

CHAPTER 51 – DUNAMIS

Now able to exclusively find large quantities of flux, Luke's days and levels passed in a blur. By the end of his first week in the assessment test, the slow-motion explosion of the Gordian had reached halfway across the room.

It had progressed faster than Luke expected.

The larger it became, the faster it seemed to grow, as if it was feeding off its own destructive power. Despite that, he felt confident that he could stymie its advance. And it was finally time to do so.

He was nearly at level 10 Apprentice Runegraver, and had succeeded in finding out more about runes, flux, and even Dunamis than he had thought possible.

The books were useless. *Everybody knew what Dunamis was*, so nobody saw fit to describe it. Dunamis was so fundamentally understood by the people of the multiverse that they took it for granted that everybody else understood too.

When he had finally succeeded in using [Trance] while tired out of his mind and trying to relax, Luke stumbled upon Dunamis' secret.

His eyes snapped awake after what felt like a fraction of a second, a golden blaze of a System notification hanging in the air in front of him.

Skill gained: [Novice Dunamis Wieldance (Common)]

(Unique Race Skill)

Dunamis underpins the very fabric of reality. All creatures F-Grade or higher are capable of using Dunamis to one degree or another. Exceptionally skilled Dunamancers can even twist the flow of fate

itself to their benefit. The higher a creature's rank, the more Dunamis they can hold and channel at any one time. But capacity is not the only measure of strength. Wieldance, a practitioner's skill and capability to utilize Dunamis, can easily sway the battle between two equally ranked opponents. Adds a small bonus to the influence of Willpower and Fate when using this skill.

That opened up the floodgates of knowledge. Luke suddenly started to see more references to Dunamis that he actually understood.

Perhaps it was just frequency illusion, but ever since he unlocked the [Novice Dunamis Wieldance] skill, he saw mentions of Dunamis *everywhere*. Even in books he was certain he had already read and found no references therein.

Dunamis, for example, could be used in place of mana to fuel spells and abilities. It could even be used in place of stamina, or as a sort of supernatural nitrous to drastically enhance anything you wanted to do.

The problem with Dunamis, however, was that it lacked a bar or status that he could reference. There was no easy way to know how close to empty he was.

He could *feel* the difference, but it wasn't exactly accurate. He might feel like he was low on Dunamis, but actually have much deeper reserves than he thought if he kept pushing.

On the other hand, when he thought he was fine, he found himself flagging, suddenly bereft of the super-magical substance.

[Trance] used Dunamis in small quantities to enhance his rest, allowing him to still function and also get in some sleep. While it didn't wholesale replace sleep, it meant that he could still read and do low-impact activities while under the effects of [Trance].

He wouldn't be able to train or even craft, but reading and relaxing were easy to do. Luke was able to claw back a good 3 to 4 hours a night. He filled them with more reading, which in turn allowed him

to expand his knowledge of not just runegraving as a whole, but this new reality he found himself in.

Like mana, Dunamis regenerated naturally. If he spent time focusing on his breathing and imagined that mystical stardust flowing into his body just like it had when he ascended to F-Grade, Luke could regenerate Dunamis much faster.

Meditating to recover Dunamis was frighteningly fast. Far faster than any other vital resource, even accounting for food. He wasn't sure if it was a result of his significantly higher Fate lending him a boost to his [Novice Dunamis Wieldance].

The alternative was that it only seemed fast because he was still at Mundane rank, which he knew meant he could only hold a very small quantity of Dunamis at any time.

Anything extra he tried to hold would simply seep out into the surrounding atmosphere, like trying to fill up a jug with more water than it could hold.

Still, Luke found the exercise entertaining.

Since he couldn't use [Trance] while doing anything remotely active—such as taking a shower or cooking food—Luke took to gathering Dunamis during those times, even going beyond what his body could hold.

Operating on the simple assumption that by trying to fill his body with more Dunamis than it could handle—which caused no discomfort that he could tell—it would stretch his capacity by degrees. It was the basic premise for strength conditioning as well.

Luke continued Dunamis training in between his other duties.

By the end of the first week, at just over 10 total days in the assessment, Luke finally hit level 10 Apprentice Runegraver from the result of crafting his first successful [Conduit Rune (Crude)].

It took him 13 tries to complete the rune. It was a pathetic crudeness, but he had *created a functioning rune* and he couldn't be more elated.

[Conduit Rune (Crude)]

(Rune: Stage One)

A blazing eye of power that connects two sources together when instilled with mana. Effects greatly amplified when instilled with Dunamis.

Set on a piece of linen paper, Luke looked on with pride at the rune as the notifications flowed in.

Level Up! Your [Apprentice Runegraver] Profession has reached Level 10.

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

You have [Apprentice Runegraver] skills to select.

Luke brought up his status to have a look at how far he'd come. Throughout the week he had been putting free points into either Wisdom or Vitality. They were both reasonably high enough now that he felt comfortable sinking some more points into Willpower, considering its increased utility.

Status

Name: Luke Solus

Race: Human (F-Grade - Level 14)

Dunamis Rank: Mundane (1)

Class: Thief (Level 19)

Profession: Apprentice Runegraver (Level 10)

Vital Resources

Health Points (HP): 980/980

Mana Points (MP): 77/1,300
Stamina Points (SP): 402/470

Stats

Strength: 101
Dexterity: 174 (+2)
Endurance: 47
Fortitude: 44 (+2)
Vitality: 98
Perception: 93
Willpower: 55
Wisdom: 130
Arcane: 110
Fate: 92
Free Points: 0

Luke had to do a double-take. He hadn't been following his status this entire time, devoting his attention only to assigning free points and continuing his reading or working.

He couldn't be sure when his Mundane rank went up to Mundane (1). Now that he knew what to look for, Luke could feel the difference. It wasn't earth-shattering or anything, but it was an appreciable uptick in the amount of Dunamis he could hold.

And it proved that his training, sporadic as it had been, was working.

Unfortunately, it also confirmed a slight annoyance: the System didn't provide him with any notifications pertaining to his rank increasing.

Hopefully, it would let him know when he went up a full rank. Like the rest of the System power scales, these were already well known among the denizens of the multiverse.

Fortunately, they were so ingrained that it was easy to find further information. Even without the references in books, grades were obvious. They went up by letters. G-Grade for the recently uplifted

peoples of new universes, F-Grade for children, newborns, the infirm, and the perpetual slackers, then E, D, C, etc.

Each grade was a monumental leap in power, with the smallest being from G to F.

According to everything he had read, going from F to E would be a substantial jump in power. It would also cause interesting side-effects for his current profession and class.

Ranks for Dunamis were much the same. They were all well known and the next rank that Luke could look forward to would be Copper. Similar to grades, ranks were exponential leaps in power with larger gulfs between them than grades.

It was also supposedly very difficult to raise your rank, numerous blockages prevented progress. There was some mention of gates as if they were important, though Luke couldn't make heads nor tails of the information, which was usually just in passing.

The whole affair felt a lot like trying to learn about a country's history by strictly reading ancient magazines where the authors only sometimes rambled on about current events.

It would have been nice to have someone at least a little knowledgeable about the System to explain things to him. He wouldn't have said no to a teacher. At least these books were the next best thing, even though they didn't talk back.

Luke tried once. Not entirely out of gnawing loneliness, but partially out of curiosity. Magic existed in so many forms within the System that Luke figured talking books might not be entirely out of the question.

Unfortunately, these books didn't do that.

Turning back to his skills, Luke knew which one he would pick. He just hoped that there wasn't *also* a new better skill. [Augmentation (Unusual)] was still there alongside the black sheep of his selectable skills, [Runic Ease (Common)].

But there were also two new ones that had him sitting up with interest.

[Offensive Rune Potency (Uncommon)]

(Apprentice Runegraver Profession Class Skill)

Runes are central to everything a Runegraver does. Without them, Runegravers are nothing. By deepening your connection to the offensive runes you create, you can enhance their potency. Adds a minor bonus to the influence of Arcane, Willpower, and Perception when using this skill.

[Defensive Rune Potency (Uncommon)]

(Apprentice Runegraver Profession Class Skill)

Runes are central to everything a Runegraver does. Without them, Runegravers are nothing. By deepening your connection to the defensive runes you create, you can enhance their potency. Adds a minor bonus to the influence of Wisdom, Willpower, and Vitality when using this skill.

Luke considered the new skills for a long while. He had been planning to pick up [Augmentation]. As far as Luke could determine, [Defensive Rune Potency] and [Offensive Rune Potency] increased the strength of what he could already create, whereas [Augmentation] opened up a new avenue within Runegraving.

Additionally, both skills were uncommon-rarity. A significant step down from [Augmentation's] unusual-rarity.

If he could pick up more than one thing, it would be [Offensive Rune Potency] over the other. He generally preferred to inflict more damage than stay on the defensive.

Not to mention, there was no telling how far offensive runes could go. They might be so potent with that skill that an uncommon-

rarity weapon could hit as hard as an unusual rarity weapon, which was one tier of power higher.

Luke was less certain about the effects of those kinds of runes, whereas he had read a couple times in passing about the rarity tiers.

With a sharp intake of breath, Luke finished deliberating and made his decision. He picked [Augmentation].

Skill gained: [Augmentation (Unusual)]

Luke recovered from the surge of knowledge quicker than the last time.

He got up and went over to the storeroom, casting his senses deep into the recesses of the shadowed shelves and valleys hidden by toppled piles of crates and barrels.

He knew what to look for now that he possessed the skill, but nothing stood out as an augmenting material.

Though he hadn't expected much, he was still disappointed. Although not as much as if he had mistakenly picked [Augmentation] over [Flux Sense] which had yielded extreme dividends.

It was only through [Flux Sense] that he was able to spend so much time making [Threefold Flux] and eventually his first rune.

Before Luke went to check on the Gordian as he now did twice each day, he received another series of System notifications.

Despite the enormity of it, he had nearly forgotten all about his profession evolving at level 10.

This was largely because every book he read suggested that not every class or profession evolved at set intervals. It was incredibly rare to get quick successive evolutions.

Only those born into the noble Houses (emphasis on the capital H) who had access to fate-altering elixirs and expensive infusions of

[Dunamis Draughts] made it possible for their heirs to consistently reach new evolutions.

And even then, getting “good” evolutions was rare.

More often than not, they simply evolved down a specific line. Apprentice [Insert Generic Crafting Profession Here] was usually the first step. This went the same with [Insert Class Here]. Rogue didn't normally evolve into Thief.

It should have evolved into Experienced Rogue or Battle Rogue depending on Luke's Marks.

However, with Luke's high Fate and unconventional Marks, the evolutions for Apprentice Runegraver made Luke's eyes nearly fall out of their sockets.