random on the worktable until he found what he was looking for.

The most basic type of flux was essentially grains or sand of elementally focused material broken down from a given item.

One of the first runes Luke had learned was a simple sorting rune that would allow him, with a little modification, to sort the grains of flux and pull them into a leather satchel.

The satchel was small, fitting easily in his palm, and possessed a simple drawstring to cinch the bag shut.

Luke grabbed 8 just to be safe and headed back into the storage room. He returned to the workshop to grab the silvery [Stele], the Runegravers tool of choice, and knelt down beside the piles of glittery sand to do his work.

For this particular rune, he only needed the type of flux he was hoping to capture. A quick glance at the piles of silky sand told him that he had earth, fire, and wind flux in order from most to least.

Each grain of flux had a silvery sheen atop its elemental color. They resembled glitter or colored sanding sugar.

The rune came to Luke easily, thanks to his repeated practice. He expected to have to fix or adjust sloppy work, considering he was [Runegraving] on leather. It wasn't the easiest thing to keep flat, but he surprised even himself with how effortless it was.

The thrill of successfully creating something with magic was immediately eclipsed by the bolt of lightning he felt strike his very soul.

Notifications rolled past, but Luke wasn't able to see them. His mind, body, and soul felt like they were splitting apart at the seams.

You have successfully crafted [Flux Satchel (Fire)]. Extra experience gained for crafting a recipe above your level. Bonus experience gained for first time crafting completion.

Level Up! Your [Apprentice Runegraver] Profession has reached Level 1.

Stat points earned: +6 Arcane, +6 Wisdom, +2 Dexterity, +2 Perception, +2 Free Points.

Level Up! Your [Apprentice Runegraver] Profession has reached Level 2.

Stat points earned: +6 Arcane, +6 Wisdom, +2 Dexterity, +2 Perception, +2 Free Points.

Level Up! Your [Human (G-Grade)] Race has reached Level 10.

Stat points earned: +1 All Stats, +1 Fate, +1 Free Point.

First Limit Break Reached.

Ascension in progress...

Luke had felt a brief version of this when he had gained the soulstone for Apprentice Runegraver, but this was on an entirely different level.

Pain didn't begin to describe it. Every wound, scrape, break, bruise and every cough, sneeze, and illness he ever subjected his body to came back with a vengeance.

He felt it all as one long tapestry of agony as if his body was forcing him to remember what he had done to it for the last twenty-odd years.

Luke thrashed and seized on the floor, scattering flux everywhere with eyes rolled up into the back of his head, unable to see.

The pain lasted all of a minute or two, but it felt like two lifetimes to Luke. He wouldn't have wished it on his worst enemy. Even Marcy didn't deserve that, which spoke volumes about the horrendous experience Luke would have nightmares about for the rest of his life.

When he opened his eyes, he realized he wasn't in the storeroom anymore. Instead, he was somewhere else. Some place dark and distant.

For a moment, he looked around to see if the Discordant Dragon was there, but then his attention was snapped back to the image in front of him.

An outline of a body was sitting cross-legged, the fingers of both hands loosely interlocked in its lap, thumb tips touching.

Luke could feel himself adopting the same pose and intrinsically understood that he was looking at *himself*.

Taking a deep breath, stardust spiraled out of the dark vastness of space and entered Luke's body. He watched with detached wonder as the sparkling motes flowed into the body and attached to a central network.

It resembled blood vessels, or perhaps nerves. He could see them light up with a bioluminescent blue glow. Each deep measured breath Luke took drew in more and more of the sparkling blue-gray material until his veins pulsed with power and light.

Each breath filled out the form in front of Luke. First blood vessels and nerves, proving him wrong about the initial guess, then bone and flesh in quick succession.

As he watched, he saw how the first network of glowing lines differed from the other two. His organs were wrapped tight in lines of blue light, particularly his heart, lungs, stomach, and brain.

Tiny dots, like little nodes on a subway map, peppered the network here and there. The majority of them wound around the organs, but several were just placed anywhere without rhyme or reason.

Sooner than he would have liked, a tether of that same sparkling blue light appeared between Luke's body and what Luke was beginning to suspect was his soul.

Each breath strengthened the bond until the only way Luke could have resisted being pulled back into his body would be to sever the bond entirely.

As curious as he was about what would happen if he did something so rash, Luke wasn't about to do it on a whim.

Entering his body felt strange. Like his skin was slightly too tight. His body felt subtly alien in a way that Luke couldn't put into words.

The feeling slowly abated as he focused on his breathing, drawing more of that glittering dust into himself until he felt a shift in the airless, lightless place he had just been.

A rank, horrible smell assaulted him, worse than the sewers had ever been. When Luke opened his eyes, he was naked, sitting in the same posture from that comforting distant place among the stars.

All around him was a foul black muck that reeked on several levels. It wasn't just his sense of smell, which seemed heightened, but also some other sense that detected the decay and rot of filth and poison expelled from his body.

Luke's clothes had melted as the sludge ran out of his body and he was remade better than any biological process could achieve. It was incredibly fortunate he hadn't been wearing his [Scout Cloak].

As he watched, paralyzed by the horror of what had come out of him, the muck slowly sizzled and became a noisome cloud of all his physical pain and anguish.

Every wound, every illness had formed a scar on his body, lowering its capacity and making it work that much harder for every mote of progression.

Luke had heard often enough his parents saying "whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger" but now he saw that it couldn't have been further from the truth.

Each scar hampered progress, weakened him in a million tiny ways that he—and apparently the rest of his species—would never be able to sense.

It wasn't until he was exposed to the System and to mana that his body began to struggle against the shackles of his birth.

As the rest of his impurities turned into black smoke and vanished into the air, Luke realized that he had never felt so light, so free, so *good*, in all his life. In fact, the last time he remembered feeling this full of pure energy was when he was a little kid.

Despite the impurities vanishing, Luke still took three showers in a row until he couldn't smell it anymore. As he did, he went over his notifications, eyes bulging at what had happened to him.

Eventually he came to the most recent notifications.

[Human (F-Grade)]

The lowest Grade of life in the multiverse. F-Grade creatures are the most basic you will find in the multiverse. As an F-Grade Human, you are on equal footing with the children of other sapient races. While your biological makeup was partially compatible with mana to begin with, G-Grade species are incompatible with Dunamis and must undergo Ascension.

With this infinitesimal amount of Dunamis, the power that underpins the very fabric of creation coursing through your veins, you can now gain ranks and further evolve your classes and professions. As an F-Grade Human, you have access to new racial skills capable of utilizing Dunamis. Race stats awarded per level: +3 All stats, +1 Fate, +2 Free Points.

[Trance (Unique)]

F-Grade Humans need more sleep than many other F-Grade races. While the rest of the multiverse has a biological imperative to sleep, shutting themselves off to the world regardless of their desires, Humans can enter a trance-like state to partially stave off their need for true sleep by utilizing traces of Dunamis.

That's a substantial lift in power per level, but still nothing compared to Apprentice Runegraver, Luke thought, if only on a technicality.

His race took 2 levels in either his class or profession to raise, effectively halving the points-per-level. Which meant that Runegraver was still the king.

F-Grade humans amassed an astonishing number of stats per level up now. It spoke volumes as to how strong most races must be since F-Grade humans were apparently comparable to children.

As much as Luke wanted to immediately try out [Trance], he figured it could wait until he cleaned up the flux in the storeroom and had a safe space to attempt it in.

Since [Trance] was a racial trait, he had a deeper understanding of how to use it than usual. Still, he would feel more comfortable trying it out in a chair.

While Luke toweled off and got dressed, he dropped his 5 free points into Willpower, one of his lowest stats that was seeing more use from Apprentice Runegraver.

As he was looking over his status, Luke started at the change.

Aside from the obvious changes of his MP growing by leaps and bounds with the stats awarded per level from Apprentice Runegraver, Luke saw something else.

He was used to seeing G-Grade next to his race, but now he had something else below it. Luke squinted at the floating text. “Why does nobody tell me what Dunamis is?”