

Oracle 540

Chapter 540 – Global Power-Up

The reactions differed from refugee to refugee, but all of them without exception blinked a few times as if they couldn't believe their ears. Even his long-time companions like Will and Kyle did not hide their surprise. Kyle had already been more or less prepared for such an announcement, but it was quite different to think about it and actually see it come true.

Jake wasn't one to waste his time or anyone else's. After that short speech, he immediately honored his promises. He'd had plenty of time during the night to chat with Xi and fiddle with his wristband and had already found a practical solution for distributing those Welcome Packs.

The Faction Vault could apparently also be used to store dematerialized resources like Aether. There was a limit to the number of Aether types allowed and just like their Oracle Devices there was a number of Slots dedicated for this purpose. Fortunately, the skill was already level 5 and all the Aether types owned by him and his comrades combined were not nearly enough to fill all those Slots.

That wasn't his intention anyway. For the time being at least.

It was a shame he had let his companions keep their respective Grade 2 Aether Encodings so as not to damage their bond because he could have really used them right now. Alas, this kind of thing could not be rushed.

To obtain these higher-grade Aether Encodings, they had spent their precious Ordeal credits or Aether points and it was already good enough that they agreed to collaborate by putting their assets in common. The only known exception was Will who still hadn't offered his Charisma Encoding services to the rest of the faction, but Jake knew him well enough to know that it wasn't out of malice, but rather out of an inferiority complex.

Without these Grade 2 Aether Encodings, Jake could only offer them normal Aether and some Grade 1 Sharpening and Hardening Gray Aether.

With some manipulation, Jake deposited enough Aether in the Faction Vault to fulfill his ambitions and accredited the new probationary members to access the Faction Vault in order to withdraw the quantities of Aether and resources included in his Welcome Pack.

In all, the Welcome Pack contained 12,700 Aether points and 300 Gray Aether points, enough to max out their seven main Aether stats at 100 points, including Extrasensory Perception, as well as enough Grey Aether to strengthen and sharpen up to three weapons. With this Aether, even those who failed to score a kill during the past battle would have no excuse.

In addition to this Aether, Jake had dedicated 20 cubic meters of the Faction Vault space to these new members, which he partitioned into one hundred identically sized mini cubes. Each of these refugees now had the equivalent of a large backpack-sized space storage unit in which to store food, water, and whatever else they wanted to cram in.

Of course, the remaining 140 cubic meters were reserved for him and his companions. They had recruited 61 Players during the Third Ordeal, 62 including Sigmar, but they were not yet entitled to use the Faction Vault for the time being. Their recruitment was tied to special circumstances and Jake didn't

know if they intended to stay. Therefore, he could only treat them as suspicious outsiders until their probationary period was over.

For most of these refugees, it was the first time they had earned so much Aether at once, and most were so rapt and emotional that tears of joy were dripping down their faces. Others were just flabbergasted, unable to reconcile their sudden good fortune with their miserable lives of the past months. Lastly, a few were more pragmatic and just soberly thanked him before taking out their Aether to upgrade their stats.

It took a little longer for these refugees to learn how to use their Space Storage. Without having awakened the Extrasensory Perception stat, it was impossible to materialize and control one's Spirit Body, let alone mobilize one's consciousness from a distance. Mentally accessing the Space Storage dimension to deposit and remove objects was therefore out of their reach for the moment.

But others were in less of a hurry and chose to improve their stats first. Thanks to this meteoric power-up, a good half naturally awakened their seventh stat and managed to access their Space Storage after becoming familiar with their new mental abilities.

The other half, however, were unable to experience that feeling of transcendence. Even after maxing out their Intelligence and Perception, their Extrasensory Perception stat refused to unlock. They were just better humans, but without any supernatural abilities.

This made Jake realize that the condensation of the Soul and Spirit Body was not just a matter of Aether Stats and that there were probably other conditions that had to be met to awaken this seventh stat.

Intuitively and from his own experience, it surely had to do with the mental strength and resolve of an individual and strong emotions were perhaps necessary to trigger this spirit transmutation. It should not be forgotten that, at the root, consciousness was only the result of some electrical connections in a network of neurons.

Half an hour later, the refugees had begun to recover from their emotions and Jake ordered them to break camp. Those who had awakened their seventh stat were in an excellent mood and were instantly recognizable by their smug faces, while the others were a bit more taciturn but still much more optimistic and confident than the day before.

"I'm surprised at your decision." Will confessed as he walked beside him once on the road.

Svara bobbed her head vigorously to signify her assent. Jake laughed at how little humanity they were giving him.

"Do you really think I'm heartless?" He asked seriously after a while as he noticed that their bafflement didn't seem to abate.

"Yep." Svara replied matter-of-factly. "You enslaved me after all."

Jake rolled his eyes and retorted crisply, "But I released you once the Ordeal was over. It was just a precaution. In the end, you joined us of your own free will. If I am a heartless person, doesn't that make you a masochist?"

"You..."

Will smiled as he listened to their bickering, but that didn't stop him from saying his piece.

"Next time, I'd like to be in the loop so I can plan the distribution of all this. It shouldn't be the leader's job to take care of this sort of thing."

Jake gave the man an exasperated look before reluctantly agreeing. Sometimes Jake felt like Will was one of those Prime Ministers who controlled the country in the light and made all the important decisions where he was just a ceremonial monarch sitting on his throne to keep up appearances.

In the end, it suited him. No matter how ambitious Will was, he could not take his place. The Mirror Universe was not a place where the weak could depose an emperor with only schemes and money. Overwhelming strength was the absolute prerequisite.

For the next few hours, the group tracked the footprints of the three factions a few miles ahead of them. The latter had broken camp before them and the Welcome Packs distribution had put them even further behind.

This was not in vain, though, for the increased fitness of the refugees allowed them to step up their pace substantially, and they soon caught sight of the stragglers from the three factions again.

The weather had deteriorated further if that was possible and a fine, slightly acidic shower was now raining down on their faces. It wasn't enough to hurt them, but the rain made their faces itch unpleasantly.

Pale green lightning bolts occasionally streaked the sky, releasing a deafening thunderous rumble, and startling the most impressionable. The only good news was that the Digestors were nowhere in sight.

Twice, Jake and his group witnessed the spawn of a Rank 1 Digestor, but with the refugee power-up neither Jake nor his companions had to move a finger.

For the first one, an axe whirled through the air and raised a slight gust of wind in its path before splitting the not-yet-fully materialized monster's skull in two. The goblin Xort had flung this axe. The second time, the newborn Digestor was played to death by Khal and the Secyone's sons (the redheaded prostitute).

With their new powers, they were not so weak anymore and Jake had the opportunity to appreciate the incredible adaptability of these children. Ironically, it was sometimes the adults who were supposed to be more mature who had the hardest time adapting to change. The children were more accepting of the situation.

Without the fear tugging at their stomachs, they would soon regain their playing instincts and start to enjoy life again. Mauling Digestors was certainly not ideal for their psychological development, but Jake had to deal with the times.

In the early afternoon, they suffered another assault. There was no warning, and no shrill cackling from any of the three factions to prepare for it. If the refugees had not boosted their stats and equipment, there would certainly have been some casualties.

The horde consisted of over 20,000 Rank 1 to 3 Digestors and even from up in the sky this army of monsters seemed endless, like a grayish torrent sweeping through the forest of ash that they roamed like a swarm of hungry locusts.

The battle lasted more than an hour and no powerful Digestors made an appearance. Under these conditions, Jake and the felines decided to fight normally alongside the others without using any strong Aether Spells.

The goal was to give these refugees a chance to gain experience and build up their still-fragile backbone. It was also a good opportunity to observe them and understand their characters and talents.. By the end of the battle, some of them had already stood out from the crowd.