Wanderer 27

Chapter 27: Beast affinity

Mictlantecuhtli (Percival's familiar)

Mana cores:

???:

There was a lot to unpack there.

Seeing the familiar had inherited his friend's name gave him some relief. With any luck, it meant Micky was indeed buried somewhere inside the bird. Well, it was also possible it meant nothing. Perhaps the Status had simply picked that name out of convenience, as that was how Percy thought of the creature.

'Hopefully it's the former.'

Another thing that caught his eye was how his prolific second core had spread out once more. Though it was back to Fractured again – for some reason. By now, he was pretty sure this thing was glued to his soul. After all, his soul was the only thing he'd brought back from the Moirai.

However, it seemed to have more components to it as well. Perhaps one rooted in his body and one in his mind, explaining the two other types of mana needed to repair it. Once he had, his mind followed his soul to Huehue, which was why his clone had only lacked the life part. But now, his mind didn't seem to be present in the familiar, downgrading it by another step.

'In any case, this is a project for the future.'

The next thing he noted was that the mysterious section with the question marks was missing two of the usual culprits. It wasn't that strange the small critter didn't have a bloodline, but Percy was surprised it didn't have a Status either.

‘Then how am I reading it right now?’

The only answer he could come up with was that Micky’s Status was currently just an extension of his own, which he could view through their connection.

“Well? Any idea what’s wrong with it?” baldy asked, snapping him out of his thoughts.

Percy shook his head. There wasn’t enough information to identify the problem. That said, he did have an idea on how to solve it.

“Have you tried feeding it anything bigger than insects?”

“It’s a newborn chick! What else could it eat?” Elaine asked back.

“He doesn’t mean the meat. Just the cores.” baldy explained to his granddaughter before turning to Percy. “It has the beast affinity I imagine?”

The young man nodded. They wouldn’t be needing any tests to confirm that. Every non-sentient animal in the universe had the beast affinity by default. Beast mana was unique in that it couldn’t normally leave one’s body, rendering its owners incapable of casting spells. However, that didn’t make it weak. In fact, it was the opposite. It had the unique property of strengthening its users to such an extent they could compete against mages of the same grade with nothing but brute force.

And this was just the start. This affinity gave animals another colossal advantage that made sentient races envy them greatly. They could advance naturally, without having to resort to things like expensive elixirs. Beast mana was great at consuming and assimilating other mana types, which meant its users could evolve extremely quickly simply by hunting and devouring others.

Had it not been for their general lack of intelligence, beasts might have become the dominant force in the cosmos. Well, there was also the fact that each promotion required a ton of food, which wasn’t exactly sustainable. For example, merely to advance from Red to Orange required the consumption of hundreds of Red cores. This made Blue and Violet beasts extremely rare. As for White? Percy doubted there were any on Remior.

Still, the young man didn't care about Micky's bright future prospects right now. Hearing the bird improved whenever it ate made him think better quality food might be the answer. After all, insects had Brown cores – a special grade below even Red. It was exclusive to them, as larger creatures couldn't survive with something that weak. Perhaps what Micky needed were a few Red cores…

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"It's not like I haven't considered it. Though I don't think the issue is a lack of mana." baldy said. "But we can give it a shot if you want."

Percy insisted. He didn't necessarily disagree with his grandpa's assessment, yet it wasn't like they had a better option.

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Elaine opened the door, entering Percy's room.

Suspended above her hand was a bubble of water, with something squirming inside. It was a mouse, clawing desperately to escape its liquid prison. Unfortunately for it, its efforts weren't going to bear fruit today. Still, Elaine had made sure its head was above the surface, to avoid drowning the animal a minute too soon. It had taken her a couple of hours to procure Micky's meal. The Avalon House had no shortage of meat, but mana cores tended to crumble away and dissipate shortly after one's death. They needed a fresh kill for the bird.

"I'm sorry it took a while. I had to search the fields for ages to find one."

A powerful Green cored mage could naturally capture vermin rather easily, but that was precisely why there weren't any inside the mansion.

"Come on buddy. You need to eat." the young man said.

Percy had been told it was getting harder to wake the bird up, but he hoped to get through to it via their connection. Focusing on the ethereal cord as he gently spoke to his friend seemed to work after a few attempts. The chick moved its head groggily. It needed help standing up.

Elaine lowered the glowing bubble into Percy's other palm as the young man brought his hands together. The girl tightened the sphere, snuffing the life out of the mouse, closing her eyes in the process. Percy knew she didn't like doing it, which only made him appreciate her help more. Then, she pulled the mana away from the rodent, tossing the splash of water aside as the tiny corpse landed in front of Micky.

Percy rolled the body over with his thumb, pointing at the animal's sternum. After some more prodding, the bird finally pecked at it, causing Elaine to look away again. Even Percy wrinkled his nose in disgust, though he didn't avert his gaze. Instead, he activated Mana Sense, unwilling to miss anything important. With his sixth sense, he followed the orb of Red as it rolled down the bird's throat, swiftly dissolving in its stomach. A gush of mana soon flowed through Micky's body, causing him to perk up before resuming his meal with more vigour.

"It does seem to do something." baldy said.

Percy nodded, still observing his friend, relieved to see his condition improve however briefly. He and Archibald kept watching the bird, both raising their eyebrows as it continued getting better with each peck. Micky couldn't possibly eat more than a third of the carcass in one sitting and, even then, it would take him a while to finish. Naturally, each bite was no larger than a grain of rice, yet – for some reason – the mana never stopped spreading out of the familiar's stomach.

"What's going on?" Percy asked. "Most of the mana should've been inside the mouse's core. Where's the rest coming from?"

His grandpa appeared just as perplexed as he was. Each bite gave Micky less mana than that first one, but still not nearly as little as they would have expected. Meanwhile, the bird's mood greatly improved, as the familiar pecked more and more frequently, like his life depended on it.

'Don't tell me?!' Percy's eyes widened as he harboured a guess.

It was only a couple minutes later that Micky's condition stopped improving. The bird was still eating gluttonously, but the meat had stopped releasing mana at some point.

"We're going to need more mice." Percy said, flashing his cousin a sheepish grin.

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"Please tell me this is the last time I'm doing this." Elaine spoke with a grimace.

Percy scarcely registered his cousin's words, his attention focused on the floor. There, Micky was skidding around happily, having already finished eating another two mice, currently heading towards the third.

Well, 'finished' might not be the best word, as the bird seemed to grow disinterested in each carcass after a minute or two, consuming less than a tenth of the meat. Only after his third victim stopped providing him any mana did Micky pause. This time, he wasn't in a rush to reach the next one either.

"I think he's full." baldy said.

"Micky, I know you're stuffed, but can you keep going? Just one more." the young man pleaded through their connection.

The bird tilted its head in confusion. Percy wasn't sure if it had understood his instructions. Maybe it just didn't get why it had to continue eating when it wasn't hungry. Still, it listened after a moment, walking to the fourth mouse. Though its steps were clearly a touch less eager than earlier.

Like before, some mana was soon released inside Micky's stomach, flowing through his channels, filling his body. Unlike before, however, the bird's frame was already saturated, rendering it unable to absorb any more. The familiar looked unwell, as if he was about to be sick, having no outlet for the excess. The Red glow rose up his throat and towards his beak, about to spill out, when Micky stubbornly held it in, unwilling to throw up his food. Yet more mana manifested in his stomach, mounting up the pressure, making Percy stare at his friend in alarm.

“That’s enough. Just let it g–”

The young man was about to stop him, when something strange made him swallow his words. For seemingly no reason, a chunk of the excess mana instantly vanished from Micky’s body, as a subtle flow trickled through their connection.

It wasn’t much, but Percy recognized it, his eyes widening.

‘Soul mana!’