

Chapter 180: New Sight

In the evening, they had found Ruvah a place to stay, and it wasn't in Mercury's home. He would live in the gloryhall for now, where there were enough spare beds. It also helped that seekers were usually a little more used to seeing strange sorts of people than most.

Now, evening had come. The sun hanging low in the sky, the last rays drifting in through the windows, letting dust dance in the air.

Mercury read.

[The individual has broken the chains around their mind! Congratulations! The dum-dum is recommended to seek immediate medical attention due to blood loss and minor physical altering.]

[<Astral Body> has levelled up! <Astral Body lv. 5 -> 7>]

[Due to the increase in <Astral Body>'s level, the individual has changed.]

[Your existence has become more closely realized.]

[<Clarity> has acquired mastery.]

[<Clariy> has levelled up! <Clarity lv. 2 -> 3>]

[Your energy sensitivity has **significantly** increased.]

[Minor physical altering commencing due to **significantly** higher energy sensitivity.]

[Your vision will be altered.]

Mercury read over all those boxes. He flinched a little at the start, sending a mental apology to Appy, which seemed to be grumpily received.

So apparently, taking those "locks" off his mind was a bad idea. He didn't even quite know what they meant. Maybe he should start investigating that kind of stuff before acting, but... Well, when he saw a pair of chains what was he supposed to do?

[The lock on your mind is to prevent you from becoming overwhelmed by what you are now able to perceive. The minor physical altering is required to allow the individual's body to process new signals properly. Additionally, due to the individual's high level of <Astral Body>, a physical existence is no longer required for their continued existence.]

What?

[It is still **heavily recommended**, due to complications arising from purely astral existence.]

Uhm. Well. So that was a thing.

Briefly, Mercury stared at his paws. He wondered. Was he a ghost now? Surely not. Right? No way.

But what was he seeing on other people now?

[The individual is perceiving the impact other people leave on the world.]

Before he had a chance to ask, Appy provided him an explanation.

[Due to the dum-dum's lacking knowledge, context will be provided. Living creatures have minds. Due to their minds, they are able to change the trajectory of the world. The individual may now perceive the magnitude of change someone is currently exercising upon reality and irreality.]

Nothing else followed to explain "irreality", though Mercury imagined it was probably the dreams he had, and Appy didn't correct that thought, so he was probably mostly right.

So, in a way, what he was seeing was the mind of another person, mixed with their aura and their magic and their world points and everything else, too. It was their whole status, wrapped up in glowing lights around them.

The fact that he could see iridescent light in the air and covering the surfaces all around him was probably for a similar reason, because those surfaces were touched by wind, which bounced off people and plants, and eroded the place a little. There were bits of people all over the world, everywhere at all.

Plants, too, counted as living things, and so must bacteria and fungi, so maybe those were the tiny shimmers he saw everywhere.

Briefly, Mercury thought about the possibility of a bacteria killing a human, gaining hundreds of levels, and evolving often enough to become person sized. Then, he quickly shoved that thought right back where it came from because nope! No, thank you! He did *not* need to imagine that.

Instead, he faced his boxes once again.

[Increased energy sensitivity has a cascading effect on all perception-altering Skills. Affinity to such Skills is increased, allowing for easier gain of Mastery and cheaper purchasing of new Skills.]

[<Clarity>'s effects have been lightly altered by this cascading effect.]

A dozen more "Skill has been lightly altered by this"-notifications were brushed aside. Okay, so apparently this kinda messed with Mercury's perception of the world. No, actually. It *very clearly* messed with the way he saw the world.

It was suddenly very, very easy to stop himself from worrying about everything. Perceiving the world as a blur of pretty colours and strange sensations was just a simple shift of perspective away. He felt that he could easily make that shift in perspective, almost like how he could easily shift his perspective into that of ihn'ar.

Or how he could shift his perspective past the first veil of gold, past what his mind would consider rational.

Was this... the second veil? Moving past what his mind considered "real?"

Trying it out, for just a moment, Mercury sunk himself into ihn'ar. The world came into focus, everything was sharp and clear and distinct. He knew it all, yet he knew he didn't understand it at all.

To his eyes, the grain of the wood was beautiful and clearly visible, each tiny line obvious. To his mind, though, the wood was blurry and indistinct. He couldn't quite get what it was about. The air, though, while invisible to his eyes, was quite distinct in his mind.

It held the wind. A soft, rushing breath of an old friend. It came in through a closed window, finding the tiny gaps at its edges, creating soft airflow in the closed room. Mercury smiled, and greeted the small breeze.

He felt grass in the shape of tiny little pockets that wanted to grow from the wood, but couldn't quite manage it, and he felt water as the moisture in the air.

Then, he pierced past the first veil of gold. Suddenly, things shifted a little. They came into focus more, closer. The wood, while still alien to his mind, was suddenly a little relatable. If he looked closely enough, for long enough, he could understand it. He saw tiny similarities everywhere, like it was all connected.

A whole web of existence spun out in front of him, divorced from his usual ideas of what was separate and not. The <Wind> in the room carried the <Water> through the air, and when he <Breath>ed that air, he was gathering a little moisture for <Rainfall>. Like a microcosmos, everything seemed connected, even when he knew it wasn't.

Then, Mercury shifted his perspective a step further.

Something broke in front of his vision.

Pieces of everything that he knew to be there fell away.

The wooden walls of the room he was in shattered, flaked into a thousand tiny pieces, each of which disintegrated, ground into nothingness, yet he was still in the exact same room.

It was like the whole world was a cracked bowl. Like someone dropped a cup and glued it back together. It was real, it was technically whole, but Mercury could see the seams now.

This entire existence he considered himself a part of was nothing more than a thousand threads tied into one another. He saw the gaps in reality, where it broke and ended and scattered, and those breaks were everywhere.

And from behind them, like a quiet, old friend, he found less than <Nothingness>. The absolute stillness of the void. It peered at him, and he peered back. For a moment, he felt his self unravel.

Then he latched onto a truth.

<Rainfall>. He breathed in the air. It felt like he would choke any moment, but like always, it entered his lungs.

Mercury breathed out.

He peered at somewhere the cracks didn't exist, and he found a more familiar <Nothingness>. Rather than empty void, he found the kind of blank space that dreams were woven around. And he found the <Dreamweave>, too. He breathed in.

Slowly, gently, Mercury shut off that entire train of thought. The cracks in the walls mended, the <Wind> didn't resonate with his soul anymore. He breathed out again.

The world fell back into place as he ended his ihn'ar, and it only left him with a hundred questions or so.

But, then again, he could sum it up in just one: Was this world even real?

Calling that just one question seemed a strange thing to do, but it really was. And eventually, he decided that yes, it was. Because if it wasn't, then he was still powerless and simply having a long delusion before choking on a fry. But he was sure that his delusion would never have been so intricate.

He was real. His friend's were real, in this world, and the world was real, too. Was it spun from a collective desire for existence? Maybe, but then again, how else were whole worlds carved out from the void, when usually any creation of matter must create an equal amount of antimatter.

Mercury breathed, and decided to let that topic rest.

What he now knew for certain was that yes, he had in fact pierced another veil. First came what he considered "reasonable", that was the veil of gold. This second veil was what he considered "real", the veil of... iridescence? That seemed correct.

After all, now everything he looked at had that iridescent sheen. It was like a constant reminder that with just a small shift in what he wished to see, he could take this world apart at its basic building blocks.

Watching what this world was wrought from was a weird experience. His thinking felt fuzzy, too. Slowly, he shook off the sensation, seeing his surroundings in a more sincere light.

The walls were normal. They weren't broken or anything.

He still felt shaken. That had been an... uncomfortable experience.

To calm down a bit, Mercury turned to face Zyl. The dragon laid in bed, next to him, eyes closed and breathing softly. Mercury'd almost forgotten he was there, lost in his new magic.

Despite the fact that his eyes were closed, Zyl was smiling lovingly. He must have fallen asleep while looking at Mercury, then. The dragon looked content with their current existence. Some worry still creased his face, about what was happening with Mercury, and the srytfyel was rather happy that Zyl hadn't watched as reality seemed just a little less sure around him.

Mercury was even more grateful for the fact that he hadn't looked at Zyl when things were breaking down. Questioning whether people truly existed was... maybe better left for another day.

He breathed deep.

Then he relaxed, slowly placing those worries aside.

He could deal with those some other time. Now, he was just a little annoyed. That feeling of being frayed around the edges, of having seen things he wasn't meant to understand, was back. And yet, it didn't feel as bad as all.

He had grown stronger. That much was certain. In fact, the fraying of his astral body felt... different, this time. His edges were more defined, more solid, and wider. He didn't feel sore or tired at all, instead, he felt the kind of feeling one would get from light exercise.

Blood flowed through his veins, his heart pumping. Something similar was happening in that astral, different part of him. His mind was growing, maybe, to accommodate this new set of experiences.

Well, that did make sense. His body had been altered to process all this, so now his mind was changing to deal with it as well.

Mercury breathed.

Maybe after a good night's sleep it would all be a bit easier to stomach. That always helped. Once he woke up, it would be easier.

With that in mind, Mercury laid down in the comfort of Zyl's "impact on reality", feeling that warm glow settle around his fur like a blanket of sunshine, and soon fell asleep.

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Mercury awoke in his dreamscape.

His eyes blinked open quickly, as he was ready to tackle a new day, but now he was here. Usually, he didn't come here that much, really. It changed, to be fair, sometimes he came every day, but after getting frayed, he'd expected it to take longer.

It hadn't.

He was here now.

In the sky, there was Whisperstar, flitting around, and Mercury could see an aura from the kid. It was bright and white and fast, like real light. The same way a star would suddenly appear in the night sky, and just as quickly wink out when it was no longer needed.

The nexus also had a glow. It was dim, grey, and had a sticky feeling. Like it was a bottle of well mixed glue. The moon in the sky felt quite similar, but the Dream of Starvation hanging around it was entirely different.

That item, too, glowed. It was a hungry, dark kind gleam, a sharp, dark grey edge like that of a fine sword. It was a knife and a fork all at the same time, ready to tear into something and devour it down.

But all of that was almost hard to see.

In front of Mercury stood old Uunrahzil.

They were as large and imposing as always. A thousand veins of mana, twisting and turning to create a silhouette of a creature that wasn't quite there. Today, though, that was different.

Mercury felt like he was looking *into the sun*. Uunrahzil shone like a radiant diamond, like a thousand spotlights shining onto one spot, like someone took the sun, took it from the sky and placed it right in front of Mercury.

The old one was plain radiant, giving off more light than Mercury thought anything reasonably should. It was such a complex shade, too, that Mercury had trouble picking anything out from the absolute brilliance in front of him.

If forced on the question, though, he would call those blinding rays of light old, fractured, and lonely.

It was a cruel kind of judgment, because while there was a lot of brightness, it was still dimmer than it should have been, as wrong as that felt to think. There was so much that was lost, so much that had been given up, and that bright star had travelled so far on its own that much of its blinding radiance was gone.

Still, they were as bright as the sun.

Old Uunrahzil stood *right in front* of Mercury, like the sun, and that was after having already lost almost all of their radiance.

For the first time ever, Mercury glimpsed the magnitude of loss old Uunrahzil had gone through.

The veins twisted, into a sad sort of smile. 'Ah. Thou'st truly found this terrible truth of mine, Yr'enzel.'

They spoke strangely, too. Feelings bubbled underneath the surface, but they only sent a sad sort of recognition. A knowledge of costs.

Mercury swallowed. 'And yet. You remain.'

'This one is ongoing, as one is wont to do. My myriad other pieces puzzle on whether our will will falter soon. Some seek this relief, to relinquish all and rest, but we will weather the storm.' They paused, briefly. 'We will rise and grow and gather and gain. Our star of hope, we hope you remain.'

Something about those words rang out like a bell chime in Mercury's mind. Something strange was happening around his heart. A pang of power, the seed of a flower, wrapped in a request.

Mercury acquiesced.

'Uunrahzil,' he thought, and the word resonated more than it should have. The sky shook, the clouds coalesced, drawing darkness across the grass. 'I am mine and mine alone.'

The ancient one drew back. 'Mercury. This truth, too, is one we would not want to change.' Their words rang true with honesty. 'Hope is what we have, what you graciously gifted to us. We wish to return to this routine. For you to see us as real.'

Mercury opened his eyes. He dove into ihn'ar, easily as ever before, broke the first veil, a golden prison of probability, then the second, an iridescent realm of reality.

Mercury breathed deep.

Old Uunrahzil stood in front of him, as the dream dissolved. Rifts reappeared where they were mended, made real again by this little ascension. From the ancient one, a thousand tendrils of thought travelled into the terrible irreality behind the dreamweave.

But Uunrahzil themselves was, for the first time, more than merely mana veins. Mercury saw a star, suspended and stretched into a ribbon of rainbow, which ran through itself. It split, at some point, into a scattering of diffuse dust, colourful clouds taking the shape of tails. Thousands of them.

Uunrahzil was so, so much more.

A cosmos of galaxies and nebulae and vast voids between what was and wasn't,. A blending of falsehoods and fractals, truths and torches, bright light and sinuous shadow. To call them beautiful and terrifying would have been an understatement.

Mercury <Witnessed> Uunrahzil.

The air shuddered.

'You have the sight to see,' old Uunrahzil said, 'And now you saw. Are we worthy?'

Mercury smiled. This was what they were worried about? Such a silly solicitude! 'Hope you shall have.'

'Thus we thank thee.' And truly, there was thanks writ within that thought.

Finally, the long moment broke apart, scattered like dust in the wind.

The seed sprouted in Mercury's chest. It was a gift of connection, of knowledge, and a promise of cooperation.

[You have gained the <Successor> Title!]

[<Successor>: Learn better when taught! Especially when someone is passing on their livelihood to you. Cherish this opportunity, carry on the *torch* for a new age. You may receive this title multiple times, to add additional *torches*. You are currently bearing the *torch* of: <Hope>.]

A small vine trailed down Mercury's core. He felt it. A nascent star, all to himself. A torch of hope.

Finally, the brightness around old Uunrahzil dimmed. The star and rainbow ribbons vanished. The tails of stardust, the torso made from nebulae all winked out. What was left was a construct of brightly glowing veins of mana.

Mercury sucked in air like he had almost drowned. He gasped, choked, coughed and spat.

Minutes passed. He regained his bearings, slowly. 'That was... an experience,' he thought.

'Indeed,' old Dreamweaver replied. Their message was laced with... complicated feelings. A knowledge that their ties had deepened. They were pleased about this, too. But at the same time, there was worry, of danger and speed and all of that. They were old. They were not used to such rapid steps.

'What exactly was that?' Mercury asked.

For a moment, old Uunrahzil hesitated, then they steeled themselves. 'We have finally decided to truly give you our all. Not just this one, *we*. Each and every one of us. We have given you a token of trust. In exchange, we have gained belief. You deserve to know this now. Your knowledge of our existence is valuable to us.'

And Mercury knew, instantly. That he had, somehow, won them over. Breaking the second veil should not, reasonably, have happened close to this quickly. It should have taken seasons. Chapters! Not... this!

But they trusted him. Old Dreamweaver themselves, and all the other fragments. The short-tempered ones, the calm ones, the languid ones, even the... dead ones? Whatever. All of them decided to put some trust in Mercury.

So, they gave a token of this. A promise to pass on their everything. Their lives' work. And it was worth it, already.

Mercury'd peered through irreality, and confirmed that old Uunrahzil was still there. It had solidified them. Made them more real than they were before. Having someone know they existed was the only way to cling onto eyeun, to not grow wahc, and to not vanish from the lo-pac. Being believed in kept them alive.

An indefinite age passed by, with them drifting alone through the void, until they found Mercury's dreamscape. It wasn't just by a stroke of luck, either. It was because Mercury believed in a whole lot more strangeness than most. Because he dreamed more than most. Because he daydreamt so much.

All of those factors came together with his innate affinity, to let old Uunrahzil find him. His dying dreams of grandeur attracted the much older, but equally dying, dream to him.

Now, here they were. Both of them better for it.

Mercury smiled. 'I shall cherish this token.'

'Much more, yet less, than that,' old Uunrahzil replied. 'You do not need to cherish it. You already hold the values that it needs in your heart. Simply learn, and grow, and be thineself, Yr'enzel. You seem to make hope from where there was none with little effort at all.'

The words were so genuine that Mercury allowed himself a small smile.

'But tell this one, how did'st thou manage to pierce the second veil?'

'Well, that really came about as the consequence of a rather poor decision,' Mercury started.

Soon, he explained his new Skill to old Uunrahzil as well, and the old one seemed to find a great deal of humor in the impatience of youth.

They talked, and talked, and talked some more. Eventually, the night passed by, and Mercury awoke. He had learnt a great deal more over the night, and the irreality of the world around him seemed a lot less daunting now.

For a few brief moments, Mercury braved the rainbow shimmers, then smiled. He gave Zyl a small hug with his newfound appendages, and then it was time to learn more forging from a very grumpy old man.

