Wanderer 151

Chapter 151: Teal powder

Only once he finished the earth mage too did Percy finally allow his weapon to regain its colour, a scythe of glowing teal appearing in his hand.

Ever since he first mastered Crystallization, he'd naturally tried applying it to other affinities. Sadly, whether it was his own soul mana, or Gabe's fire and air mana, the spell had never worked with anything else.

With one exception.

Like most of Percy's spells, it worked seamlessly with his fused mana, as it was indistinguishable from pure mana in its corporeal state. That said, the teal powder hadn't been particularly useful before now. The first thing he had tried was to brew elixirs with it, only to end up giving the Aurora Dew a slightly different colour. It hadn't altered its effect, however, rendering the extra effort pointless.

Luckily, this all changed a few months ago, upon his spell's evolution to Reinforcement. Following Sengo's teachings, Percy could strengthen his cyan constructs with the corresponding powder, so there was no reason why he couldn't do the same with the teal constructs. That way, he'd have tougher weapons without losing the fused mana's versatility.

But he didn't stop there.

'This worked better than expected…' he grinned, tracing his fingers along the scythe's surface.

The edge was as sharp as a katana's, but that wasn't what he was focusing on. Instead, he felt the grooves and curves of the embroidered symbols along its length. They covered the weapon from tip to tip, from the crescent blade all the way to the bottom of its shaft.

Naturally, these were all concealment runes!

One of his soul affinity's greatest advantages was its invisibility. Sadly, the fact that it could be bypassed through Mana Sense so easily had always rubbed him the wrong way. Initially, he'd only bothered learning the concealment runes as a means to guard his secrets but, at some point, he'd come up with an even better use for them.

'Still not perfect though…' he sighed.

Examining the weapon with his sixth sense, he couldn't help but spot multiple areas where the enchantment failed, making the construct detectible. It was faint, but his opponents might have noticed the scythe's edge in time, had they been a little more observant.

Whether it was his smithing technique or his runecrafting, both had plenty of room for improvement. Of course, he couldn't help it much. The crude runes were the most he could currently achieve without compromising the scythe's structural integrity. As for the enchantments, he'd only be able to link them more seamlessly after he delved into magiscript proper.

'This will have to do for now.' he shrugged.

In any case, it would be a while until he earned enough credits in the Vault's challenges to afford the books on the more advanced topics. That said, this only made him more eager to return there.

"Are they all dead?" Nesha asked, approaching him.

Percy responded by pointing at his familiar. Micky was flying towards them, carrying the final body in his talons. Suffice to say, they'd dealt another major blow to House Tantalus today.

"I'm surprised they haven't sent any Greens yet." Nesha mused.

"It's not that strange." Percy said, eliciting a frown from her.

It had already been about half a year since they arrived in Bogside town. And this was already the third group the enemy House had sent to investigate the disappearances. Originally, Percy had expected them to send more people, and a lot sooner at that. According to his original estimates, they should have

responded with a Green mere weeks after the first attack. Over time, however, he had come to realize the reason they seemed to be holding back.

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“I’m guessing they can’t afford to part with their Greens right now.”

“Why not?”

“Well, I imagine my grandpa is applying a lot of pressure on them, in the western side of the province. Dealing with some random wild beast near one of their towns isn’t that urgent, by comparison.” råŅoBE
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“Haven’t they sustained more losses by taking it easy though?” she asked again, clearly unconvinced.

It was true. By now, Percy and Micky had killed 15 Yellows in total. A substantial force even by a noble House’s standards. Had they sent a single Green from the start, House Tantalus would have suffered less.

“I think a big part of it is that they didn’t expect any of their groups to fail. After all, they’re operating under the assumption their target is a mindless beast. They probably hastily delegated whatever Yellows they could spare, whenever they could.”

“I still don’t get it. Isn’t a group of 5 Yellows a greater force than a single Green?”

But Percy shook his head.

“On paper, 5 Yellows should indeed be able to take a Green out. But their value in the war is a little more complicated to estimate.” he said, giving Nesha a quick rundown of his understanding.

At the end of the day, the war would be decided by the highest powers either House could freely deploy. In other words, their Blues. As for those weaker, their contribution was mostly determined by how much they could impact the war between Blues.

While a Green was nominally as strong as a handful of Yellows, they were many times more valuable than that in practice. After all, Greens could actually survive and meaningfully participate in a fight between Blues, possibly even tipping the scales. As for Yellows, they wouldn't last a moment in such a high-level battle.

Of course, that didn't mean Yellows were worthless. Far from it. They could be deployed in areas where there weren't any Blues, with the purpose of taking out the enemy Greens, thus affecting the high-level battles indirectly. Still, they were two layers removed from the battles that mattered the most, making them more disposable.

And that was without considering their value outside the war. After all, Greens were more often Yellow-borns, which meant they had to be protected at all costs. As for Yellows, they were typically Orange-borns or even Red-borns – nobody in their right mind would send a child under 10 on a mission.

"That makes sense, but I doubt they'll continue sending Yellows to their doom." Nesha said.

"Right." Percy nodded. "I'm sure they'll wise up after this latest failure. They'll send a Green next time." he said, his expression grim.

Nesha and Micky both nodded, their faces equally sombre.

"Hey, it's not that bad!" Percy suddenly said, easing up the mood. "We're not completely helpless against a Green. Not anymore."

Had one arrived months ago, they would have probably had to hide or even run away, but things were different now. Between Percy's new spells, their new mastery of runes, and Micky growing more experienced, they were more than capable of giving the next unfortunate noble to come after them a warm welcome.

"In any case, we should head back. There are only a couple hours left until sunrise." Nesha suggested.

“Because you need rest...” Micky said, his voice oozing with sarcasm.

Out of the three of them, he’d had the toughest time today. After all, the sun had still been out back when the latest batch of nobles arrived in the Grisly Bog. That meant that neither Percy nor Nesha had been able to join him immediately at the time. At least, not without arousing suspicion.

Consequently, the crow had been given the annoying task of keeping their enemies busy for a few hours, so that they wouldn’t leave before the others arrived. To do that, he’d been forced to fly wide circles around them, letting them spot him frequently to entice them into staying, yet without ever giving them the chance to harm him.

“It’s been tough on all of us.” Nesha shrugged unapologetically. “I’ll have to replace the pitfall traps tomorrow, you know…”

“Alright. That’s enough in-fighting. We should all take some time to relax.” Percy said.

Next, the trio broke up, with Micky flying deeper into the swamp, heading towards his nest, while the others made their way to their humble hut. Yet, the three of them weren’t the only ones returning home…

‘Just what is going on with this clone?’

The ethereal cord attached to his stomach had been acting strange over the last couple of days. It had kept tensing and shaking in irregular intervals. From experience, Percy could tell this was a signal the clone was on its way to Remior.

However, it should have long arrived by now. Moreover, the cord vibrated way more than it usually did, as if the clone was on some tumultuous journey, having encountered some unprecedented obstacle this time. Something preventing it from returning.

It wasn’t until late in the following morning that Percy’s wisp finally reached him, its condition shocking him…

Chapter 152: Who am I?

Percy hammered the flat slab of steel absentmindedly, thinning it further with each strike. It wasn't until it looked about to break that he remembered he was supposed to fold it again. Only after doing so did he dip it into a trough filled with water to quench it, before applying another layer of clay mud and moving it into the furnace. That said, the fate of the knife wasn't exactly at the forefront of his mind right now.

'The clone died, didn't he? I died.'

Percy didn't fully understand what his latest clone had experienced, as he'd only brought back a few scattered memories. The knowledge of how to heal his soul more efficiently was by far the clearest, followed by his promise to some girl to look for her in the future.

As for the details of what had gone down between the two, he didn't really remember them. He had a faint idea that their friendship had started off on the wrong foot, before evolving to something more earnest by the time they parted ways. But he didn't really know how or why that happened, nor how he was meant to find her again.

'There was also something more…'

He did recall he was supposed to injure his soul in a specific manner to lure some soul-based entity into his body. Next, he had to break it down and absorb it into his soul to obtain some kind of benefit. Percy didn't remember what exactly that benefit was, but the details of how to go about it were clear enough. Of course, the whole process seemed dangerous, but his clone had clearly deemed this to be a memory worth preserving.

'Maybe it has something to do with finding the girl...'

In any case, Percy would give it a shot, but only after he practiced with the healing art a little. It was best to know how to fix himself in case something went wrong. And he'd also try looking for his new acquaintance during his future trips. Though, none of that was particularly urgent right now.

What bothered him a whole lot more, were the implications of this recent adventure on himself. And he wasn't thinking about the injury per se. He was confident it would heal in a couple of weeks at the latest. But that wouldn't bring the dead version of him back to life – it would merely replace him.

'I suppose I've always known this was a possibility…' he sighed bitterly.

Just because his bloodline allowed his clones to survive and operate on their own for some time, it didn't mean they were immortal or invulnerable. They were ultimately nothing more than fragile chunks of his soul. The only reason none of them had been lost or destroyed before now was due to how rare soul affinities were. He'd never met any mage or creature capable of interacting with his souls before now. Well, other than Metatron. But this was bound to happen eventually.

'What if it were me in the clone's shoes?'

The result would have obviously been the same. After all, Percy and his clones were the same person, with the same personality. Naturally, he would have made the exact same choices, ultimately sacrificing himself to benefit his main body. So, he would have ended up dead too.

Was it worth it?

The only real difference between him and the clones was the size of their soul. They were the same person until the very moment the bloodline activated, at which point the biggest portion remained in his body, while the smaller one ended up flying out. Percy had never really had to deal with this issue before, because all his clones had made it back – other than the one he'd shoved into his familiar. And that one, he'd sacrificed to save his friend, not for his own sake.

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Evidently, this wasn't always going to be the case, however. Moving forward, he'd probably be forced to make the same choice again. A choice between self-preservation or sacrificing himself for the original's benefit.

'Can I do it again, knowing what it means? Or should I, even?'

At the end of the day, Percy had to decide what was most important for him. His goal had always been to reach the pinnacle of magic – to grow as strong as he could. To aim for divinity, and beyond. But would it even matter if some other Percy achieved that goal, should he himself perish?

It all boiled down to one simple question.

'Who am I?'

Was there only one Percy – the original? Or did all his clones have the right to live too? Should they all strive towards a common goal – to elevate their joint existence to the highest level? Or should they put themselves' first?

It didn't matter much when they could safely return to Remior. Whenever that happened, they would simply fuse back into the original, sharing the same fate. But the choice wouldn't always be this easy.

"I think the steel is ready for the next round of tempering." Nesha said, breaking him out of his thoughts.

Only now did Percy realize the bar was already red-hot. Placing it back on the anvil, he continued the forging process. Having removed most of the impurities, he began to consciously flatten it into the shape of a kitchen knife this time. Obviously, the townsfolk didn't need any fancy katanas. Percy had been forced to adapt Sengo's teachings to some more useful everyday tools to make a living here.

A couple hours later, Percy sharpened the knife's edge with a whetstone. His lack of experience in tandem with the subpar tools at his disposal did knock the quality of his crafts down a notch. Adding the fact that he hadn't given it his all today, and the knife he currently held wasn't exactly his finest work. An untrained eye might have missed it, but it was a little rough around the edges. It was slightly wider in the middle than it was supposed to be, the wavy patterns on the blade not quite as clear as usual. Percy couldn't help but click his tongue in annoyance.

"It's fine. It's still better than what people here are used to." Nesha consoled him.

She was playing with some space mana in her hands, trying to get a bit better at shaping it how she wanted. Naturally, she hadn't missed Percy's irritation.

“It’s not that.” he said. “Do you think my clone was a fool to do this?”

While he couldn’t be certain, Percy guessed his clone had brought this grim fate upon himself, because of multiple risky choices. And he’d already brought Nesha up to speed on the topic.

“I don’t know. I’m probably not the best person to ask, as I’ve never put any external goal above my well-being. Even working towards my revenge is something I only do when I can. I guess it all boils down to what you value the most.”

Nodding, Percy placed the knife on the floor, before washing himself outside with some water. Next, he went to bed early, Nesha’s words still echoing in his mind. While his companion was more than a little eccentric – and oftentimes lazy – she was by no means stupid.

It was true that he’d never really had to choose between his life or his goal. After all, the two were normally inextricably linked. He couldn’t become a god if he was dead, could he?

‘Except, it turns out I can…’

Then, he shook his head.

‘Maybe I’m thinking about this all wrong. What if taking a few risks with my clones is the only way to stand a chance?’

The odds were already stacked heavily against him. Even with the Aurora Dew and his two cores, he’d only live long enough to reach Blue. He still wasn’t even close to Violet or White, let alone godhood. Metatron had made it clear he doubted it was even possible. Could Percy afford to play it safe, and still hope to succeed?

‘Probably not.’

Doing his best to ensure each of his clones made it back was a given. They weren’t disposable tools to discard at will. Each of them was him. At the same time, he didn’t have the luxury of preserving all of them. Many would die again, if any part of him was to ever become a god. Remembering back to the

time he'd first practiced his soul affinity on that goblin, all those years ago, his thoughts now rang in his mind once more, truer than ever.

'A soul affinity, huh? Clearly not meant for the faint of heart.'

At the time, his thoughts had been shallower. He'd only considered the pain he had to endure when using his bloodline. As it turned out, that was the easy bit. Whether it was the tragic fates of the dying people he met during his travels, or the difficult choices he'd have to make, his affinity continued to prove itself brutal at every turn.

In the end, it didn't matter who he currently was, nor who his clones were. Whichever side he found himself on, Percy had to give it his all, in service of the person he wished to one day become…

Chapter 153: Housewife

Nesha picked up the knives from the table, before leaving the hut. Percy was still busy using his new trick to repair his injured soul, so she'd deliver the finished tools to Mr. Dylan for him.

On the way to the shop, she didn't stop playing around with her mana, however, trying to keep it in the shape of an orb. It was annoying, training like this, day in and day out. Not something she was very accustomed to. Still…

'I don't want to lose to him.' she bit her lip. 'At least, not too badly…'

Percy was already stronger than her, despite being a grade lower. This was a strange thing for Nesha but, seeing him constantly doing his best motivated her to try harder too. While she'd never admit it, she felt like shit guzzling down three doses of Aurora Dew per day while contributing so little to the group.

Of course, Nesha had long known that Percy was hard-working. In fact, she'd learned this as early as during their first month in the Guild, years before their collaboration. But it was one thing seeing the results of his efforts from the outside, and a different thing entirely to live in the same house, watching him train relentlessly from sunrise until sunset. And oftentimes, beyond…

The guy never stopped – except for when he worked on the anvil. But even that, was in part to maintain their cover as commoners and pay the bills, while also helping him get better at reinforcing his pure constructs.

'Well, there's also the time he spends practicing with that atrocious ocarina…' she reminded herself, cringing as the memory of the nail-scraping sound made her want to tear her hair out. She had no idea why he'd kept the darn thing, but at least he only played for Micky nowadays.

In any case, it wasn't a mystery to her how Percy had grown so strong. Given his abundance of secrets combined with his peculiar work ethic, and anything else would have been stranger. She very much doubted she'd be able to keep up with him, but she wouldn't forgive herself if she continued to waste her own gifts.

"Good morning! Miss Nesha, was it?" Mr. Dylan asked, breaking her out of her thoughts. "How is Percy doing? I haven't seen him much lately."

"Good morning! Indeed, he spends all day working at home." she said, speaking a half-truth. "I figured helping him out with the chores was the least I could do."

She handed him the knives, getting some silver coins in return, as well as a couple bars of pig iron that Percy would be using for the next batch. They were heavy, but not to a Yellow. Especially not since she started exercising.

Bidding the man farewell, she brought the metal home, before going out for another round, to restock their supplies. Initially, she'd discussed with Percy the possibility of getting herself a job in the town, but other than her marketing skills, there wasn't anything else she'd be much good at. Besides, they didn't really need a lot of money. Percy's job was more than enough to cover for the necessities and get himself some blacksmithing practice.

In the end, they'd decided it was best for her to pose as a housewife. After all, her current priorities were things she could work on while staying at home. She had to get better with her magic so that she wouldn't be a liability in a fight, as well as working towards the enchantments for the spatial amulets.

'If he brings me any…' she sighed.

Nesha had already grown decent at drawing the pocket runes. Sadly, Percy hadn't had the chance to bring anything else from the Vault. According to him, it was only recently that he felt confident taking the Red magiscript challenge for some credits, so he only began looking for a suitable host to take there in the past few weeks. And he had yet to find one.

After buying the groceries, Nesha returned home again, taking her second dose of Aurora Dew for the day. Like Percy, her next promotion was a little over a decade away. Reaching Green in her thirties would be a dream come true. People who didn't know her might even mistake her for a Yellow-born. At least until her peers started hitting Blue a century earlier than her.

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'Not that there's any room for us in high society anymore…' she smiled bitterly.

For the time being, they had to hide from the world. And she didn't know if there was a way out of their mess either. Their current plan was to lay low for as long as possible and hope for the best. Admittedly, not the most thought out one.

Even beyond their conflict against House Tantalus and their rapidly dwindling supply of elixir, finding a way to placate the Divine Root was arguably their most pressing issue. Percy didn't mention it much, but Nesha could tell it was weighing on him hard, as nothing else would matter should they get caught.

'Oh well, I suppose we both knew the risk when we made our choices…'

Ignoring Percy who was still working on his recovery, she lied with her back on the floor, before beginning a set of sit ups. According to him, it would take her years before she was ready to learn Circulation. Physical exercises weren't what she had imagined spending the first half of her 20s on. Still, the boosting art was arguably the most useful spell she'd ever seen. She'd be ungrateful to not bother learning it after Percy generously offered to coach her.

She only took a break a couple hours later, once she had grown too tired to keep going. Sadly, they didn't have a life user nearby for her to cheat her way through this phase of the training as Percy had.

Glancing around the room, Nesha saw Percy still sitting cross-legged in the same spot, Synchronization active. She couldn't observe his soul directly, but Mana Sense revealed a ridiculous amount of mana pouring into his stomach. It was partially obscured by his bandage, but she did see a huge portion sticking to the ceiling of what she guessed was his wound.

The hole had already shrunk noticeably in the last few hours! Not that strange, in hindsight. Between Percy's insane mana regeneration and Micky eating Yellow souls to supplement him, he'd only need a week or two to fully patch it up, before sending clones again. And that was only because he had to recreate the entire chunk his clone had lost. Normally, they estimated he should be able to recover within a day once a clone returned, letting him essentially send them out back-to-back!

Drawing some mana from her core, Nesha formed a miniature butterfly, making it fly around the room. Its design was crude, some of its mana leaking with every flap of its misshapen wings, leaving a trail of black motes in its passing. Her mana control was still atrocious, but it was already better than Percy's. And this wasn't due to her being more talented or more hard-working than him.

It was a feature of her grade.

A mage's control over their mana greatly increased with each promotion. This was why Yellows and Greens could form more intricate spells and control them remotely. For example, the time spells of that noble they had faced before fell in that category. This was in stark contrast to Percy's spells, that he had to essentially prepare before firing. It was why he couldn't change the trajectory of his throwing knives or his sickles once he launched them.

Of course, that had begun to change a little once he started fuelling his spells out of that strange, fused mana of his. Powered by two Orange cores, his teal constructs were easier for him to control, which was how he was able to more easily change the Mantle to a bunch of projectiles or change his mana's properties mid-flight. At least, that was their current hypothesis.

'Oh well… It's none of my business anyway. I have my own magic to worry about.' she thought, letting the butterfly disperse once she ran out of mana to fuel it.

Looking out of the window, she noticed it was already dark. She grabbed another vial of Aurora Dew from the amulet, before heading towards the door. One of her current projects was to spread more of her pitfall traps in the Grisly Bog each night, to prepare for when their next enemy arrived. And to keep Micky some company, when Percy was too busy to do so himself.

Yet, right when she was about to leave, Percy spoke, stopping her in her tracks.

“Nesha.”

“Hmmm?”

“Remember when you asked me to give you a second core?”

“Of course. You said it was too dangerous to try that on a friend. Also, that it wouldn’t be of any use to me if I didn’t train with it.”

“Right. Both of those are still true, but a couple things have changed since then.”

Nesha nodded. She still wasn’t quite ready to fight a fellow Yellow by herself, but she was confident she could support Percy and Micky in a fight without hitting them by accident.

“I’m not just talking about your own growth.” Percy added, probably guessing what she was thinking. “This mending art is a game-changer. Obviously, I’d like to spend some more time getting better with it, and it’s never going to be completely risk-free, but it would be hypocritical of me to lecture others about risks when I’m gambling with my own life all the time.”

Nesha’s eyes widened, but Percy raised a hand to stop her.

“Not right now. Keep practicing and think hard about it. If you still want to go through with it, I’ll give it a shot as soon as we get ourselves more elixir.”

Chapter 154: Mend

The soul mana gushed through Percy’s channels like a torrential river, lighting up a silver maelstrom around his sternum. Tears formed and closed throughout his soul, but he didn’t pay them any attention, having long grown used to this version of his boosting art.

Instead, his attention was glued to the hole around his stomach, as it had been over the last couple of weeks. The rush of mana tried to fill the crater like a lake, a lot of it leaking out of the wound, though Percy held it back as best as he could. Instead, he guided it to stick to the surface of the hole as much as possible, cutting down the losses.

In addition, he willed it to act with purpose, boosting his soul's natural regeneration rather than blindly attempting to patch the wound up. Not only that, but he focused it in interspaced locations, prioritizing the growth of thin tendrils all over the wound, rather than letting the mana act uniformly.

[Congratulations! You have mastered a new spell: Mend – Crude!]

'Finally.'

He had spent several days making up for his nearly destroyed clone, the crater having already shrunk from the size of a grapefruit to that of a cherry. The latest healing art he had brought back from the mysterious girl – whose name he didn't quite remember – had clearly done wonders, even in its incomplete state. Yet, it wasn't until now that the Status deemed his mastery sufficient to list it along with the other spells.

Naturally, Percy was elated his efforts were recognized, but he didn't let his concentration waver, continuing the arduous process of mending his soul. Doing so was especially critical right now, as Micky had informed him he was about to munch on a Yellow beast, providing him with another potent source of mana.

'Starting.' the crow spoke through their bond, sending him the image of a snake lying motionless under his talons.

Sure enough, more mana flooded Percy's saturated soul a second later, forcing him to let some inside the crater. Like this, a portion would inevitably end up wasted, but he'd still lose less than if he allowed it to spill out randomly from his pores.

It wasn't until four hours later that he finally stopped, satisfied with today's improvements. The wound wasn't entirely gone just yet, a small hole still present in his stomach, but it was already smaller than the scar in his sternum. Plus, this one didn't have a cord extending outwards, so he was confident it would close completely tomorrow.

‘Can’t wait to resume sending clones.’

His latest misadventure had cost him some valuable time, though he didn’t regret it. How could he, having gained so much from it? Grinning, he pulled his Status up, taking some time to appreciate the fruit of his labour.

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Percival Avalon

Mana cores:

Bloodline:

Spells:

Decrees:

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Percy was back to seven spells, having previously ‘lost’ one when his Quarterstaff and his Parting Gift merged into the Soul Harvester. That said, the overall quality of his arsenal had never been higher, with over half his spells now being Refined! Even Elaine only had two of those, despite having two grades on him!

‘And I’m not even done digesting the gains from the last clone!’

He still wasn't completely clear on how this absorption process was supposed to work, his memories of the trip a little foggy. But he did remember enough to give it a shot – as soon as his soul was back to normal. Whatever the result would be, it was definitely worth delaying his return to the Vault by a few more days…

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'Micky, are you ready?' Percy asked through the cord.

Another two days had passed, and he was finally ready to begin. Luckily, his wound had fully closed yesterday, though he'd chosen to play it safe and get a good night's sleep before experimenting with the strange technique.

'Yes.' the familiar replied, sending the image of another freshly slain carcass.

Percy nodded. It never hurt to have some extra mana stashed on the side, just in case. Sending a trickle to his eyes, he examined his soul once more, making sure everything was in order. He might use his boosting art later, but he'd decided to hold on for now, unsure whether it would help more than it hurt.

'Ok, I'm going for it.'

Gathering some mana on his index finger, he delivered a few precise incisions in various sections of his soul, inflicting several narrow cuts along his limbs and torso. He winced in pain, of course – soul injuries weren't something he'd ever get completely used to – but he kept going, having experienced far worse over the years.

Naturally, he would have never dared to try anything similar on his flesh. While the pain would have been much easier to stomach, he would have risked dying of blood loss. Luckily, his soul didn't work that way. Besides, this latest series of injuries vastly paled in comparison to the crater he'd just finished healing.

'Now, I think I'm supposed to leak mana through the cuts…'

This next part was a bit foggier in Percy's mind, but he figured it couldn't be far off. After taking a few seconds to replenish what little mana he had spent, he pulled a sliver of it from his core, splitting it in multiple parts, before pushing it out of the cuts all at once. At the same time, he focused on the pain, trying to exaggerate the idea of his injuries in his mind.

Unsurprisingly, having possessed dozens of dying bodies made this rather simple. He guessed he had a huge edge in this regard, compared to the natives of the mysterious world. Motes of silver soon leaked out of his wounds one after another, fading into nothing within mere metres of his body.

'Is this really going to reach far enough to lure them here?'

He didn't know if he had done a good job giving his mana the 'scent' of a dying soul, but it wouldn't matter if the motes didn't even leave Remior. His only hope was that the creatures could sense it from much further away, through the plane of souls that they presumably dwelled.

Pushing the rest of his mana out of his core, Percy repeated the process one more time, yet without seeing any tangible results several minutes later. His failure was definitely a little disappointing, but he wasn't one to give up easily.

'Time to bring out the big crossbows.'

Heeding his request, Micky soon sent him a ton of soul mana, as Percy activated Synchronization, now pushing the silver motes out several times more forcefully than before. Naturally, the substance tried to latch onto his injuries, to heal them as it usually did.

But he didn't allow it.

In fact, he did the exact opposite. Not only did he actively prevent the cuts he had manually inflicted from closing, he even did his best to keep some of the tears caused by his boosting art open.

Visualizing the horrendous state of his past hosts and capitalizing on the intense pain, Percy kept at it for a couple more hours – until long after Micky had run out of mana to send.

‘I guess it’s not happening today.’

Sighing in defeat, he finally allowed the mana to close the minuscule cuts, restoring his soul to pristine condition. Percy wasn’t sure what had gone wrong. Yes, his memories of the technique weren’t too clear, but he was confident they were at least complete. There didn’t seem to be any key component missing. He’d even released a lot more mana than any Orange mage had any business wielding. Or even a Yellow, for that matter.

‘Is it possible there just aren’t any of those strange creatures nearby?’

This was the only logical explanation he could come up with. After all, he was competing by his lonesome against an entire culture of people who did this regularly. Their collective efforts had probably drawn plenty of the creatures to linger in the outskirts of their world, massively lowering the barrier of entry for any individual person trying to lure one of them over.

‘For all I know, the nearest creature is on the other side of the universe…’

His expression drooped, as he grew more and more certain of his guess. If he was right, then he could only think of two possible solutions. The first was to leave Remior with his main body, repeating the experiment at a more suitable location.

‘Yeah, fat chance of that happening.’ he smiled bitterly.

Currently, his only means of travelling across worlds were his clones and Metatron’s Decree – neither of which would help in this situation. Which left him only one option. He had to massively expand the scope of his efforts, to lure the creatures from much further away.

‘I’m going to need a lot more soul mana…’

Chapter 155: Spirit

Percy allowed his boosting art to fizzle out, as he placed both palms on his knees, breathing heavily.

While the creation of his clones had grown into quite a routine operation by now – a far cry from the dangerous and laborious venture it was during his early days – the act still left him a little tired afterwards.

It wasn't until a few minutes later that he found the strength to stand up. He'd have to heal his injuries again at some point, but not right now. Unable to absorb one of the mysterious creatures, and with a clone currently roaming the cosmos, Percy had decided to take the rest of the day off, feeling himself deserving of a break.

The sun was still at its apex, Nesha currently in the middle of a workout just outside the house – they'd made a pact to leave any sweaty business out of the hut.

Walking to a wall, he reached out towards nothing in particular, seemingly grabbing a fistful of empty air. It wasn't until a second later that a glowing teal scythe manifested in his hand. Naturally, this was his latest Refined spell – the Soul Harvester!

Only, Percy hadn't created this one today, but nearly a week ago! This was a convenient feature of his twice-fused mana. The cyan crystals were already semi-permanent constructs which could survive for an extended period of time without breaking down. His mixed mana constructs created through Reinforcement inherited some of that durability – though not all of it, due to the presence of regular mana causing them to decay over time. That said, using his teal mana pushed the durability even further, as the substance had always been a little harder to break down.

What all this meant, was that his scythe could survive for several days before its structural integrity was compromised! A very fortunate development indeed, as creating each one was a time-consuming process – especially with all the concealment runes Percy had to embed into each one.

Tracing his finger along the weapon's length, Percy nodded in satisfaction as he examined the scythe's condition.

'Still good.'

Propping the construct against the wall, he robbed it of its colour again, before leaving the house for some fresh air.

The dirt roads of the small town were… not quite busy but, perhaps active was an apt term. A few of the townsfolk walked about, greeting each other with a smile, chatting for a few minutes at a time, or entering a shop. The mood was strangely uplifting, which made Percy crease his brow.

‘I’d have thought these people would be more downtrodden… Given the circumstances.’

The residents of Bogside town had a lot more problems to deal with, even compared to the average commoner on Remior. For one, they lived under the jurisdiction of a particularly ruthless noble House, slaughtering them on a regular basis, treating them as little more than livestock to feed their horrific bloodline.

And that was without even considering the economic difficulties these people had to endure. Most towns across Remior were good at producing at least something of value. They had to, in order to survive. A few of them, like the nearby Greyquarry town, had mines in their vicinity and could export ores and minerals. Others were suitable for growing magical reagents – things that places like the Alchemists’ Guild needed.

Sadly for the people of Bogside town, they’d drawn the short end of the stick in that regard as well. From what Percy understood, there was some fertile land to the northwest of the town, allowing the peasants to supply their cruel overlords with crops and animal products. However, that wasn’t exactly the most profitable business, so they normally had to supplement it by gambling their lives to venture into the nearby swamp, harvesting some additional materials from the magical beasts living there.

‘But that’s no longer an option… all because of us.’

This was something that gnawed at Percy’s conscience lately. An unfortunate side-effect of his actions was that he’d rendered the entire bog off-limits for the residents, inadvertently cutting off part of their lifeblood. He and Nesha could see that these people were struggling more to get by than when they had first arrived in the town.

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That said, they didn’t seem too distraught over it – for some reason.

With the pretence of browsing for some bread from the local bakery, Percy paid attention to a couple of ladies gossiping loudly by the entrance. Ok, eavesdropping was admittedly not his classiest moment, but he was dying to know why these people seemed so chirpy, despite the harsh times they were living in.

“Hey, Margaret! How’s Randal doing today? Is his knee still bothering him?”

“Good morning, Brenda! You know how these things are… The pain is getting worse. Last night, he woke up all sweaty. He couldn’t go back to sleep again.”

“Oh my god! That sounds awful! You really need to take him to a life mage.”

Margaret sighed.

“I know. The problem is, he’s not in any condition to travel. The nearest life mage lives in Greyquarry town. It’ll cost three times as much to get him to come to us… And with Randal unable to work in the fields, our finances are a bit tight too…”

“Do you want us to lend you some money?” Brenda offered. “Waiting is only going to make the situation worse.”

“Oh, no. No!” Margaret hurriedly waved at her friend. “You’re raising two young kids, Brenda. I appreciate your kindness, but we can’t impose on you.”

Brenda insisted some more, though Margaret just shot her down. Still listening in, Percy couldn’t help but feel his chest tighten, as their words only exacerbated his guilt. Though the next thing Margaret said made him furrow his brow.

“Besides… I’d take this situation any day over what we had in the past.” she said, her features easing.

“I know what you mean… Having a little less food on the table is a small price to pay. How long has it been, even? About a year?”

“Almost. Gods, we’d have lost a dozen people by now.” Margaret nodded.

“Probably more. Those bastards used to take a handful each time. I hope House Avalon wipes them all out!”

“Shhh! We aren’t alone.” Margaret whispered, discreetly pointing at Percy who hurriedly looked away, his cheeks heating up.

“Geez, I wouldn’t worry about the new kid ratting us out to those assholes Margaret. Remember what they tried to do to his wife a few months back? Anyway, I hope that monster bird stays in the Grisly Bog forever, money be damned. I’d rather go hungry with my kids and husband than wake up every morning afraid I’ll lose them.”

“Do you think we’ll be safe here though? What if the beast flies over here one day, looking for food?”

“Well, I suppose it’s possible, but I doubt it can take the whole town on. Besides, it hasn’t harmed a hair from any of our heads so far. It’s only ever touched the pompous assholes who went looking for it.”

Margaret remained silent for a few seconds, seemingly pondering something.

“Say… do you think the rumour about it is true?”

Brenda chortled.

“C’mon Margaret! Don’t tell me you believe that crap? That’s the kind of shit Fegan tells the kids!”

“I know, I know… It sounds ridiculous…” Margaret chuckled too. “Still, how else do you explain the strange glow on its body? Beasts can’t use magic like that. Both Reni and Samia saw it. They said it looked almost…” she paused, contemplating her next words carefully. “Sacred. And then it let them go, only attacking those people…”

“No way… It’s got to be some kind of coincidence. Maybe it went after the nobles first because they were stronger, and thus tastier. As for the glow, I think that’s probably an exaggeration. I bet its feathers just reflect the sunlight in a weird way. The girls must’ve mistaken it in their panic.”

“Sounds like a stretch.” Margaret insisted.

“And believing that a guardian spirit descended from the heavens to protect our town doesn’t?” Brenda asked in incredulity.

“Look, I’m not saying that. Just, maybe the bird has some level of intelligence and wanted to help us out. Anyone would, after seeing how those people treat us.”

Brenda shook her head.

“Nah… Margaret, this is a good thing for us, but don’t go ascribing some noble purpose to a wild beast. It’ll only get you killed if you ever come face to face with it. Most likely, it just got hungry, plunging its talons into the first people it saw. And House Tantalus won’t stop poking at it, sending more and more of their men to their doom.”

“What about Lenon then? How do you explain that? Two nights ago, he went into the bog, scavenging for food. A foolish gamble, but he did come back a few hours later, carrying an Orange rat carcass. Not a scratch on him.”

“Huh, I did hear about that, actually! That moron was asking for it.” Brenda huffed.

“They’re hungry, Brenda… The man was trying to feed his kids.”

“I know that. But who’s going to feed his kids if he gets himself killed? He just got lucky, is all.”

Percy who was still following the conversation subtly exhaled in relief. Hearing about the positive impact he’d had on the town lifted a heavy weight off his chest. That said, listening in to the rest of it caused his jaw to slacken.

“You don’t think the spir– the beast, I mean, spared him?”

“I think it’s much more likely it missed him. Though, I must admit, the next part of his story sounds a little spooky… even for me…”

“I know, right?!” Margaret mused. “He claims he heard an eerie tune emanating from the depths of the Grisly Bog. An otherworldly screech akin to a ghost clawing against the gates of hell, begging to be let out.”

“Yeah. I don’t know if there’s any truth to that, but I sure wouldn’t want to hear something that dreadful…”

Chapter 156: Parrot

While Percy had kept an eye out for any sign that could lead him back to the mysterious girl, he had failed to find any clues as he roamed the space between worlds. He wasn’t sure what the problem was, but he figured there wasn’t much he could do about it at the moment.

In the end, he jumped into the first Red beast he saw, hoping it would be a suitable host for the magiscript challenge. The possession went relatively smoothly too. The creature allowed him to join without any hiccups, though it didn’t relinquish control over its body completely. This one wasn’t passive or timid like the gecko, nor chill and nonchalant like the floating cat. Just… really, really friendly?

‘I suppose I can work with this.’

Having to share wasn’t the most convenient turn of events, but Percy reminded himself that he was taking over the bodies of others. Naturally, going solo wouldn’t always be an option. In any case, it should be fine as long as the beast allowed him to do what he wanted.

Settling into the new vessel, Percy soon examined their soul’s condition. It was alright – he’d seen worse. Sadly, Mend wouldn’t help him much here. Even with his improved efficiency and his potent Orange mana, his pitiful stash wouldn’t be anywhere near enough to bring his host back from the verge of death. As always, the best he could hope for was to temporarily patch the cracks up.

‘Maybe I can come up with a spell for that too, at some point...’

A few minutes later, he managed to tap into the body's senses. The first thing he felt was the gentle warmth of the sun, licking at the front side of their body. At the same time, a blanket of soft sand simmered beneath him, hugging his back. Next, he tried to take a breath, only to realize he couldn't.

'Shocker.'

It was ridiculous – but perhaps not so surprising – how often his hosts had died of some form of suffocation. Though, unlike Takeo or the monkey, this guy hadn't been strangled by a vine, nor drowned. It had choked.

Percy felt an object in their throat, blocking their air canal. Upon regaining consciousness, his host desperately tried to cough it out, to no avail. Of course not. If it was that easy, he wouldn't have died in the first place. Luckily for him, he had Percy to help him this time.

Pulling a sliver of teal mana from his stash, Percy moved it to their throat, pushing against the obstruction. A few seconds later, their joint efforts were enough to dislodge the object, letting the creature spit it out.

'What do we have here?'

The beast greedily gasped for air the first chance it got, though Percy ignored it as he examined the instrument of his demise. It was a large, spherical object. Pink and… hairy? Almost like a miscoloured coconut. In fact, his guess was probably not that far off, as he could tell via his connection to the creature that this thing was edible.

'Wow. Did you try eating it whole?!'

Friendly or not, his latest host clearly wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed.

Not being in a rush to move on, Percy allowed the beast to go about its day, while examining their surroundings. As he had come to realize early on, they were currently standing on some kind of beach.Though it looked very different from what one might expect.

Gazing around some more, he quickly noticed it was more like a desert than a beach, as the sand extended in every direction, all the way to the horizon. Rather than a sea, it was dotted with lots and lots of small oases. Their sizes ranged from tiny puddles to lakes wider than Bogside town. And they seemed to be filled up with regular water, the crystalline liquid shimmering as it reflected the bright sunlight and the clear blue sky both. At least, the colours were right this time.

What caught his eye were the tall palm trees lining up the oases' coasts, boxing them in, like natural fences. Percy had never seen a palm tree back on Remior – at least not outside illustrations – but these definitely looked a little weird. They always came in pairs, their trunks intertwined with one another, as if the trees were engaged in some stationary dance, embracing their mates passionately. Their crowns lightly touched, looking like they were kissing, with lots of pink coconuts adorning their shared canopies.

'Odd… But also cool.'

More importantly, Percy spotted plenty more creatures like his host, allowing him to get a better look at them from the outside. His host was clearly an adult – not losing to the tallest of them. They were birds, their beaks short and hooked. As for their plumage, it varied from one individual to another, ranging from the brightest yellows to the gloomiest blues, to exotic pinks and warm reds. A quick glance revealed his own feathers were a relatively unassuming brown – that very thought dampening his host's mood.

'Hey… For what it's worth, I think you're handsome.' Percy tried cheering the bird up.

Overall, the creatures faintly resembled parrots – as much as any alien ever could. That said, they had six limbs. Other than their wings, each of them sported two pairs of talons. Most of them walked on all four, but they seemed capable of standing on their hindlegs too – if they wanted. At least, that appeared to be his host's preference.

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Clenching one of his "hands", Percy noted it had a decent range of motion. He only had three digits on each limb, but one was opposite the other two, so he wouldn't have much trouble holding an object, or drawing runes with it.

‘Not as good as a human hand. Or even the monkey’s for that matter…’

He frowned. It wasn’t perfect, but it would do. Next, he pulled up their Status, just in case there was any big surprise there. Sadly, there wasn’t.

Percival's clone

Mana cores:

Spells:

Decrees:

As always, the Status listed only the spells that he could theoretically cast in this body. Synchronization and his Secret Art weren’t among them, as he lacked his bloodline or a second core, but that didn’t mean that everything else listed there was useable.

‘I suppose the Status isn’t smart enough to recognize I don’t have enough mana for the Soul Harvester. Though a smaller Mantle should be doable.’

Either way, he didn’t want to bring any cyan or teal powder to the Vault, unwilling to hand Metatron such a useful gift. That said, he’d use his fused mana if he had to. That one wasn’t a secret from the titan – after all, it was from there that he even learnt about it in the first place.

While Percy was busy assessing his situation, his host went about his day unfazed. He strolled casually along the soft sands, acting as if he hadn’t just evaded death. Every now and then, he waved at his peers or greeted them with a throaty squeak. Eventually, he stopped underneath the shade of a particularly large pair of palm trees, where many of his friends had gathered.

Lifting his eyes from the Status page, Percy examined the other creatures from up close. He guessed these ones were all males, betrayed by their more vibrant coats and slightly larger builds. They were pointing at a group of females bathing in the clear waters of the nearest lake, snickering at one another. His host looked like he was having fun.

‘I kinda feel bad I’m about to take him to the Vault.’ Percy sighed.

This place was essentially a paradise. No predators in sight, abundant food, a nice environment, and lots of friends or potential mates. It was pretty much a dream come true, whether one was at Red or White, a beast or a sapient.

But he’d do it. Percy had never thought twice before eating a slice of ham, or a chicken’s drumstick. It would only be hypocritical of him – not to mention dumb – if he sacrificed an opportunity to spare a bird’s feelings. Still…

‘I suppose there’s no harm in letting him stay here for another day. We do need to collect some food first too.’

Percy planned to gather a lot of supplies before going to the Vault this time. Sizian meat was the only food they had there, and each piece would cost him an arm and a leg. Not caring about his host’s advancement in the slightest, Percy couldn’t possibly justify spending a credit on every meal – he had yet to even earn any! Plus, he didn’t want to burden Gabe with that again.

Of course, starving wasn’t an option either. He fully intended to spend at least a couple of weeks there this time. Possibly longer. The obvious solution was to simply bring some food with him through the portal.

Over the next few hours, he coaxed his host into helping him gather a pile of coconuts. At first, the creature resisted. He was having way too much fun just chilling with his buddies to waste it collecting food when he wasn’t even hungry. But Percy managed to get through to him, mainly by making it appear like a game. They took turns controlling the body, competing to see who’d pick the most coconuts.

Naturally, the creature wiped the floor with him – being much more used to his own body. Not that Percy cared about his loss too much, his eyes dripping with enthusiasm as he stared at the pile of coconuts sitting before him. It was about as tall as he was.

‘Ok, these should last us for a while. The only question is how to get them all through the portal.’

Looking up at the trees, his gaze locked onto their leaves, each longer than he was tall, and wider than his arm. A single leaf would probably tear in an instant under all this weight, but what about a hundred of them?

Fortunately, the parrot proved to be a decent climber. A good thing too, as his wings didn't seem large enough to support his weight in flight. Some more placating and a few games later, Percy grinned in appreciation as he scanned their handiwork.

Hundreds of coconuts were resting inside a green sack. Without anything to tie the leaves together, a few coconuts slipped through the gaps whenever he tried dragging the sack. But it was fine. Most of them had remained inside, so the majority would probably make it through the portal.

Activating the Decree, both of them marvelled at the sight, as the circular gate manifested before them. It wasn't Percy's first time seeing this, but that wasn't nearly enough for him to tire of watching a titan's magic at work.

'Ready?'

He got a wave of confusion back. Naturally, the creature hesitated, unsure why it had to leave its home and its nestmates behind. With a heavy heart, Percy used the promise of a second core, and unimaginable magical secrets to coax his new buddy into stepping through the portal. Sadly, none of those things appealed to the parrot. It seemed satisfied with everything it already had.

It took Percy a couple more hours to convince the bird the trip was worth it. And, he only succeeded by omitting a very important detail – the fact that there was no coming back. Tricking the parrot like this did leave a bad taste in his mouth, but he knew this was the only way.

'Even if I leave him here, he'll die when I go. I can't fix him on my own. But Metatron will…'

Dragging the leafy sack through the sand, Percy tossed it through the portal first. A few coconuts spilled out in the process, but he just kicked them all right behind it. Then he stepped through the magical gate too.

It was finally time to learn some new runes.

Chapter 157: Large animals

After overcoming the dizziness of the trip – at least it helped he was expecting it this time – Percy stood up, examining his surroundings. Lots of people were looking at him curiously again. Though he seemed to have been transported to a different location.

'As I thought, it's random each time…'

That flew in the face of their idea to sneak Gabe out through a portal. Not that they'd placed much hope in that plan to begin with.

More importantly, Percy noticed something else that gave him pause. These people were all shorter than him – other than the horned ones. Strange. Coming here in the body of a Red beast, he would have expected to barely reach their knees.

'Don't tell me these parrots are large animals?'

His heart skipped a beat at the implications. This was huge! Red beasts were essentially regular animals, mostly untouched by magic. They could still use Mana Sense, and possibly Circulation too, but their affinity had yet to start influencing their bodies at a deeper level.

That was why Red beasts had the greatest size disparity of all grades. One could be as small as a mouse, or as large as an elephant. It wasn't until core advancements came into play that this began to change. The smallest creatures grew the most from each evolution, first to the size of a fox at Orange, then to about the size of a human at Yellow, and so on.

As for animals that were already bigger than that to begin with, they still grew larger and stronger with each promotion, but not by nearly as much. Supposedly, the two ends of the spectrum met up at some point between Green and Blue, when the smaller creatures managed to catch up, closing the gap.

However, Percy wasn't thinking about the higher grades right now. The fact that his host was already about as large as a Yellow beast while only at Red was an amazing stroke of luck. Of course, it didn't mean he was anywhere near as strong as a Yellow. Even an Orange opponent would probably be

difficult to contend with. Still, Percy was willing to bet they'd have a massive advantage in the Red challenges.

'First things first.' he shook his head, suppressing his bubbling enthusiasm.

He picked up the loose coconuts that had fallen out of the sack, glaring at one of the green folks who tried to snatch one. The guy was actually at Orange, but he barely reached the parrot's waist. That seemed to deal quite a blow to his self-esteem, as he begrudgingly let go of the exotic fruit a moment later.

'Yeah. Didn't think so.'

Placing his palm on the ground, Percy then tried to log himself into the cube. Naturally, the unintelligible squeaks of his host struggled to convey the message, but a blue circle still lit up around the talon a couple seconds later, turning silver right afterwards.

The cube seemed to understand what he wanted too, as a small hole opened up, the translation device popping out. It looked quite small to his current perspective, not to mention how the parrot didn't have any ears to hook it around, though it still stuck to the side of Percy's face without any issues.

"Authorization pending. Please input user ID."

Percy wanted to roll his eyes, but the bird's eyeballs appeared fixed in place. Clearly, the cube had already recognized him, otherwise it wouldn't have given him the device. Asking for his ID at this point was just needless bureaucracy…

"User ID: WANDERER."

"Authorization granted. Welcome back to the Vault, Percy." the cube replied, though the second sentence was spoken in Metatron's voice, sending a chill down his spine.

Picking the sack again, Percy carried it to a less crowded spot, seeking some privacy. He didn't really care what the Vault's mortals saw – he doubted any of them had the balls to cause him any trouble. That said, he didn't exactly want to garner any unnecessary attention either.

"Cube. Can I speak to Metatron?" he asked once he was alone.

"Evaluating request…"

While he'd rather not make a habit of interacting with the titan frequently, he had been playing with an idea in his mind since his last visit. It was risky, though it would get him more value from these trips if it worked.

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"Evaluation complete. Request denied. User does not meet the minimum requirements. 'Contacting a god of the Vault' is listed on the restricted section for White grade or above. 'Contacting a titan of the Vault' is listed in the restricted section for Concept realm or above. 'Contacting the founder' is not listed on any reward list."

Percy was unfazed by the flurry of messages, having expected them. But he also expected the amendment that should come any second now. After all, there was no way Metatron would leave him without the means of accepting his deal.

"NOTIFICATION: User has been granted special authorization to contact Metatron. Proceed?"

"Yes."

It wasn't until about five minutes later that another portal opened up right next to him, a familiar pentapus slithering right out.

"Nice to see you again, Percy. Though I must admit, it feels like yesterday when we last spoke. Don't tell me you've come around so quickly?" the titan greeted.

“No. I’m not ready to accept your terms just yet. I was hoping to propose a deal of my own instead.” Percy replied, trying to maintain his composure.

Though he couldn’t help but swallow a lump as the titan scanned him from head to toe.

“Only a Red beast this time?”

“I can’t help it. Those are some tough challenges you’ve implemented. I’ll need to ease my way through them.”

“Let’s hear it then.” Metatron nodded. “Though I would caution you to not summon me again for anything not directly related to my offer. I’m a busy man, Percy.” he added in a more severe tone, making him shudder.

“I want you to give me enough life mana for the Morais’ Decree every time I visit the Vault with a new body.”

Metatron blinked a few times, staring at Percy in incredulity.

“I’m still waiting to hear the other half of this so called ‘deal’.”

“In return… I’ll do my best to leave my hosts intact before I leave.” Percy shrugged.

Yet, the words barely had the chance to leave his mouth, when a suffocating pressure descended on him, forcing him down on his knees. His bones creaked and his joints ached in protest, as the parrot hid in the very recesses of his mind, cowering in terror.

“Have you lost your mind?!” Metatron asked, his tone cold as ice. “Did my easy-going demeanour give you the impression that I’ll stand to be blackmailed by a mortal?!”

The titan spoke slowly, each word slamming at Percy with the weight of a battering ram, pressing him against the ground. He knew the god was holding back too, otherwise he would have long reduced him to a sticky puddle.

“I’m… not… blackmailing… anyone…” he spat, each word a struggle.

Creasing his brow, the titan eased the pressure on him somewhat, letting him breathe. It wasn’t until a few seconds later that Percy managed to speak again.

“I’m only asking for proper compensation for the things I’m already giving you.”

“Last time I checked, letting you come and go as you please, and to participate in the challenges is plenty of compensation.”

“That’s how you get me to keep coming back.” Percy flashed the titan a defiant look. “However, I’m under no obligation to leave my hosts intact when I leave. This is just a courtesy you expect of me. All I’m asking is that I get a little something back in return.”

“That’s not a ‘little something’. Do you have any idea how much life mana it costs to repair the Moirais’ Decree? Of course you do. You’ve seen it before.”

But Percy wasn’t quite ready to give up just yet.

“Please. We both know you fix the bodies and give them their new cores the moment I leave. After all, they’re your precious test subjects. I’m just asking you to do it earlier, so that I can use them too. In return, I’ll go out of my way to keep the bodies in a good condition.”

Metatron finally withdrew the rest of his pressure, his eyes narrowing.

“This still sounds like blackmail to me. Why should I agree to this? If you want to earn more things from the Vault, you just have to accept my terms.”

“It’ll cost you nothing. And it’s only fair. I’m giving you an endless supply of bodies with one of the most powerful Decrees in the universe. All I ask is a chance to play around with them for a few days beforehand. If you really want to convince me to collaborate with you, this will go a long way.”

Metatron appeared to think for a couple minutes. Percy didn’t rush him, knowing he’d already pushed the titan way more than any mortal should ever dare to.

“Very well. But I’m warning you. If you try to pull another stunt like this in the future, I’ll revoke your access to the Vault entirely. Your bloodline is valuable alright, but I’m not going to humiliate myself grovelling at a mortal’s feet.”

“I’m guessing you won’t be lending me a Ring of Sacrilege then? What if I ask nicely?” Percy chuckled, half-joking. Emphasis on the ‘half’, though.

“You wish. But I might consider trading you a ring for another, should you get lucky enough to find one. Or something else of equal value.” Metatron laughed too, his voice trailing off as he vanished through another portal.

Once the god was gone, Percy allowed himself to grin. Voicing his farfetched demands to the titan had been a bold move, but the payoff was immense. That said, he didn’t plan on pushing his luck again anytime soon. As for what Metatron had said on the way out, he didn’t pay it much heed.

‘Something else of equal value to a Ring of Sacrilege? As if they grow on trees…’

Shaking his head, he spoke to the system.

“Cube. I want my body healed up completely.”

“Evaluating request…”

“Evaluation complete. Request denied. User does not meet the minimum requirements. ‘Healing via divine mana’ is listed in the restricted section for Yellow grade or above.”

It wasn’t until a minute later the cube corrected itself.

“NOTIFICATION: User has been granted special authorization to receive a god’s life mana. Proceed?”

“Do it.” he said, not even caring if anybody saw this. The big dog was already in the know.

“Accumulating life mana. Healing begins in 6 rits.”

Chapter 158: Plan

Strictly speaking, the parrot didn’t need that much healing.

Unlike Gabe, who had been stabbed full of holes before Percy first found him, the bird had merely choked to death. They only needed to make up for the minor deterioration the body had undergone between death and reanimation.

Suffice to say, Percy was forced to keep scratching himself during the process, to ensure the cube didn’t stop pouring life mana into them before the second core was ready. Naturally, the poor bird was taken aback both by the suffocating amount of liquid mana enveloping them, and by Percy’s insistence on self-harm. However, he was still too frightened by their meeting with the titan to dare interfere with his guest.

A few minutes later, Percy nodded in appreciation, searching inwards for the new organ.

‘Take the reins over, will you?’

Next, he instructed the parrot to grab their supplies and head towards the challenge cubes. The sooner they started collecting credits, the more time he’d have to study the new runes.

Percy did consider dropping by the residential cubes to greet his friend, but ultimately decided against it. It hadn’t been that long since he met Gabe, and it wasn’t like he had any good news for him. The best he could do right now was to keep getting stronger.

Of course, he'd also thought about renting a room himself, so that he wouldn't have to stay outside during the whole visit. Unfortunately, even the smallest lodging cost way too much, priced at around a credit for every 18 or so Remior days – Percy's best estimate. In fact, he was a little surprised his stingy friend had deigned to splurge on that himself. Then again, the only alternative was spending his entire life homeless.

Sadly, credits were far scarcer for a Red than they were for a Green, so Percy would have to soldier through the next few weeks. Besides, his host was a beast, so it wasn't like he'd grown up indoors either.

As they walked towards the challenge cubes, Percy ignored the bird's fumbling attempts to keep the coconuts from spilling out of the rapidly degrading sack. His attention was focused on their abdomen, as he tried to locate and awaken the second core.

'I still can't believe Metatron agreed to this.'

The impact of their new organ could hardly be overstated. While it would certainly help them do far better inside the combat challenges, that wasn't what excited Percy the most. The best part was that it would let him spend a lot more time in the magiscript challenge. After all, their beast mana couldn't leave their body, and their teal mana couldn't be replenished. Had they not netted themselves a new core, they'd be lucky to last through the first wave.

Percy was quite literally viewing the new organ as a source of ink!

Of course, the ancient titan wasn't dumb. Both he and Percy were fully aware of this unspoken subtext behind their negotiations. Had he refused Percy's request, the latter would feel more pressure to accept the titan's terms or, at the very least, reveal a few more of his secrets.

'I guess he knows I won't come back here as often if he makes my life too difficult.'

In any case, locating the new organ didn't take him too long, though he'd have to clear the first few channels before he could fill it up. Naturally, he started doing just that immediately, but his rumbling stomach interrupted him a couple hours later, breaking his concentration.

‘Ok, let’s take a lunch break.’

Grabbing a couple coconuts from the pile, he slammed them against one another to crack their shells. It only took a few attempts, which meant that either their shells were weaker than regular coconuts, or that his host was stronger than a Red human.

Shrugging, he bit at the fruit’s interior, tearing a chunk out. It was the same pink colour as the outside, but it was soft and spongy, dripping with a refreshing juice. That said, it tasted nothing like he had expected.

‘What the hell?! It’s salty!’

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And not just salty. It had a bit of an oily texture too, its flavour vaguely reminding him of raw salmon. Not quite the sweet snack he’d been looking forward to. Still, he guessed it should be rather nutritious.

A few bites later, Percy took a step back, allowing his host to take over. The exotic snack didn’t exactly taste bad per se, but he knew the bird would enjoy it a lot more than he did. In the end, they ate four of the damn things! Who’d have thought that raising the dead, travelling across the universe and negotiating with a titan could work such an appetite?

As a fortunate side effect, the familiar taste seemed to placate the parrot’s growing unease too. The poor creature had started sending him images of the sandy beach a few hours ago, clearly longing to return to its home and friends.

‘Maybe one day, buddy…’ Percy sighed.

He wasn’t sure if the bird understood him, but it remained silent, letting him resume his work on the channels.

‘Fingers crossed for a pure affinity.’ he thought at some point.

Honestly, Percy had never expected the day would come when he'd wish for that. Without Crystallization, this would pretty much be the worst possible outcome with regards to the combat challenges. However, it was the affinity he was most used to drawing the runes with, which was his primary goal for the trip.

He wasn't only thinking about the credits and the rewards either. The magiscript challenge would be a good way to assess his current skill in the sublime art, and to figure out what the next steps would be.

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'Two days…'

This was a new record for him. Percy was confident he was the universe's leading expert in awakening mana cores by now. He was also experienced enough to tell the new affinity wasn't one he'd used before.

While he couldn't manipulate the mana directly just yet – not until he managed to fill up the new organ and add his willpower to it – he could see that the nascent channels took a different route through their body than any he'd come across in the past.

'Oh well, I'll have my answer soon enough I suppose…' he shrugged.

It wasn't until an hour later that the core was full, sending a wave of vitality rippling through the parrot's body. Getting a second core at the same grade was quite the boon – it should double their strength, on paper at least. That said, the fact the bird was already much larger than the typical Red beast did somewhat diminish the impact.

Next, Percy pulled a sliver of mana to their right fore-talon, manifesting a blob of brown which quickly coalesced into a fistful of sand. It was rather obvious what affinity this was, but Percy still pulled the Status up for the final confirmation.

'Figures.'

Not the most ideal outcome, but certainly within expectations. Sadly, Percy had never actually possessed an earth user before, which meant there would be a bit of a learning curve ahead.

Takeo, Gabe and Micky weren't the only sentients his clones had possessed over the years. The rest hadn't held any particularly interesting secrets for him to bring back to Remior, though he'd experienced a few other common affinities through them, including fire, air, water and pure. Though earth just happened to be one of the two elements he was completely inexperienced in, along with lightning.

'First time for everything I guess.'

Unwilling to waste time, he continued opening more channels. It would take him weeks to clear as many as the average mage used, but he didn't need all of those. As long as he could send the mana to his talons to draw with, and maybe use it in a fight, it should be plenty. Percy didn't expect to be casting any profound Refined spells in this body, but giving himself a small edge against Red golems shouldn't be that tall an order.

'I wonder if I can use the sand to reinforce the teal mana...' he thought suddenly.

In theory, it should work. Structurally, the sand wasn't that different from the cyan powder, and he already knew that all affinities could be fused. Often, in multiple ways too. Hell, he'd already discovered a couple different approaches to fusing pure mana with itself. If he did this, he'd have another edge during the combat challenges without having to compromise his secret.

But he quickly shook his head. Even if it was possible, it would take him weeks of experimentation to get there. His limited supply of fused mana would run out way before he saw any tangible results.

'It's not worth it.'

Percy then looked back at the pile of coconuts. It had shrunk slightly, but they still had plenty to last them for over a month. The parrot would too, his physical injuries already healed.

Though that didn't mean it was wise to stay here as long as possible. Percy actually had a few specific goals for this trip. Other than getting Nesha another rune for the spatial amulets, he wanted something

for himself too. He didn't know exactly what, but he was hoping for an enchantment that would let him amass more soul mana for his experiment.

'The sooner I bring them back, the better. After all, my main body is under a lot of pressure.'

Taking everything into account, Percy made a rough plan for the rest of his trip. He'd spend the rest of the week clearing out as many earth channels as he could, before diving into the magiscript challenge. He'd progress as far as possible as his current skill with the concealment runes would allow. Hopefully, that would mean at least a couple of waves. Then, he'd do the same with the combat challenges…

'Actually, I should give myself a couple of weeks to practice the new runes too. Two weeks for the challenges, two weeks for learning. I'll return home a little over month from now, whatever the outcome.'

Chapter 159: Magiscript challenge

"Wave begins. May your challenge be successful!"

Percy stared at the cylindrical piece of metal erected in the middle of the room. It was too short to be considered a pillar. A podium maybe?

Shrugging, he approached. In any case, the magiscript challenge wasn't dangerous like the others. Just difficult. Hopefully, the first wave of the Red level would be manageable though.

Reaching the strange structure, he saw it descend slightly lower, seemingly adjusting itself to his own height. A second cylinder rose up from the ground behind him, reaching only about halfway to the first one. It was just tall enough to serve as a seat.

'Huh. I guess they want us to be comfortable during the challenge.'

Next, he looked at the first podium. A few symbols had lit up. Percy only recognized two of them, still not as proficient in the Vault's language as he would like. Luckily, the translation device took care of it.

'Draw any rune 100 times, with at least a 90% success rate.'

‘Ok. It’s not that bad.’

Evidently, a single rune was enough to carry him through the first wave. It still meant the locals couldn’t make any progress in the magiscript challenge unless they earned some credits from the others first. Or did the cube give them a few credits to get them started? Or a free lesson? Percy would have to explore the system some more later. Perhaps there was some kind of starter pack he was missing out on.

In any case, the first wave seemed manageable. Gathering some earth mana on one of his claws, he began to carve one rune after another on the podium’s smooth surface. He’d already practiced with this enchantment for months until he could reliably draw it on his scythe. It shouldn’t take him many attempts to get through it…

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‘Hmmm… This is annoying...’he frowned, staring at the results.

‘Enchantment: Concealment (General). Difficulty: 1. Runes drawn: 100. Time taken: 3192 rits. Success rate: 87%. Score adjusted due to difficulty: 87%. Wave failed. Try again?’

Percy was sure he was normally better than this. Evidently, the parrot’s lacking dexterity coupled with the unfamiliar affinity impacted him negatively, pulling his score down. The low difficulty of his chosen enchantment also meant he wasn’t eligible for any bonus points either.

Even worse, this was his fourth attempt already, each one having taken a little over an hour. It couldn’t be helped, as his mana tended to run out about 20 runes in, forcing him to take several breaks to refill his core during each attempt.

“No.”

Naturally, Percy wasn’t going to quit so easily, but his host had been bugging him to take a lunch break for a while now. Walking to a side of the challenge cube, Percy sat next to the coconut sack, picking a couple of them from the pile.

He’d been forced to bring his supplies inside, as somebody might try snatching some if he left them unattended. This wasn’t a big problem during the relatively peaceful magiscript challenge, though he wasn’t sure what to do when he started working on the combat ones.

‘If we’re lucky, the golems won’t touch the coconuts. Though I suppose I’ll have to live here for the foreseeable future.’ he chuckled. ‘Hopefully they don’t kick me out.’

Either way, that was a problem for later.

After finishing his meal, Percy returned to the centre of the room, restarting the wave. His host had no interest in the boring task, falling back to the recesses of his mind, waiting for all this nonsense to be over.

This book's true home is on another platform. Check it out there for the real experience.

In the end, it took Percy three more attempts to barely eek out the required 90% success rate. Spending about half a day on the first wave was definitely worse than he’d hoped. Still acceptable though, considering he’d given himself two weeks to get through all the challenges.

“Congratulations! Wave 1 has been cleared! Calculating rewards…” the soulless voice declared.

It wasn’t Percy’s first time hearing this, but clearing a wave all by himself hit a lot differently than when he was merely tagging alongside Gabe. He was finally going to earn his first credits!

“Awarded credits: 30. Current balance: 30.”

‘Is that it?’ he frowned.

Obviously, he’d known lower grade challenges gave out fewer credits, but this was still less than expected.

‘If my memory serves me, Gabe earned like 6000 from the sixth wave, and 3000 from the third one. So, it should be 1000 on the first…’

Extrapolating, he figured each grade roughly tripled the rewards – rounded for convenience. The first wave of the Orange grade would probably grant 100, while the one for Yellow should be at 300…

Honestly, it wasn’t so bad. A portion of sizian meat was valued at 1 credit, and its effect was pretty much on par with an elixir on Remior. Converted to contribution points, that meant Percy had just earned about 12000 of them!

‘It took me over a month of hunting to get that many back when I joined the Guild.’ he thought, feeling a little better.

Though the Red-borns of the Vault were still screwed if this was all they had to go by. Assuming they could clear the first three waves of each challenge – a rather generous assumption too, as not all of them had a bloodline or a blessing – they’d only get 540 portions of sizian meat in total. And that was without taking into account the cost of actually delving into runecrafting in the first place. This wouldn’t even last them two years – meaning they’d never make it to Orange.

‘I guess Gabe wasn’t kidding when he said the low-borns starve to make space for more people.’

Presumably, the system took care of the kids at least until they first awakened their core, so somewhere between the ages of 5 and 8. After all, they didn’t even know their grade before then, nor did they have the mental maturity to undertake any challenges.

After that, the Red-born children only survived a couple years at best – which was ample time for them to demonstrate any unique bloodline or talent they might have. Motivated by their empty bellies, they’d give it their all until their last breath, at which point the gods could pick out any occasional outlier with a promising bloodline, leaving the rest to die in their early teens.

‘And Metatron is probably wondering why I’m not taking his shitty deal.’ Percy felt the urge to laugh. ‘I’ll be damned if I ever work with that bastard.’

Orange-borns had it slightly better. The relatively talented ones could potentially earn around 1800 or so credits at Orange, barely giving them enough time to hit Yellow. At that point, they could earn another 5400 credits if they could maintain their momentum, living for another decade or two.

But that was it.

Only the most talented Yellow-borns who had both a higher starting point and the potential to go past the third wave actually stood a chance of making it to the higher grades. And even those people – people like Gabe – wouldn't easily hit Violet or White.

'No wonder the guy is so stingy with his money. The cutoffs are even steeper here than Remior.'

Had Gabe been born on Remior, he'd probably be on par with the most gifted members of the Divine Root – even before he obtained his second core. Here, his future wasn't quite as secure. The realization exacerbated Percy's guilt over all the things he'd made his friend buy him.

'I swear I'll make it up to him.'

In any case, he couldn't do much as he was. There was only one path forward and he intended to see it through to the end.

The good news was that he had several advantages the locals didn't. First, he didn't need any sizian meat, which meant he could funnel all his credits into his studies. Second, he could earn credits from every grade, by coming here with various bodies. Obviously, the lower levels wouldn't reward him as much, but every little bit helped. Percy fully intended to rob this place clean by the time he was done with it. Finally, his arrangement with Metatron would give him an edge, his second core making up for his lack of a blessing or a bloodline. Assuming the titan kept true to his word, of course.

"Cube. Start the second wave of the magiscript challenge, Red level. User ID: WANDERER."

"Authorization granted. Restarting 'magiscript' challenge, Red level, wave 2. Wave begins in 18 rits."

Percy patiently waited for the podium to light up again, before checking the requirements.

‘Draw any rune 200 times, in under 5000 rits, with at least a 95% success rate.’

Naturally, the requirements had increased quite steeply, not only leaving him with much less room for errors, but also imposing a somewhat strict time limit. He’d have to pick up the pace and improve the quality of his runes to get through it. Still, this was good.

‘My proficiency should continue to go up as I acclimate to this body. As long as these waves don’t need more than one enchantment, I can keep going…’

In typical Percy fashion, however, he just had to go jinx himself. Getting through the second wave took him three more days. In theory, he still had plenty of time to attempt the third one.

That said, the requirements finally stumped him…

Chapter 160: Shopping

‘Draw any three runes 300 times in total, in under 6000 rits, with at least a 95% success rate. Each individual rune has to be drawn at least 50 times.’

‘Shit.’

Percy only knew the concealment and pocket runes, but the latter didn’t even work without space mana, nor had he practiced them much.

The book on the concealment runes that Gabe had lent him had contained other variants besides the “general” one he was using. Though most of those involved specific mana types that he didn’t have access to. For example, there was a variant that needed fire and air mana – emulating the light affinity – which turned an object dim. Supposedly, that was the cornerstone of more complex enchantments to even turn something translucent. There were even some variants using fire or water that could be used to hide an object’s heat signature – achieving the same result via different principles.

In any case, most of that had been useless for him, either because he lacked the corresponding affinities, or because the effects didn't particularly interest him. If he wanted to get through this wave, he'd have to learn some new enchantments.

'It's not so bad… That was my goal in coming here in the first place. But I suppose I'll have to adjust my schedule slightly.'

"Cube. Abort the challenge. Also, tell me if you have any runes for preserving souls. User ID: WANDERER."

"Challenge aborted. Wave failed."

"Authorization granted. Evaluating request…"

Ever since Percy realized he didn't have enough soul mana to draw the mysterious creatures to his body, he'd decided to sift through the Vault's database for any runes that might help.

Of course, he already knew he'd be hard pressed to find any enchantments for storing mana directly. As he'd learned a long time ago, a mortal's mana was much more difficult to preserve for an extended period of time. Maybe there was a way to compress a lot of mortal mana into divine mana, but even if there was, he very much doubted he'd be able to draw a rune capable of withstanding such a process.

In other words, his only option was to take a step back and look for a way to delay a soul from deteriorating. That way, they could gather a lot more food for Micky to eat at once, giving him a ton of mana in one go.

"Evaluation complete. There are 4568 books, 14531 research logs, 72 encyclopaedias and 485736 news reports that mention "rune", "preserve" and "soul". Part of the selection is restricted for your grade. Only 4287 books, 3765 research logs, 20 encyclopaedias and 267890 news reports are available for purchase. Total cost: 475399 credits. Current balance: 90."

"Geez. It's even worse than the last time. Ok… Leave only mentions of standalone runes that can be drawn by beginners below Yellow. Filter out any runes not in the Vault's language. No point in learning

those if I plan on learning magiscript in the future. Leave only runes that need the soul affinity – I imagine those will be more effective for the job."

"Evaluating request…"

"Evaluation complete. There are 8 books, 4 research logs, 1 encyclopaedias and 367 news reports available for purchase. Total cost: 1007 credits. Current balance: 90."

'Hmmm… Maybe I'd be better served buying some sort of index of beginner runes rather than trying to look for them one at a time?'

At the end of the day, Percy had no clue how he was meant to navigate the database. The gods certainly haven't made it particularly intuitive.

"What's the title of the encyclopaedia?"

"Evaluating request…"

"Evaluation complete. The encyclopaedia is titled '10000 magiscript runes for beginners'. The encyclopaedia is valued at 200 credits. Current balance: 90."

Love this novel? Read it on Royal Road to ensure the author gets credit.

'I'll be damned! That sounds exactly like the kind of thing I need!'

Percy's avian heart skipped a beat, though there were still a few issues to solve. And not just the fact he couldn't afford the book quite yet.

"How deeply does the encyclopaedia delve into each rune? Is there enough material there to learn them?"

“Evaluating request…”

“Evaluation complete. The encyclopaedia lists the runes, their requirements, a few of the most common variants, and their function. The preamble notes ‘…this encyclopaedia is mostly meant to be used as an index of common runes, not a teaching aide…’”

Creasing his brow, Percy doused his bubbling enthusiasm. As he had expected, this was too good to be true. Gabe had lent him an entire book on just the topic of concealment runes alone. Buying detailed information on 10000 runes with a measly 200 credits was, frankly, impossible.

‘The encyclopaedia is still going to be useful for me later on. I should get it as soon as I can. For now, I’ll have to focus on the runes I want.’

“Cube, are the remaining 8 books all focused on specific runes?”

“Evaluating request…”

“Evaluation complete. The 8 books are titled ‘Preservation rune, Vol. 1, 2, 5, 9, 13, 16, 19, 20’ respectively. Each delves into different variants of the ‘preservation’ rune. These include the variants that meet the previous search criteria. Total cost: 80 credits. Current balance: 90.”

“Ok. Does any one of the tomes include variants suitable for preserving living souls, dead souls, mana constructs and perishable objects?”

Percy’s query wasn’t random. One part of his goal was to preserve a few corpses for Micky to eat, but he also hoped to learn a rune he could use to patch his clones’ souls more effectively. That might allow him to extend his trips even further. As for the last part – well, preservation runes were widely used. It would be nice to learn a variant suitable for his Soul Harvester, or something to keep food fresh for longer.

“Evaluating request…”

“Evaluation complete. Volumes 5, 9 and 20 meet all the search criteria. Total cost: 30 credits. Current balance: 90.”

Percy couldn’t help but grin. He was certain he’d find what he was looking for somewhere in these three books, and the price was already affordable. Of course, he could try narrowing it down some more to save a few more credits, but he’d rather browse through the options and pick the most effective variant to learn.

“Is there any discount for somebody’s first purchase? Or a free tutorial for beginners? How are kids with no credits meant to delve into the challenges in the first place?”

“Evaluating request…”

“Evaluation complete. User is eligible for ‘beginner’s bundle’. ‘Beginner’s bundle’ contains: 30 portions of sizian meat, allowance of 50 credits to be spent on reading material.”

“Seriously? How come I wasn’t informed of this? Was I supposed to just guess it exists?”

“Evaluating request…”

“Evaluation complete. All users are automatically notified about the ‘beginner’s bundle’ upon awakening their core. User’s core has already awakened. User should have been informed already.”

Percy tried to roll his eyes again, only to be reminded his host couldn’t do that. He wasn’t sure if Metatron was deliberately being a prick, or if he had genuinely forgotten to mention this, but he was inching towards the former. Either way, this was good news.

“Leave the sizian meat for now.”

He didn’t know if he could sell it back to the cube for credits, but he might need it in the future if one of his clones ended up in need of a quick snack.

“Use my allowance to purchase those three books. I’m also looking for a ‘control’ rune that is compatible with ‘pocket’ runes and spatial amulets. It must be usable with space mana, but I’d like a variant that can also be drawn with other types for broader applications.”

Naturally, this rune was mostly for Nesha, though Percy wouldn’t mind something he could use himself. It would enrich his arsenal, not only to get him through this challenge, but to hopefully allow him to craft more intricate enchantments in the future.

“Confirmed. Deducting credits. New balance: 90. Additional allowance: 20. Delivery in 6 rits.”

“Evaluating request…”

Percy picked up the books from the hole, before the cube assessed his second request.

“Evaluation complete. There are 4 books that meet the previous search criteria. They are titled ‘Control rune, Vol. 7, 8, 18, 21’ respectively. Each book contains at least one variant that is compatible with space mana, pocket runes, spatial amulets, and general applications. Total cost: 40 credits. Current balance: 90. Additional allowance: 20.”

Percy sighed. This was going to be a lot of reading, and he only had two weeks to get through it before it was time to resume the challenges. Still, it couldn’t be helped. The concealment rune had already made him stronger, and the new ones promised to do the same.

“Do it. Use the allowance first.”

If he finished all his tasks in time, there was one more thing he hoped to get by the end of his trip. He had no idea if they even had anything like that, or if he’d have enough credits for it, but it would qualitatively improve his kit if he managed to get his hands on it.

Suddenly, he had a strange thought.

‘Huh. Navigating the cube’s database is a bit of a pain, but I’d never imagined shopping would be so much fun...’