Wanderer 271

Chapter 271: Wiseman's Chamber

Percy arrived at the designated lounge an hour early, unwilling to waste even a second of his time in the Wiseman's Chamber.

"Good morning, sir." an attendant greeted him with a deep bow.

He was an older Orange-born. Not quite at Blue yet, though a few silver streaks ran through his mane. His luxurious clothes looked twenty times more expensive than Percy's robes.

It took Percy a few moments to recover from his surprise at the man's overly polite greeting. What "sir"? The academy's staff generally spoke to the students more informally than that. Evidently, the Felmarans took this place very seriously. But he shook those thoughts away, focusing on what was important.

"Morning. Any chance I can get in early, since I'm already here?" Percy asked, testing his luck.

The clerk merely chuckled, taking it as a joke.

"My apologies, sir. We are required to strictly adhere to the schedule. The chamber consumes vast resources while active. Even a single extra minute inside would be costly for the academy, not to mention unfair to the other students."

"Alright." Percy sighed, swallowing his disappointment.

The attendant gestured to a nearby sofa, embroidered with intricate patterns. Percy sat, immediately noting how unnaturally soft the fabric was – likely enchanted to be so. The man then offered him a drink, a juice served in a tall, conical glass with ice cubes floating at the surface. Taking a sip, Percy savoured the refreshing coolness and mild sourness. It was one of the best things he'd tasted on Felmara, second only to Lyn's pastries.

"Wow, if I knew you'd treat me this well, I would've woken up earlier."

The attendant smiled brightly.

“I’m glad to hear you’re satisfied with our service, sir. I hope you had a restful night. It will help you make the most of your time in the chamber.”

Percy nodded. He would have done that even if Dugris hadn’t already suggested it. The potions would work wonders for maintaining his mental clarity and keeping him awake longer, but they couldn’t replace sleep entirely. That was part of the reason why each session in the chamber only lasted a few days. Getting tired halfway through his stay would be a colossal waste.

The two waited in silence for the next few minutes. Percy absentmindedly sipped his drink, admiring the grand chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, as well as the intricate carvings on the wooden walls. Most depicted the same man whose statue decorated the garden – Rhaziel Proudheart.

The god was shown in all sorts of settings – healing the sick, patronizing the poor, defending the weak… Clearly, the Felmarans worshipped their leader dearly. From what Percy had seen so far, it seemed warranted.

“Sir, it’s time.” the attendant said after a while, breaking him from his thoughts.

Getting up, Percy followed him through a long corridor, passing a couple of armed guards standing at attention on either side. Eventually, they arrived before a sealed door, covered in so many enchantments it made him dizzy. Whether it was through his eyes or through Mana Sense, it resembled the sun more than a slab of wood.

“Please, sir.” the clerk said, stepping aside. “Just a reminder – you will spend over four days inside, though only three will have passed outside. Ah, but there is no need to track the time yourself. The enchantments will deactivate automatically as soon as your session ends. May your training be fruitful.”

Percy nodded in thanks before entering. As the door shut behind him, several more enchantments flared to life, illuminating every surface of the cube-shaped room. There was another door on the other side, which he knew led to a small bathroom he’d have to use sooner or later.

A soft hissing filled the air as colourful vapours seeped through vents along the walls, merging into a dense, pale mist that made it difficult to see past his nose.

Taking a deep breath, Percy allowed the potions to settle in his lungs, as a soothing sensation spread out of his chest, reaching every corner of his body. His muscles loosened, the lingering fatigue melting away like a snowflake under the summer sun.

Sadly, this sense of euphoria barely lasted a couple of seconds before the seed in his abdomen woke from its slumber, sucking the life mana like a gluttonous vortex. Exhaling, Percy noticed the wisps coming out of his mouth had a faint purple hue.

Soon, the vents activated again, pumping more mist into the chamber. It was predominantly green, replacing the life mana faster than the other types, to match his consumption.

Unauthorized usage: this tale is on Amazon without the author's consent. Report any sightings.

‘Eh… if this continues, Leo’s core might be repaired by the time this is over…’

This wasn’t necessarily a good thing. Percy hoped he wouldn’t have to explain why he’d used up so much life mana. Plus, he was unlikely to be around long enough to benefit from the new core. Not to mention he’d have to weave a bandage for Leo and instruct him on how to make more of them…

In any case, this was a problem for later. For now, Percy shifted his attention to the potions again. At least the other types had already taken effect. The tension in his forehead disappeared, as the mind mana gently caressed his brain. His worries dissolved, leaving only clarity behind. At the same time, he felt the pure mana rushing into his sternum, trying to refill his core. Not very helpful at the moment, since it was already full, but this would change as soon as he started training.

‘Wow, this feels nice, even outside the practical benefits.’

More importantly, something stirred in his mind. It was difficult to fully grasp, as he had little experience with mind mana, but he could tell that more of it was flowing to his brain than the last time he used a similar potion. Leo’s fragmented memories grew clearer, details that had once been hazy suddenly sharpening into focus.

‘It actually works!’ his heart skipped a beat, though he quickly tempered his enthusiasm.

Just because the potions had a positive effect on the lingering memories, it didn’t mean they could restore Leo’s sense of self. If the past few seconds were any indication, the effect was incredibly subtle. At this rate, he’d need months here to make any real progress, if it was even possible.

‘Ok. I’ll have to find a way to speed up the process.’

Next, he set his satchel down in the corner. It was standard practice to bring some food with him, and he’d also brought a few notebooks. Primarily, Leo’s diary and the notes from the Pre-casting courses. It was the only subject the two of them shared, so he figured they might help him accelerate his training and catalyse his host’s recovery at the same time.

But first, there was something else he wanted to do.

Placing a hand on the wall, he traced the contours of the runes. He couldn’t understand them – having never learned the locals’ runecrafting language – but he was still curious about their complexity.

‘There are at least a dozen nested enchantments in here…’

Percy wasn’t blind to the skill required to pull something like this off. The people who’d drawn these probably had centuries of experience under their belts. If they had access to the Vault’s language, they could have done even better.

Though he had to move his face really close to make the details through the mist enveloping the room. A few runes he recognized as self-repair enchantments. He couldn’t read them, but he’d seen similar ones on other objects.

Of course, that was not to say the room didn’t require regular maintenance. The self-repair runes could restore everything in its original condition only if provided with the appropriate materials, and there was no substitute for the time mana coursing through some of the runes. Naturally, the academy had to bring in people with the correct affinity every now and then.

Other than that, the time acceleration enchantments seemed to be fuelled by ambient mana, even though they'd certainly needed a time mage to draw them the first time. In that, they were actually similar to Nesha's pocket runes – drawn using her space mana but operated remotely without it.

'I should try to learn some time enchantments at some point. They might come in handy. Plus, I'm sure I can find an even better version in the Vault.'

Time dilation was a useful – if somewhat flawed – training tool to have in his arsenal. Even without an enchantment, time affinity users could use their spells to accelerate the flow of time around their body, to increase their advancement speed. At least in theory.

In practice, even Blues would struggle to keep a 50% boost active for more than a couple minutes before emptying their cores. Constantly maintaining it throughout their lives was naturally out of the question. This was why most of them just used their mana as a weapon, to accelerate or decelerate somebody else's attack, much like that guy from House Tantalus had done a few years ago.

Then again, even if one used advanced runecrafting to apply a more permanent enchantment – as the Felmarans had done here – time dilation didn't do anything to solve the biggest problem with core purification. After all, it consumed one's lifespan at the same rate as it pushed their advancement speed, netting them no benefit whatsoever.

'No wonder rooms like this aren't too common.'

Generally, its only value was to speed one's time in relation to others. This was why Percy was currently travelling to the Thirsty Valley. Reaching Yellow sooner would allow him to protect himself and his friends. The Divine Order regularly used it to outpace their enemies, so that they'd have an easier time defending Remior. Meanwhile, the Felmarans probably wanted their brightest students to contribute to their world's technology sooner rather than later.

Even so, only a god could accelerate time by severalfold, and it wouldn't be worth it just to help a few mortals. Not unless they could set up a Decree to automatically do it for them.

'That's all nice and dandy, but there's another problem in my case which others don't have to worry about.' Percy smiled bitterly.

His progress was largely tied to his ability to send out clones. Sadly, if he sped up the time around his main body, his clones wouldn't be affected. From his perspective, each clone would stay away for longer, so he'd send fewer of them out in the same span of time.

And, as a mortal, he could produce a finite number of clones over his lifetime. Every second he spent in the Thirsty Valley would cost him some of those limited opportunities. It was something he was keenly aware of, and a sacrifice he was willing to make to obtain the power he needed to protect himself.

'Well, it's not so bad. I'll live for over a thousand years if nothing goes wrong, so the time to Yellow is just a drop in the bucket.'

More importantly, he could potentially flip this drawback into an advantage if he placed his clones in accelerated time instead of his main body. That way, they'd accumulate more knowledge before returning. Though he'd need his clones to have a time affinity for that to work, and possibly some pretty specialized materials to build a chamber like this.

'Anyway, that's a project for later. Better focus on the task at hand.'

Chapter 272: Shards of glass

Glancing around, he quickly spotted a strange circle in the middle of the room. It was covered in even more enchantments than everything else, clearly protecting something extremely valuable. And Percy knew exactly what it was.

The Wiseman's Dust.

There was an indentation inside the circle, about the shape of a palmprint. Percy placed his hand on it without hesitation, prompting an immediate reaction.

Something metallic unlatched with a heavy click, the disk splitting into six slices before retracting to its edges. Beneath them, another protective layer was revealed, this one transparent. It was a glass screen lined with six rows of colourful symbols. They rhythmically pulsed outwards in a spiral pattern, protecting something important. The panel looked rather thin, but Percy was under no delusion he'd be able to scratch it.

Under the glass, he saw a tiny mound of clear sand, emanating a soft light. Compared to the countless enchantments decorating the room, it almost appeared dim, yet still irrevocably demanding of attention. At least, Percy found it difficult to avert his gaze. It radiated a different kind of aura, bathing the room in its mystical power.

Concentrating on the feeling, he realized there wasn't a shred of mana emanating from it. At first, he thought it might be raw willpower – much like a domain. But that wasn't it either. Whatever the sand did, it affected his mind directly like the potions. Though it didn't take him long to realize it didn't empower his thoughts in the same way.

'It's not really making me think faster, or smarter… Just… different…'

Putting it into words wasn't easy, but he felt as if the Wiseman's Dust planted new ideas in his head. Or, more accurately, it helped him develop his own ideas, opening his mind to new possibilities.

Before coming here, he'd extensively planned the details of the trip – hoping to make the most of his time in the chamber. He'd selected specific pre-casting exercises he thought would help him the most, and even decided how he would attempt to heal his host. Yet, after spending mere seconds in the sand's vicinity, he was second-guessing everything, thinking of new ways to refine his approach.

'Wow. This kind of benefit is almost impossible to quantify. But I can see the appeal…'

The time dilation and the potions alone would have allowed him to squeeze weeks' worth of training in mere days. On the other hand, the effects of the dust were both subtler, and yet infinitely more powerful. How they were leveraged ultimately came down to the individual. For some, they might be worthless – offering no guidance at all. But for others, they might be the key to a path they would have forever missed. All that remained to be seen was where Percy stood on this spectrum.

'Either way, this is a priceless experience in and of itself.'

It wasn't every day a mortal got a glimpse of divinity. Perhaps, this kind of out-the-box thinking was precisely what one needed to reach godhood. And maybe, it had to be so deeply engrained in their very bones, that it left all sorts of indelible traces behind.

‘And to think these are just the impurities…’

The clear dust before him was, in a way, little more than filth. The part of the demigod that had failed to ascend.

But, from a different perspective, it was flesh and blood that had accompanied a Green-born for thousands of years, throughout their mortal life. Purified again and again with each promotion, washed repeatedly with raw power, until it faltered at the very last step. Had things gone slightly differently, it could have been part of a greater existence. Blessed with immortality. Destined to eternally roam the cosmos.

Yet, here it was, as residue, doomed to fade with time after gifting a fleeting glimpse of its owner’s radiance to a few lucky mortals.

‘Regardless… it’s time to get started.’

Sitting cross-legged beside the dust, Percy pulled out one of the notebooks and flipped to the first page. He’d read them all before, of course, but he hadn’t copied his host’s actions entirely. Certainly not inside the Wiseman’s Chamber.

Pre-casting was a broad technique that covered all the ways one might prepare the mana inside their core to influence their spells. Consequently, there were countless ways to practice it, depending on factors like affinity, talent, spells, and intended use. What worked for one person might not be suitable for another.

If you spot this tale on Amazon, know that it has been stolen. Report the violation.

Had Percy developed a training plan in a vacuum, it might have even been best to ignore the boy’s previous efforts entirely, doing his own thing.

‘But mimicking his methods is the best way to jog the lost memories…’

The first exercise involved splitting the mana inside his core into two portions. A trivial thing, even for Percy. He wasn't yet at the level of the other Pre-casting 4 students, but he could already separate his mana into more than a couple flows if he wanted. Still, he didn't skip the exercise, choosing to read Leo's notes carefully.

'…Mr. Lonan stressed the importance of visualizing the mana inside our core. He said it's easier to control when you can clearly picture its movements. He suggested we each develop our own internal model, since what works for one person might not suit another…'

'…I found it easier to keep the two flows apart by imagining them as two distinct marbles rolling along opposite walls of my core. Lyn pictured hers as two candle flames floating in her sternum, but that didn't seem right for an air affinity. In my case, the mana wants to stay in motion, so I have to play along – shaping it into two orbs chasing each other in an endless cycle…'

Following the instructions, Percy adopted Leo's imagery, setting his own instincts aside. Strictly speaking, this wasn't ideal for him, since it went directly against his long-term goal of forcing the mana to stay still. But there might be time to try his own methods after working through the notebooks.

Sure enough, it took only seconds to replicate Leo's actions. Unfortunately, nothing changed. The boy's fragmented memories continued absorbing the mind mana at the same snailish rate as before.

'Maybe the exercise was too simple. Or maybe it's because his method was too different from my own.' he shrugged, turning to the next page.

'…restraining the flow to a single axis is difficult because the mana wants to move randomly. It's also hard to track its motion inside the core, as it flows incredibly fast in a tight space. After hours of failure, I came up with a simple trick…'

'…pressing my index finger against my chest, I imagined it piercing through my core. Then, I focused on moving the mana around it without ever touching. A bit silly – I know – but it worked! It only took me a few minutes to get it right once I applied this! Though the others did make fun of me for a couple of weeks, until I learned to do it without the finger…'

Now, this one was more promising. Still relatively basic, but Percy hadn't practiced it as much as the previous one. He could do it, though his rotations were more wobbly than he'd care to admit.

Pressing his fingertip to his sternum, he tried shaping the flow correctly. This time, he got an immediate reaction. An image flashed in his mind. Blurry and fleeting, but still a great sign. Pushing onward, he immersed himself into the exercise, reaching for the fragmented memory.

The outlines sharpened. It looked like a classroom, but it lacked colour or sound. Beyond that, everything around him remained indistinct.

Percy tried to make out the details of the nearest person, but that caused him to make a mistake with the exercise. He slipped, the mana veering off course, colliding with what should have been the image of his finger. He tried to correct it, but the damage was done – the memory vanished.

'It doesn't matter. I'm clearly on the right track here!'

Not letting the hiccup discourage him, Percy spent a few seconds examining his mind. His brain seemed to be drinking the mind mana more eagerly than before. Not fast enough yet, but it was a promising start.

Diving back in, he repeated the exercise, this time causing the memory to return even faster.

Percy accelerated the mana's rotation, careful not to lose control this time. At first, nothing changed, other than the memory growing slightly clearer. But he kept at it, pushing the speed up bit by bit as he got more comfortable with it.

Eventually, something else changed. A second memory surfaced, equally incomplete. This one contained no images – only sounds. The chatter of his classmates buzzed in the background, Mr. Lonan's stern voice explaining something. The strangest thing was that the memories felt disconnected – as though they belonged to separate moments entirely. Yet, Percy wasn't sure that was the case, as the sound seemed to match the teacher's lips.

Focusing on the two memories almost caused him to lose control again, but he held on. Juggling the exercise and the images, he pushed the mana faster, knowing this was the key to Leo's recovery.

The two fragments twitched – almost like they were reaching for one another!

‘I knew it! They’re from the same day – they just drifted apart due to the damage in Leo’s mind!’

Pressing forward, Percy pushed the rotation to its limits. It was already risky – the mana was moving fast enough to injure Leo if he made a mistake. But he also understood his host wouldn’t need a healthy core if his mind remained broken.

The fragments trembled. This time, they moved closer to one another, though they met heavy resistance. Like two islands fixed in place amidst a raging ocean, Percy had to not only unlodge them from their spot, but to also push them across a sea.

“Ugh… shit!” Percy groaned, nearly losing control.

It wasn’t a painless experience in the slightest. The memories felt like shards of glass, stabbing violently into his brain. But he gritted his teeth, enduring the agony. This was the only way forward.

The fragments moved again, and that wasn’t everything. This time, a third one appeared – that of his finger pressing against his chest. But it was slightly different. It felt muted, and the finger was pointing a few degrees off. This wasn’t Percy’s doing! It was from when Leo had done the same thing, months – or maybe years – ago!

And that was just the start. A fourth component soon appeared – mana rotating in his core. It overlapped with what Percy was doing, except Leo was more precise, having practiced the exercise for much longer.

Percy grabbed hold of this final memory, using Leo’s experience as a compass to refine his own control. It was as if the two were helping each other – Percy piecing the boy’s mind back together, while Leo guided him in pre-casting.

‘Come on, just a little farther!’

Chapter 273: Finding Leo

Something warm trickled down Percy's chin, soaking the fur on his neck. The smell of iron filled his nostrils, his brain feeling like jelly. But he endured.

More importantly, his concentration stretched like a rubber band – or perhaps, like a slingshot, shooting shrapnel through his skull. Staying conscious was just as hard as maintaining the exercise, but he knew he couldn't afford to pass out. If he did, he could easily lose all his time in the chamber, dooming Leo in the process. His only option was to keep going.

Eventually, something changed. Two of the pieces snapped together, a satisfying click reverberating through his mind. At the same time, his headache eased slightly, the students' voices blending into their images. Not only that, but the memory gained some colour, everything growing less blurry.

And that was just the beginning of a chain reaction. The fused memory pulled its remaining components with renewed vigour, a fresh wave of agony rippling through his brain.

Still, that didn't last long. Soon, they got assimilated too, bringing clarity with them. The air mana inside Leo's core flowed even faster, as more fragmented memories lit up in his mind, all of them associated with the same exercise, yet coming from different moments.

One of them had to be from the week after – Leo had barely improved by then, and it appeared he was still using the finger trick. The memory was missing its sound like the previous one, though it had colours this time. They swirled around like liquid blotches of paint, lacking a fixed form.

Another memory seemed to be from several months later. By now, Leo was rotating his mana as easily as breathing, incorporating the exercise into a more complex task. Percy guessed this one had to be from Pre-casting 3, so mere weeks before the boy's death.

'Cool… I think.'

Restoring a memory brought more of them into focus. Almost like solving a jigsaw puzzle, except that he only had access to a few of the pieces, the rest slowly popping into existence as he branched outwards. Assuming this continued without any dead-ends, he might be able to heal his host!

But it wasn't going to be pleasant.

‘Well, it doesn’t matter. I can handle a little pain. Besides, it’s not like I get nothing out of this.’

Concentrating on the exercise again, Percy forced the new memories to expand like before. The smaller shards were easier to fuse, while the larger lumps moved more slowly. They hurt more too, acting like cheese graters rather than shards of glass.

By now, Percy felt like somebody was making scrambled eggs inside his head. The only way to bear the pain was to dip his senses into his core, tuning everything else out. The mana rotated faster, not straying from its orbit by even an inch. Sticking closely by the walls of the core, it formed a thin ring, circling around where he imagined his finger to be. In fact…

‘I no longer need the finger!’

This was incredible! Mastering the exercise to such an extent by himself would have taken him dozens of hours. Yet, it had barely been twenty minutes since he entered the chamber.

Usually, he couldn’t just learn his hosts’ spells this easily, even if his mind was connected to theirs. This was why Micky had been forced to demonstrate Circulation for him back in the arena, and why he’d spent some time overseeing him as he practiced it by himself.

Yet, Leo’s circumstances were unique. The mere act of rebuilding the boy’s shattered mind – one brick at a time – allowed Percy to peer deeper into the memories, experiencing them more fully. Even then, he knew he owed his quick progress to the potions accelerating his thoughts and the Wiseman’s Dust opening his mind up.

‘Alright buddy. Let’s get you healed. I promise not to give up on you if you don’t.’

A case of theft: this story is not rightfully on Amazon; if you spot it, report the violation.

***

Minutes became hours as Percy flipped through the pages one after the other. The exercises had started simple, though they grew more complicated towards the end of the course.

He learned to maintain the lateral rotation while pulling the mana through his channels, all the way to his palms. That would allow him to release wind blades that spun in two directions rather than one, though applying it to an actual spell was for later.

Next, he learned how to rotate the mana in parallel to the wind blades too. This way, they would spin faster, increasing their cutting power. However, this one was more complicated, as it was harder to pull this type of rotation through his channels without injuring himself.

After getting that down, he learned how to keep the rotation going in his core even after pulling some mana out, so that he could keep imposing the transformation on subsequent spells without further preparation.

Finally, he learned how to instantly flip the rotation angle between the two styles, so that he could vary his attacks.

‘And to think this is all still in Pre-casting 1…’

Getting through the whole course took a few hours. By the time he was done, he was dizzy, and his brain throbbed like crazy, forcing him to take a short break. But he wasn’t complaining.

He’d crammed weeks of practice in less than a day since he entered the chamber. Even better, dozens of new memories had taken root in Leo’s mind.

The mist in the room had grown fainter too. Between his abdomen sucking every drop of life mana, his mind absorbing all the mind mana, and the pure mana rushing into his core – Percy left nothing behind. The vents hadn’t stopped spewing more gas into the room for a second, struggling to keep up with his demands.

‘Well, nobody’s banged on the door yet, so that’s a good sign.’ he shrugged.

As soon as his headache eased a bit, he picked up the next notebook, starting the Pre-casting 2 exercises. Those were already more complicated, typically combining a few of the easier ones.

Percy had to split the mana into more portions and apply some of the other transformations on each one. Keeping two perpendicular rotations active was simple enough, but pulling them through his channels without messing them up was a lot harder.

Overall, the notebook didn't contain as many entries as the previous one, but each of them spanned more pages, as Leo had been forced to come up with multiple tricks to master them.

Sadly, the boy had predominantly focused on honing the rotations to their limits, but he'd never touched the aspect that interested Percy the most – slowing the air mana to a halt.

'Leo's style isn't very suitable for drawing runes, but that doesn't make it useless. It'll all benefit Micky, and I might even be able to apply some of it to my soul mana back home.'

There would be more issues to solve, of course. Not only would he have to adapt the exercises to a different affinity, but he'd have to use them with his boosting art active. Leo hadn't been taught to do that yet – that was apparently part of Pre-casting 5. And Percy would have to take affinity fusion into consideration – as well as his shroud – before he could use it in combat.

'It's still immensely valuable though.'

It was something he wouldn't have even thought of had he never ended up on Felmara, and skipping months of practice in mere days was quite a bargain.

Eventually, he was done with the second notebook, taking another short break before jumping to the last one. Unfortunately, Leo had barely written a few pages in it, as he'd never completed Pre-casting 3. Not to mention that the boy had missed many of his classes in the weeks leading to his death.

'Nothing I can do about it, I suppose. If it's all we have, let's just get through it too and see where we stand.'

***

Percy had no way to track the time, but he estimated he'd spent less than two days to go through all the exercises. He was more than satisfied with his own progress too, but not as much with Leo's.

Granted, his mind was in a better state than he found it in. Back then, there had barely been any traces left. Most of them had been things deeply engraved into his brain, such as his passive understanding of the local language, his knowledge of where the restroom was, or the faces of his best friends.

Now, there was a lot more there. Dozens of complete memories, each of them revolving around one of the exercises he'd practiced. In fact, some had merged, reconstructing entire lessons. And he'd even recovered a few tangentially related memories by proxy.

'But it's not enough… not even close…'

This was all still a mere fraction of Leo's past. A somewhat specialized view into it too. Plus, Percy hadn't found any traces of the boy's will or personality.

Part of him regretted not bringing the other notebooks, though he knew he wouldn't have had the time to go through all of them, nor would he have managed to get as much value out.

'The diary is all I've got…'

It wasn't ideal, since he'd read the whole thing before, and it hadn't really sparked any new memories. Then again, the situation was very different right now, as he had many more tools in his arsenal to help him pull the lost memories out of the diary.

'Here goes nothing.'

Chapter 274: Reigniting one's will

All things considered, going through the notebooks had been relatively straightforward. Percy had merely had to replicate a few well-defined exercises, without much room for interpretation. And he'd

been generously rewarded for his efforts – both at a personal level and with respect to his host's recovery.

The diary, on the other hand, was a lot more open-ended. Its contents spanned every detail of Leo's life, and it was up to Percy to actively claw through the mess to dig the memories out. The good news was that he had plenty of ammunition to help him.

Whenever Klatz's name came up, Percy could almost hear the boy's laughter. Every time Lyn's pastries were mentioned, he felt them melting in his mouth, spreading their sweetness and their warmth. Whenever Leo wrote about the garden, Percy smelled the unique aroma of the flowers there, feeling the cold breeze caressing his fur.

Of course, he had plenty of blind spots too, having barely scratched the surface of Leo's memories. But he'd already recovered just enough to allow him to draw a lot more out of the diary. Not every paragraph sparked a new flashback, but nearly every page did.

'Even better, I'm starting to get a feel about his personality.'

A lot of the memories came bundled with feelings and emotions, letting Percy understand his host better than before. What troubled him a little was that Leo had always talked to others politely, seemingly going out of his way to avoid friction. It was strange, because it didn't fit the image of a delinquent he'd drawn about his host.

'He's a good kid… How the hell did he manage to piss half the academy off?'

None of the memories touched upon Mana Flow or the traumatic event that had derailed the boy's life. Whatever had happened, Leo had buried it in the deepest recesses of his mind. Percy wouldn't be surprised if those were the very last memories they recovered.

Regardless, the landscape inside Leo's mind looked a lot better than before. Earlier, the memories associated with pre-casting had been little more than disparate seeds scattered throughout his brain, very few of them linked to one another.

But the more of them he recovered, the larger the lumps grew, several tendrils soon snaking outwards from each of them. By now, the place looked like a few networks of roots woven through one another. And every time two of them touched, they caused everything to shuffle – to reconfigure itself into something closer to the original state of Leo's mind.

Whenever that happened, Percy had to pause and take a few minutes to recover from the vertigo and the pain. It was a struggle – especially since it happened more frequently as he progressed through the diary – but he pressed on, knowing he was getting closer to his goal.

Eventually, all the memories joined the same network. The empty space still vastly exceeded the recovered memories, but Leo had healed enough for something new to happen.

'It's filling up by itself!'

Even without him doing anything, the mind mana flooded his brain on its own, faster than ever before. The mist in the room had turned cyan, the pure mana in the magic potions being the only component left untouched. The vents had never stopped spewing more life and mind mana, streams of brown flowing towards Percy, turning milky white as they neared him.

Either way, this was promising! Given enough time, Leo might even recover by himself!

That said, the passive recovery was still a lot slower than his active efforts. Thus, Percy had no choice but to dive into the diary again, pushing the process along. Or at least, that was the case at first…

A few hours later, he noticed the passive recovery had caught up. The way it worked reminded him of his own Mend spell. The mysterious girl had taught him to focus on growing thin tendrils along the surface of his soul injuries, as it was much easier to fill the space between them. And Baldy had mentioned at some point that he did something similar when he wanted to heal physical wounds efficiently.

Stolen story; please report.

'Evidently, the same applies to one's mind!'

Percy was really interested in how bodies, minds and souls were connected. Granted, he only possessed one of the three affinities, but learning more about the topic might help him use his clones better.

As far as he could tell, each of the three aspects was intimately related to the other two. Minds were deeply rooted in one's brain, but they had to be rooted in one's soul too, since Percy's clones always retained his memories even without access to his body. At the same time, bodies protected and nurtured one's fragile soul, but the soul also piloted their body.

Damaging one of the three components could harm the other two – as many of Percy's opponents had found out the hard way. But it was also possible to leverage one of them to heal the others, which was how Percy could give a damaged body a second wind by patching its soul up, or how he was currently working on recovering a shattered mind.

'Actually, there are four aspects, not just three…'

Mana cores were equally important. No living thing could exist without one, and each promotion strengthened one's body, mind and soul – to various extents. No wonder the Moirais' Decree made use of those three things to grow a second core… Percy still had no idea how it had come to be, but it wasn't strange that a Decree involving three rare affinities was so highly regarded.

'In any case, I've already done everything I could for the kid…'

Right now, Percy's contributions still helped a little, but Leo's passive recovery was accelerating by the second. It was clear that the boy's survival would ultimately be up to his luck.

Estimating that he still had around two days left in the chamber, Percy decided to move on to his personal projects. And he had quite a few of them in mind.

First, he dove into pre-casting again for a few hours, this time to reinforce his foundations with his own understanding. Leo's training may had saved him several months of training, but it would still benefit him to approach the exercises from a different perspective, making them his own. Especially while they were still fresh in his mind and while he was under the chamber's influence.

Once he was done going through them, he then practiced his own mana-slowing exercise. Even though Leo had never attempted anything of the sort, Percy was surprised at how much more easily he made progress in this too.

'I guess learning to control the mana in my core is a transferable skill.'

Forming runes was still impossible, though he didn't shy away from trying to shape the mana into simpler structures, like cubes, spheres and pyramids.

As soon as he grew comfortable with that, he then switched to another exercise he'd heard from Mr. Lonan. It was suitable for air affinity users, yet too difficult for him to have attempted in the past.

The idea was to compress the air mana inside his core further, so that he could unleash pressurized blasts of wind from his palms. It wasn't as destructive as the spinning blades, but it supposedly worked better when he first slowed the mana to a standstill, so he figured it was good practice.

'Might as well turn this one into an actual spell.' he decided.

That had been one of his original goals for the term, so there was no reason not to try.

***

Percy concentrated in his core, splitting the mana into two streams. At first, they took the form of marbles, in line with Leo's visualisation. However, he added his own spin to it, sapping the marbles of their speed, forcing them to roll down to the core's base. Only then did he will them to shrink, compressing the mana as much as he could. Next, he pulled the marbles to his hands.

Raising his palms, he unleashed the mana with all his might, launching two projectiles.

The mana slammed violently against the walls, sending a tremor through the room. Luckily, Percy hadn't put a scratch in the chamber, the protective enchantments more than powerful enough to resist a Yellow's spell.

But that was not to say that his spell was weak…

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

‘Ugh… What am I even supposed to make of this?’ he frowned.

Percy was used to his clones not having access to all of his spells, as they lacked his mutation, his bloodline, or his affinities. But this was the first time he registered a spell with his clones that he might not be able to use with his main body!

‘Well, I guess that’s not exactly right. I suppose I can always cast this through Micky and Soul Resonance…’

Either way, this was good enough for now. Technically, he still had around a day left, but he didn’t think he could achieve much more with pre-casting. Besides, there was another thing he wanted to try.

Taking a deep breath, he pushed the mana into his channels, activating Circulation. He could already maintain it for a long time while standing still, but he figured it might help him in the Mana Flow class if he got a little more used to moving around with it.

On top of that, many of his clones had the air affinity too, as did his main body – albeit indirectly. Suffice to say, it would serve him across the board to familiarize himself with it as much as possible.

‘I should do more than just learning to move with Circulation… Let’s throw in the new spell too, as well as the propulsion techniques I practiced with Gabe…’

Chapter 275: Bonds

“Are you sure about it?” one of the guards asked.

“Look at it yourself – the runes are blinking!” the other replied. “This only happens when the tanks drop below 25%.”

The first guy raised an eyebrow.

“Is there’s something wrong with the enchantment?” he asked again in disbelief. “The potions are meant to last 15 years. Didn’t we refill them like… 4 years ago?”

But the other one shook his head.

“No way. I’d buy that if it was just one type of potion, but it’s several. Maybe there’s a leak in the room or something.”

“That’s even less likely…”

Percy tried his best not to show any reaction as the attendant led him out of the corridor. Hopefully, he wouldn’t get Leo in trouble. Then again, he didn’t feel too guilty about it, all things considered. The boy wouldn’t have even been alive right now if not for him, nor would he have stood a chance of recovering without robbing the academy clean.

The good news was that the inhalables had done their job. Leo’s mind had stopped absorbing mind mana past a certain point, the network of memories in his head having reached a more complete state. Or at least, that was how it appeared from the outside. Percy hadn’t interfered during the last several hours, allowing the network to heal by itself. That lessened the pain he felt, giving him a chance to focus on his own training.

On the flipside, it also meant he wasn’t privy to the new memories. Not that it was a bad thing, as there were too many of them now, and he had no interest in spying on Leo’s entire life. Nor did he want to risk messing with his host’s fragile mind any more than necessary. Of course, he still wanted to ask the boy a few questions, but he’d rather wait for him to wake up first.

‘Why is he taking so long though?’

By now, Leo’s mind felt about as healthy as Percy’s other hosts, so he was confident it wouldn’t just crumble once he was gone. However, he couldn’t shake the worry that Leo might remain in a coma.

‘Well, if he doesn’t come to his senses by the time I leave, I’ll drop him in a public space. The local healers will take it from there.’

It wouldn't be ideal, as Leo would be forced to answer all sorts of difficult questions about the last month, without Percy's guidance. Even worse, his second core had also taken form, which was bound to raise a few eyebrows by itself. But there was only so much Percy could do about it.

'At least he doesn't know of my other secrets. Maybe they'll let him be after the initial commotion. Though I still don't know if the Moirais' Decree gets passed down to one's children.'

There was a good chance that even the Moirais themselves couldn't answer that. Some Decrees – like Phoebe's and Ea's – were obtained through bestowal, while others – like Iapetus's – were clearly inheritable. Some might even require one to be born on a specific world.

He sighed. He didn't like the idea of spreading such a powerful Decree on every planet he visited, but he wasn't going to start murdering his hosts to prevent that either.

'It's probably best for Remior if it's inheritable, actually…'

Regardless, things would be so much simpler if Leo woke up soon. It would give Percy a chance to coach the boy and do some damage control.

Alas, his host's recovery had helped him indirectly too, in the chamber. Once he stopped absorbing all the mana in there, the potions had finally begun to work as intended, letting him maximize his gains in the training room.

In fact, Percy grinned as he thought about everything he had achieved, not only in the Wiseman's Chamber, but during this entire trip. He'd registered a new alchemic principle, learning to brew pills, gels and inks. He'd also studied the theory enough that he felt confident in reproducing any other transformations by himself, should he need them in the future. Dugris had even taught him how to draw the tattoos, giving him all the tools to elevate the trollsfury potion to the next level.

Then, there was the knowledge he'd obtained about the peak factions in the universe. Granted, he still had to find a reliable way to actively travel to those worlds, but he at least had a clearer idea of how to reach his goals.

A case of literary theft: this tale is not rightfully on Amazon; if you see it, report the violation.

He'd also squeezed nearly half a year's worth of training in the past week alone, establishing a firm foundation in pre-casting, and registering a brand-new spell in the process.

Finally, the extent to which he'd familiarized himself with the air affinity couldn't be overstated. He might not be as proficient with it as his soul and pure cores, but he could probably handle himself in a fight, and even start developing some interesting combination spells with Micky.

'There's only one thing left to do here…'

Thanking the attendant for his service, he bid him farewell before heading off. He still had a couple days left until the Mana Flow lecture, and he desperately needed to get some shut eye before then.

Reaching his room, he dropped his stuff carelessly on the floor before falling face-first into his pillow, sinking in the soft mattress like a brick. Honestly, he could have used a shower – his body stank of sweat and caked blood – but he was too tired to care right now.

In fact, he hadn't even bothered to close the curtains. The sunlight might be a little annoying at the moment, but he counted on it to wake him up in time for the class.

'Well, based on Klatz's personality, there's a decent chance he'll check up on me too…' he thought as he dozed off.

***

Percy's eyes jolted open as the relentless banging on his door continued. Coming to his senses took him a few seconds longer than he'd like. Sleeping had definitely helped, but he was still exhausted.

"Uggghhhh… I'm coming." he groaned.

Glancing out of the window, he noticed it was dark outside. Sure enough, his pal wouldn't let him sleep in on such an important day. And he wasn't alone.

"Are you alright?" Lyn asked upon seeing him, her features contorting in concern.

"You look like crap." Klatz frowned.

The two stood outside his room, holding a flat object covered in wrappings. It was about two by one metres across, as thick as his finger. Percy wanted to ask about it, but something else took precedence.

"How long till the lecture starts?"

"Half an hour…" Klatz replied, getting a nod back.

"Is that blood on your face?!" Lyn didn't let up, however.

"It's not as bad as it looks. Give me ten minutes to wash myself. I'd rather not show up in the auditorium like this." Percy said, hurriedly grabbing a few things from his room while internally scrambling to come up with an excuse.

He'd told them about his advanced Alchemy classes, but he hadn't mentioned the competition or the Wiseman's Chamber. Poor Leo was already going to have a tough time explaining how he went from having zero interest in alchemy, to acing such a high-level class, then back to not even knowing what a cauldron was…

Lyn opened her mouth to say something, but he never gave her the chance, practically running towards the restroom.

"Feel free to wait in my room! You can drop that thing there if it's heavy!" he yelled, not even glancing back.

***

“Sorry about the stench.” Percy chuckled.

Upon returning to his room, he found his friends standing outside again. He could tell they’d entered at some point, as they’d left the object they’d brought propped up against the desk, and even opened the window to let some fresh air in.

“Never mind that!” Lyn quipped, scanning him from head to toe, clearly searching for injuries. “Will you please explain what happened to you this time?”

Percy shrugged, having already decided on how to deal with this.

“Remember how my Alchemy teacher was an asshole at the start of the course? Well, he made it up to me by recommending me to enter the Wiseman’s Chamber.”

The kids gasped upon hearing that, and he didn’t really blame them for it, as this wasn’t the kind of opportunity the academy’s teachers randomly handed out. Though, in his defence, it wasn’t even a lie. Sure, he’d omitted a few details to downplay his competence in the subject, but this was truly how it all began.

Of course, his friends’ shocked expressions soon gave way to odd looks. Either they found it difficult to believe a teacher would be that generous, or they had a tough time seeing how he’d ended up covered in blood after some training.

Whatever the case, he didn’t let them press him on it.

“So, what’s that thing you were carrying?” he asked, pointing at the wrapped object with his elbow.

Lyn didn’t seem very thrilled to drop the topic that easily but, luckily, Klatz’s eyes lit up upon hearing his words.

“I made it!”

Walking to his creation, the boy carefully tore the wrappings out, treating the object as gently as he would a baby. Percy was tempted to rush him, as the suns had already risen, meaning that they didn't have long before the class started. But he didn't have the heart to do that, seeing how excited his friend was. Not to mention that he might have still been asleep if not for them.

A painstaking amount of time later, Klatz was finally done, moving aside while pointing proudly at the object. It was a painting, and a damn beautiful one, too. It depicted three people resting on their backs amidst tall blades of blue grass. Two boys and a girl.

"Is that us?" Percy asked upon closer inspection, getting a grin back.

Looking back into the art piece, he noticed that what he'd originally thought to be a colourful ceiling was actually way too close to the ground. They'd easily bump their heads if they stood.

'No. This isn't a ceiling at all. Are those birds?'

There were so many of them, blending into a dense swarm. Each was small enough to fit in one's palm, though only half of them shone in vibrant colours, the rest flying among them like shadows.

"The blumbins?!" Percy asked in disbelief. "Don't tell me you got this done in the last few days?!"

It had barely been over a week since their little trip. And Percy could tell from the detail in the painting how much effort his pal had put into it. Probably dozens upon dozens of hours, which was even more impressive given how short days and weeks were on Felmara. Evidently, he wasn't the only one who'd been working hard…

"Do you like it?" Klatz asked, his smile widening upon seeing his surprise. "I call it 'Bonds'..."

"…And I want you to have it."

Chapter 276: Guest lecturer

The trio's hurried steps echoed through the long corridor as they rushed to reach the auditorium on time. And they weren't alone, several latecomers practically running by their side. Yet, Percy's thoughts were far removed from the Mana Flow lecture right now.

'I can't believe I'm going to miss these guys…'

Klatz and Lyn had helped him hang the painting in his host's room before leaving with him. Their continued, near-suffocating love had nearly brought him to tears: the only reason he'd held back was because he was keenly aware that the art piece hadn't been meant for him. At least, his success in healing Leo had tempered his guilt over deceiving them, allowing him to leave Felmara with his chin up.

'It doesn't look like he's going to wake up before I go… I should probably write him a new diary entry, to brief him in on important matters…'

Soon, the group reached the auditorium, finding the place packed with students. The buzzing cacophony of chattering kids instantly filled Percy's ears as he carefully scanned the room. It was downright enormous: large enough to fit over a thousand people, with plenty of space to spare! The centre stage spanned a massive half-circle, two hundred metres across.

Rising from the stage, dozens of tall steps extended outward, lined with rows of spacious, well-cushioned seats. The academy could have easily squeezed in twice as many students had they arranged the seating more tightly, but comfort seemed to be the priority here. Each seat was equipped with a wooden table, complete with a dedicated space for books, food, and drinks. Overall, a rather luxurious arrangement.

And the architecture was just as extravagant. Every surface: floor, steps, walls… even the ceiling: was made of polished marble, streaked with veins of gold. The only exception was the flat wall at the inner edge of the semi-circle, which was stark white, devoid of any decoration. It had a square shape, reaching the tall ceiling a couple hundred metres up. There were no windows either, but the room was bathed in a steady glow from the enchanted crystals embedded along the circular wall.

'Wow… once again, these people went all out building this place…' Percy thought.

Had they really done all this just to make a bunch of kids comfortable? It honestly resembled a venue fit for a royal wedding more than an educational facility… Then again, Dugris had mentioned that Rhaziel

tended to personally oversee these Mana Flow lectures. That alone explained why the mortals had gone to such lengths to make the auditorium presentable.

Admittedly, Percy had been a little worried about coming face to face with the deity. The only god he'd ever met in person had been Metatron, and the titan had already learned everything about him through the challenges, before their first meeting. Suffice to say, he had no idea if other gods had the means to see through his bloodline.

In fact, he'd even briefly considered skipping the lecture entirely. Granted, Mana Flow was probably the most valuable thing on Felmara, but he didn't want to risk getting his clone destroyed: or worse, captured: and losing everything else he'd obtained.

Luckily, it hadn't taken much digging to learn that Rhaziel wasn't going to visit the academy in the flesh. Apparently, he was only going to oversee the lesson from afar, via some kind of projection.

"Quiet, everyone!" a booming voice said.

An old man stood on the floor of the auditorium, dressed in the nicest robes Percy had seen since arriving on Felmara. His face was marred by wrinkles, his fur a snow-white colour, yet the presence he passively exuded carried with it the unmistakeable aura of authority.

'He feels stronger than Baldy… Don't tell me…!'

Percy drew a sharp breath upon examining the guy's sternum with his Mana Sense. He was currently located hundreds of metres away, yet the distance failed to mask the vibrant White star burning brightly in the man's chest. This had to be the dean of the academy: and the first White Percy saw in his life!

Back on Remior, this would have qualified him to lead one of the Great Houses: a position that only seven people on the whole planet could currently boast of having reached. Well, other than the Green-borns, of course…

Scanning the auditorium, Percy quickly noticed that the dean wasn't the only strong person here either. Three more people stood out amongst the crowd. They weren't quite as powerful as their boss, their cores "only" at Violet, but Percy could still practically feel their thick presence oozing into the air around

them. None of them bothered to conceal it, as it probably helped them get the rowdy crowd of students around them under control. Two of them were men, the last one a woman. All three were middle-aged.

'The vice-deans...' he guessed.

Beyond that, there were dozens of teachers scattered around the room, many of them at Blue, the rest at Green. He even spotted Dugris sitting at the front, as well as Mrs. Lia a few rows behind him. Naturally, the sight made Percy more than a little nervous. He'd never seen so many powerful people gathered in the same place.

Oblivious to his thoughts, the dean waited a couple seconds for the commotion to die down before continuing.

Support the creativity of authors by visiting the original site for this novel and more.

"I sincerely hope everyone is here today. Please, pick a seat and make sure to press your palm on the enchantment by your right to sign in. The older students should already know this, but it's imperative that you all do that, otherwise we won't have proof of your attendance, and you will be punished severely along with those who are absent."

Grabbing his hand, Lyn dragged him to the very back of the room, Klatz following right behind them. She clearly wanted to shield him as best as she could from whatever had bothered Leo last year…

Percy smiled wryly at her behaviour. He would have preferred to sit at the front instead, to get a better view of the demonstration, unwilling to miss any important details. But he didn't resist, letting the girl do as she pleased, knowing he was supposed to hate it here for whatever reason. At least, he made sure the three of them sat at a place without any strong teachers nearby, for his own peace of mind.

As soon as everyone was seated, the dean walked up the steps to the back of the room, sitting at the top row. Though he did so in the other side of the room, dozens of spots away from Percy's group.

Next, the crystals on the circular wall dimmed, plunging the auditorium into darkness. This only lasted a second, before countless runes of various colours lit up along the flat wall, blending into a giant image.

At first, it was impossible to make anything out, but the lines and contours inside the screen soon settled into a clear picture.

Percy's eyes widened as he realized what: or rather, who – exactly it was they were looking at. At first glance, he appeared to be a Felmaran man, similar in many ways to the hundreds of others he'd already seen. Yet, both his fur and his eyes shone in a dazzling golden light, his features flawless as a sculpture's.

'No… they're even better than that…!' he realized in disbelief.

Originally, Percy had thought the artist who'd carved the statue in the garden had exaggerated the god's beauty, but it appeared the exact opposite was true. The pitiful mortal had clearly failed to capture the sheer perfection in the man's otherworldly features.

His mane was long enough to reach his waist, yet it flowed outward like a blazing inferno. Every fibre woven into his robes looked more expensive than the whole academy put together. He was adorned with jewels of all shapes and sizes from head to toe, as his lips curled and parted into a confident grin. He was sitting leisurely on what could only be described as a throne, sipping some blue liquid from a finely crafted wineglass.

'Rhaziel Proudheart…!'

"Good morning, students." the god's voice was soft as a whisper, but it still permeated the auditorium like a tremor, causing Percy's fur to stand on end.

Everyone: from the youngest student to the dean himself: rose from their seats, bowing deeply in deference to their leader. Percy followed along, unwilling to stand out from the crowd.

Several seconds later, the god finally nodded, granting them permission to return to their seats. Only then did he continue.

"Today, you are gathered here to study one of our world's most precious arts: a powerful spell that can elevate anyone's magic to the next level. I hope you will cherish this opportunity dearly, and that you will all burn this knowledge firmly into your minds."

Next, his eyes shifted to the back of the room, looking straight at the dean. The old man stood up again, before clapping his hands twice.

A series of inscriptions lit up by the bottom of Rhaziel's image, touching the centre stage. They outlined a rectangle that looked tiny beneath the god's feet, yet which was actually about tall and wide enough for a few adults to walk through it at the same time.

Accompanied by a grinding noise, the surface sank a few inches into the wall, before slowly sliding aside. But Rhaziel didn't wait for it to open all the way, speaking again.

"As you all know, these classes are always delivered by some very special guests of mine. In fact, today, I have a little surprise for you. Your lecturer this time is not just a normal mortal, but a Green-born!"

Rhaziel paused for a moment, seemingly appreciating the startled gasps and shocked exclamations of the students before him. Even Percy was taken aback, not having expected the equivalent of a Holy Child to bother teaching a bunch of low-borns.

The god chuckled.

"Yes. It's quite a special occasion, isn't it? This person holds within his core the potential to become a god: the same as me! But today, he is nothing more than your personal instructor!"

The door by the centre stage finally slid open, revealing a long, winding corridor behind it. Soon, a series of footsteps echoed through it, growing louder as the guest lecturer slowly approached. And he wasn't alone. It appeared there were three people in total. Most curiously, there was another strange sound coming from the corridor. The metallic rattle of chains, clinking rhythmically between footfalls.

It didn't take long for the newcomers to emerge before the students, Percy's eyes widening at the bone-chilling scene before him.

Suddenly, the image of the beautiful academy set up to nurture the next generation crumbled in his mind. The vibrant gardens decorating its outskirts… the polite students and gentle teachers… the dazzling statue of the powerful god… all the good memories he'd forged during the past month shattered like cheap glass, the hidden truth about this place slamming into him like a meteor.

Unaware of his thoughts, Rhaziel continued, however, his smile only deepening.

“All of you should have hopefully strengthened your bodies and tempered your mana channels by now. Mana Flow can be separated into two components: Internal Flow and External Flow. Your tutor will showcase both of them, and it’ll be up to each of you to learn what you can from this demonstration.”

But Percy wasn’t paying the god any attention, his incredulous gaze still glued onto the newcomers. The three men were of the same species, though they weren’t Felmarans. All of them were at Green, but the two standing on the side looked older than the one in the middle. They wore fine clothes too, only a touch cheaper than the Felmarans in the crowd. And they appeared healthy.

As for the last one… he wasn’t in good condition. He stood barefoot, wearing nothing but ragged trousers. His skin was covered in bruises and cuts from head to toe. And there was something else. It was difficult to make out beneath the dried blood, but his body was decorated in all sorts of tribal tattoos that Percy found extremely familiar.

He sported two pairs of arms, yet one of his hands had been severed at the wrist, the other three: as well as his feet: bound in shackles. They were linked to chains that his two escorts gleefully held, as was the collar around his neck. Instead of a mouth, he had a long, curved beak. It was cracked in a couple of spots, a chip missing from one side. His left eye was gone too, a long vertical wound marring his face.

As for his remaining eye, it was listless, devoid of hope…

Chapter 277: Mana Flow?

Mana spilled out of the prisoner’s pores, shrouding his body in a cyan mist. Like with Percy’s Synchronization, the influx of mana was simply too much to fit inside one’s channels. The only way to survive the technique was to let this excess out, essentially storing it externally.

But the captive didn’t stop there. The mana formed whirlpools all around him, in specific patterns that seemed to connect with those on his skin. They drew and mixed with the ambient mana, before pushing it back inside his body with even greater force. Not just into his lungs, but through his pores too, using the existing flow inside the body to help refine the ambient mana faster.

This was it! Mana Flow! No…

‘The Dance of the Savage Gods!’

Circulation took advantage of one’s mana channels, expanding one’s capacity by storing the mana in every corner of their body. Similarly, the final step took this to the extreme, forming a secondary flow outside. It boosted one’s capacity and regeneration both, maybe even pushing their physical and magical strength further still in the process.

Though Percy wasn’t in the mood to appreciate the demonstration, his mind drifting elsewhere, his heart pounding like a drum.

‘What External Flow?! What Mana Flow?! It’s the exact same thing! The bastards didn’t even keep its name!’

There was no doubt in his mind as to why they’d done it. It was just another slap on Huehue’s face. Same reason for bringing a prisoner to teach the technique. There wasn’t a real need for that! Any adult on Felmara could have taught the course: they all knew the spell! It was all for show! Having his kinsmen: the traitors’ descendants: guarding him too. Everything done to humiliate him...

‘It’s him… Rhaziel has to be the one who ordered the coliseums built too! He’s the reason Micky spent his whole life in a cage!’

Percy’s blood boiled as he stared at the god’s smug expression. Not all the mortals in the auditorium were as sadistic as their idol, however. Some were, but others didn’t seem to care for the show one way or the other, simply focused on studying the technique. A few were clearly uneasy, awkwardly trying to mask their guilt. But nobody moved to stop this. Nobody spoke a word–

“This is wrong!” somebody screamed, shocking those around him.

Percy was the most taken aback by this. The voice had come out of his own throat, tears rolling down his cheeks!

Yet, he wasn't the one who'd done it…

Leo was finally awake!

The boy leapt to his feet, already skidding down the stairs, running towards the centre of the auditorium.

'Stop, you idiot! What can you even do?!' Percy tried to warn him, but the kid wouldn't listen.

Guilt… indignation… rage… It all spilled through their connection, as Leo failed to contain his feelings. This was it. The reason the boy had lost his sleep over the past year! Unlike all his kinsmen sitting silent by the sidelines, allowing this abomination to unfold, Leo just couldn't stomach his people's cruelty!

"Silence." an authoritative voice echoed through the hall, causing everyone to bow their heads. Their god was speaking.

"Isn't this the same kid who freaked out last year? Young or old, it appears a simple beating is too lenient a penalty for blasphemy."

Leo had already made it to the floor by the time the first person moved to stop him. Heeding his god's command, the man grabbed him by the back of the neck, slamming him on the ground.

Percy barely managed to identify the assailant by the corner of his eye. Dugris! The alchemy teacher's expression was stone cold. Gone was the mutual respect they'd slowly built over the past term: of the man who'd recognized his talent and given him the opportunity to excel. Now, there was only blind obedience left. Zealous deference to his cruel god.

"Your Radiance, what is your command?" Dugris asked, bowing his head.

"Execute him." the god replied, not hesitating for a moment to order the death of a child.

But Percy ignored them entirely, as well as the growing commotion all around them. His priority was to rein his host in before he did anything else.

‘Leo… you need to stop this madness! Just listen to me!’

Percy wasn’t powerless when it came to his hosts. He could damage their souls whenever he wanted, ensuring their demise. This was how he’d blackmailed Rambert in the past. But such methods weren’t applicable if he cared about their safety. Sadly, it meant he couldn’t seize the boy’s body against his will. He couldn’t even twitch a muscle without Leo’s permission.

Enjoying this book? Seek out the original to ensure the author gets credit.

‘Shut up!’ the boy snapped back. ‘Who the hell even are you? What does any of this have to do with you? This is the doing of MY people! OUR cruelty! MY responsibility!’

Percy wanted to click his tongue at the boy’s stubbornness. This wasn’t the time for words. Left with no other choice, he allowed his own feelings to seep through their bond. The sight of Mixcoatl looming over a dying Micky… of his starving mother and sister… of their bleeding bodies as Mixcoatl’s spear ran through their hearts…

‘You…!’ the boy’s eyes widened in shock.

‘I’ll explain later. If you want to save him, give me full control of your body. No matter what happens, don’t get in my way.’ Percy said, not leaving any room for debate.

Leo nodded as Percy started taking deep breaths, one after another.

Dugris gathered earth mana in his hand, a stone blade forming around it as he pointed it towards their heart. To the man’s credit, his body faintly shook, some signs of hesitation creeping through. But he quashed them just as quickly, ultimately unwilling to disobey his god’s command.

Percy felt the boosting art coming into effect as his eyes darted around the room. Once again, he saw all sorts of expressions in the crowd. Anger. Disdain. Annoyance. Pity. Even glee: in a couple of places.

He recognized a few people. Namely, his other teachers, and his classmates. But none of their expressions contained much warmth. Not even Mrs. Lia's, or the kids' from the Alchemy class. Evidently, a few weeks were far from enough for them to stand beside him in such a moment.

He sighed. The only two people who genuinely seemed worried were Klatz and Lyn. Their faces were pale as their lips quivered.

'I'm so sorry it's come to this…' he smiled bitterly.

It had all started with a simple wish: to give them their friend back. And he'd done everything he could to drag Leo back to life. Yet, no matter what, it seemed he had failed to give them the happy ending they deserved…

'At least, I swear I'll protect him.' he decided, clenching his fists.

Taking another breath, he focused on the strongest people. Thankfully, the dean was still far: on the other side of the room. As were the vice-deans. Hopefully, they wouldn't reach him in time. But a few Blues and several Greens were close enough to interfere.

'I'll have to be quick. I'll only get a few seconds.'

There was no more time to waste. The teacher's construct was ready. Dugris tried to stab at him, but Percy didn't let him.

Pushing the boosting art past the point of no return, he forced a series of green lines to light up all over Leo's body, swirling around like gales of wind. Briefly overpowering the teacher, he managed to roll aside just in time to avoid the blow, before sweeping the man off his feet.

Then, he jumped up with a single fluid motion, dashing towards the prisoner.

The professor was already up again, running behind him while shooting more shards of stone. And he wasn't alone, as more teachers were moving to intercept him, drawing mana from their cores.

Percy side-stepped and pivoted to avoid the spells: dancing like Micky had taught him to. Turning to the captive, he gave him a meaningful look, the prisoner's eye widening in return.

More spells rained on him by the time he was halfway through the stage.

Releasing bursts of air mana from his body, he sped up like he'd done in the challenges with Gabe, moving even faster than he ever had with his main body. The attacks all missed him, crashing into the marble floor with deafening booms, sending shrapnel all over the place.

Several shards grazed him, drawing blood. A few even stabbed into him directly. Worse still, a domain finally fell on him with the weight of a mountain as he neared the guards, freezing his very muscles.

Stabbing his palms, he used the pain to jolt himself out. At the same time, he grabbed a hold of the mana inside his core. Controlling it was harder than ever, the raging flow of Circulation agitating it further. Still, he persisted, splitting and pressing the mana into two dense dots, before pumping them through his channels.

Lifting his arms, he pointed his hands at the guards, unleashing two blasts of concussive wind. He poured everything he had into the attack, nearly losing his boosting art in the process.

The men raised their hastily forged weapons to block. Luckily, they hadn't had the time to activate Circulation. That, coupled with the elemental advantage helped bridge the gap in their grades a little, the constructs cracking against the intense pressure.

Even so, they held.

But overpowering them had never been Percy's plan.

The two landed on their knees, staring at the teal daggers sticking out of their chests in disbelief! The soft Orange mana wasn't potent enough to rip their souls apart, but more than enough to buy Percy a precious moment. Also, to get them to drop the prisoner's chains…

Ignoring them, he forced himself forward. Every step was a battle, his legs straining against the weight. Then, a second domain slammed down like a hammer. His knees buckled as he nearly stumbled.

'Come on Percy… You need to move, or the kid is dead…'

Biting his tongue, he barely ducked as a fireball brushed over his head, singeing his hair. A blob of pressurized water splashed behind him at the same time, the noise adding to the ringing in his ears.

A warm trickle rolled down his chin by the time he reached the captive.

Another barrage of spells was closing in, this one far larger than before. Evidently, the Felmarans had given up on precision, determined to take him out along with the prisoner, and even the guards.

A faint distortion formed behind him. The spells swirled in the empty space around it, falling into the rapidly forming portal. A rift tore open, smooth metallic walls adorned with colourful runes visible on the other side.

Percy grabbed the captive's shackled hand, giving him a firm look. The man nodded, grabbing back as Percy pulled them both into the portal.

The cacophony in the hall continued, from the whizzing spells flying his way, to the crowd's shocked voices blending into a buzz.

But Percy didn't care about any of that, his focus elsewhere. Turning his head up, he looked into the screen on the wall. His glance brushed right past the god's shaken expression, locking into his eyes.

"Rhaziel Proudheart…" Percy muttered.

His voice was soft, but he knew the god could hear every word clearly. He took everything in as he sank into the closing rift. The god's fancy clothes, the jewels and gemstones decorating them, the features twisted by rage and surprise, and the golden pupils glinting in a cruel light…

He wanted to burn every detail into his mind. This was the person these people looked up to. The kind of guy who'd torture and humiliate countless people for the crimes of their ancestors. The kind who'd murder a kid for speaking up against him.

"…one day, I swear… I'll feed you to my crow."

Chapter 278: Rhaziel

The wine glass shattered into sand, the liquid vaporizing instantly as a tremor ran through the mansion.

'What the hell was that?!'

It made no sense! At first, the kid had merely screamed his lungs out like a lunatic: just like he'd done last year. But he hadn't seemed capable of doing any more than that. So… how exactly had the rest of this come to pass?

Thinking back, Rhaziel realized the change had occurred while that teacher held the kid against the ground. It was after that that his entire demeanour shifted. One second, he'd been little more than a barking boy, more irritating than harmful. Then, as if possessed by a demon, he'd pulled all sorts of tricks out of thin air, ultimately wrecking the whole place up.

Of course, he didn't care about the physical damages. The repairs cost peanuts, and they had more than enough slaves left to teach everyone on the planet. Not to mention that they didn't even need the slaves, strictly speaking. Granted, the Green-borns he enjoyed putting on display were on limited supply, but he had plenty of those too.

He didn't really mind the mortals' opinions either. It was their fault anyway: for failing to capture that runt. Rather, it was the implications of the scandal that angered him. Not only had the boosting art leaked, but the very manner in which that kid had escaped irked him to no end.

'Those moves… the same ones those savages used…!'

How long had it even been since he last saw them? It shouldn't be possible for anyone on Felmara to learn them. Rhaziel had personally scrubbed the spell free of its useless physical components, keeping only its magical essence behind. The slaves that taught the course were always monitored too. They

were only supposed to teach Internal and External Flow: nothing else. Very few of them even knew the rest of the technique in the first place.

The only ones who could have taught him were the refugees hiding like rats back on Huehue, or the captured ones fighting in the coliseums. Even so, no mortal could have crossed the vast distance separating the two solar systems without help from a god.

'No… that still doesn't explain anything!'

Even if one of those savages somehow made it to Felmara, the body-possession spell couldn't have come from Huehue. The natives there had no affinities, nor any Decrees, having never given birth to a single titan. In that, they were similar to Felmara, though the reasons for it weren't.

Despite being blessed with a favourable climate and having come far with their technological advancements, Felmara was a smaller planet. Their low population inevitably led to much fewer gods and, thus, a lower chance of a prodigy emerging among them.

Huehue, on the other hand, was much larger. It was their pure affinities that had held them back for most of their history, weakening their warriors and limiting their prospects.

This was why Rhaziel had chosen to attack them in the first place, looking to expand his people's territory by stealing somebody else's. And he would have easily succeeded too, if they hadn't come up with that technique of theirs.

Of course, he could have given up on them at that point, and picked one of the countless worlds without sapients to colonize, had it been just land he wanted. Land alone wasn't enough, however. What good would it do to expand their living space or their population if they didn't have enough resources for everyone to advance?

That was why he'd remained fixated on Huehue: it was simply the closest fertile land up for grabs. Besides, even though their boosting art had made them a tougher target, it had also sweetened up the deal in the process. Unable to defeat them by himself, Rhaziel had invited others to aid him in his conquest. All his allies had been in a similar spot, hailing from smaller worlds and seeking to expand.

Of course, sharing the new real estate with others hadn't been ideal, but the spell had more than made up for it.

If you come across this story on Amazon, be aware that it has been stolen from Royal Road. Please report it.

'Did our allies get greedy?' he wondered, creasing his brow at the possibility.

He didn't think any of them had the means to pull this off, but it did make more sense than the alternatives. Perhaps, they'd grown tired of sharing and sought to claim the rest of Huehue for themselves.

But he quickly shook his head. None of them was stupid enough to do that. The Dance was a lot more valuable than the land. Regardless of their ambitions, everyone in the alliance understood the need to keep the spell under wraps. If it leaked, they would instantly lose an important advantage over the rest of the cosmos.

Besides, there were other elements in the story that didn't add up. Rewinding the recording, he played it back, starting from a point that had piqued his interest.

'There… when he stunned the guards. That wasn't just the boy's air affinity at play.'

Rhaziel couldn't use Mana Sense through the recording, but his experienced eyes still caught many details somebody else might have missed. Not a drop of blood had escaped from the wounds. That, coupled with the guards' pained expressions pointed towards a soul attack. But that wasn't all. The spell had done way too little damage for a Yellow.

'Orange? Is the actual culprit even weaker than the darn kid?'

There was more. Soul users weren't that common, but Rhaziel had still encountered several throughout his long life. That wasn't soul mana. At least, not entirely.

‘Affinity fusion?! With pure or water mana, perhaps?!’ the colour drained from Rhaziel’s face, as he felt more than mere shock or anger for the first time today. ‘Don’t tell me the Moirais are involved!’

His hair stood on end, a shiver running down his spine as he pondered the implications. If the Moirais had chosen to back Huehue, it was all over for Felmara.

‘No… I’m getting ahead of myself.’ he grabbed his trembling hand, forcing himself to calm down.

The Moirais didn’t need to sneak around. If they wanted them gone, they could obliterate them in a heartbeat. But why would they? The only thing they might possibly want from either Felmara or Huehue would be Mana Flow. Everything else, they already had in spades.

‘If that’s the case, then the matter is already over. They have what they want, so they should leave us alone.’

Still, this couldn’t be the whole picture. Even if news about the boosting art had leaked to the Moirais, they could have demanded it directly. He would have been forced to hand it over willingly. Why go about it in such a roundabout manner?

Then, there was what had happened at the very end.

That portal had formed way too smoothly, with minimal preparation, no visible effort and without leaving any unnecessary distortions around it. No mortal could have produced it. Certainly no Yellow or Orange.

Plus, Rhaziel had personally investigated the scene later. The trail hadn’t led him far, though he’d seen enough to know the runts had left the planet already. Any god talented in space magic could have accomplished something similar, but not nearly as… cleanly.

‘Metatron’s Decree too?!’

While the Vault wasn’t quite at the Moirais’ level, it was still often regarded as a peak faction. Metatron didn’t need to sneak around like this either…

No matter how much he scrambled his brain, Rhaziel just couldn't understand how everything was connected. Huehue, the Moirais and the Vault… The culprit was related to all of them, somehow, but not from any of those places directly.

'No… that look he gave me… He was acting alone: not on anyone's orders! He was too emotional! Everything he did was just a momentary impulse…'

Rhaziel felt his blood boil at the mere memory. What sort of joke was this?! A mortal, threatening a god?! There hadn't been an ounce of fear in the boy's eyes… Just rage!

When was the last time a mortal had dared to look at him like that?! No, it hadn't happened! Even before his ascension, everyone had treated him with utmost respect! Of course they had: he'd been a Green-born! The pride of their world!

That kind of unconcealed hatred aimed towards him… He'd only seen it from other gods!

Rhaziel clenched his fists, the temperature in the room rising by a thousand degrees. Half the furniture was incinerated in an instant, the rest already melting. The sliver of pressure leaking out of his body shattered the walls into dust. Even his clothes burned, the jewels covering him vaporizing as the enchantments failed to protect them. His mane flared up, dancing furiously in the air.

"HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!" his eyes teared up as he broke into sardonic laughter, each pang slamming into the building like a meteor.

Floor after floor came crashing down, the marble tiles disintegrating before they even neared him. Soon, the entire mansion was wiped off the face of Felmara. But the destruction didn't end, only continuing to spread to his surroundings.

The ground beneath him cracked, deep chasms splitting the land into islands as magma rose from the depths. A ripple of red ran through the grass, leaving only ashes in its passing. A lake in the distance boiled into plumes of white, the clouds above rolling and tumbling. Sparks of lightning coursed through them, the very sky roaring alongside him.

“Come then, you insolent worm!” he bellowed. “Whoever you are! Whatever hole you’ve crawled from!”

Blood dripped down his knuckles, his chest heaving up and down.

“I’LL WAIT FOR YOU!!”

Chapter 279: Tlaloc

“You know… saving you would have been a lot easier if you’d tried running towards me instead of standing there, waiting to be rescued like a moron…” Percy said once he was back on his feet.

Then, he helped the prisoner up, as the guy seemed incapable of standing by himself. He opened his beak to speak, but a few runes lit up around his collar, not a sound coming out. Though he didn’t give up. He tried to communicate via gestures, only for more enchantments to glow on his shackles, causing him to wince in pain.

“Oh… wow… Rhaziel is a piece of shit, isn’t he?”

Apparently, the god had inhibited both his range of motion and his ability to speak, leaving him as little more than an exhibit meant for demonstrating the boosting art to his people.

Tracing his fingers over the runes, Percy realised: to his relief: that the enchantments weren’t deeply woven into the metal itself, but rather etched onto its surface. The collar and shackles were mundane, unremarkable iron, meant only to serve as a vessel for their magic. A single flaw in the script, a mere scratch, and the whole enchantment would fall apart, freeing the guy.

Gathering some air mana to his finger, Percy nicked a spot on the man’s collar. The enchantment blinked a couple of times in protest, but ultimately died down, a wisp of smoke fizzing out.

“…thank you…” the Green-born spoke with difficulty, his voice hoarse and barely audible.

“You’re welcome! When was the last time you spoke?” Percy asked, mostly to distract the poor man from the intense pain he was clearly in, disabling the rest of the enchantments one by one.

“…a child…”

“Seriously?!” Percy’s eyes widened in disbelief. “He’s kept you in this state for over a decade?!”

The prisoner nodded, tearing the shackles and the collar off as if they were made of paper as soon as the enchantments stopped suppressing his strength. The chains landed on the cold floor with heavy clings as the guy massaged his bruised wrists for the first time in ages.

“Who… are you?” he asked, curiosity mixing in with his gratitude.

Percy scratched the back of his head, contemplating the best way to respond to that.

“My name is Percy, but the owner of this body is called Leo. It’s him you should be thanking, actually. He’s the one who spoke out on your behalf at the beginning of this whole thing, sacrificing everything to help you. I only took it from there.”

The prisoner blinked a couple of times, clearly having some trouble coming to terms with all this.

“Thank you too… Leo. I’m Tlaloc.” he eventually said, offering his upper-right hand to Leo while pressing his remaining left fist over his heart.

Percy gave partial control back to his host, prompting the boy to shake the guy’s hand as the former prisoner shifted his attention to something else.

“Why… help me? Where… did you learn that technique?”

‘Actually, I’d like some answers too.’ Leo’s voice rang within Percy’s mind. ‘And what’s up with these people?’

Looking around, Percy noticed they were once more surrounded by a crowd of the Vault's residents, examining them from head to toe. Clicking his tongue in annoyance, he placed his palm on the floor before retrieving the translation device.

"Piss off, will you? Has nobody taught you it's rude to stare?"

This was getting old. Metatron should really consider working some kind of private landing spot into his Decree. Turning back to Tlaloc, he remained silent for a couple of seconds to gather his thoughts before speaking.

Help support creative writers by finding and reading their stories on the original site.

"As you might have guessed, I'm not from Felmara or Huehue. I have the ability to possess random bodies around the universe. I do it as often as I can, searching for new ways to grow stronger."

He paused for a while, letting his words sink in.

"A few years ago, I ended up in the body of one of your people. He taught me Circulation as we fought together in the arena. I was trying to return to Huehue when I got in this kid's body by accident. The rest, you can probably guess…"

The Green-born nodded in understanding, though Leo appeared to have a couple more questions for him.

'Why me? And how did we end up in the auditorium? The last thing I remember, I was still in my room.'

Percy sighed again.

'I can only possess dying bodies, kid. You must've overdosed on those sleeping pills of yours, right before I found you. That happened several weeks ago. I only managed to piece your mind back together by earning a spot in the Wiseman's chamber and using your diary.'

Leo gasped in horror as he understood how closely he'd brushed with death. And that was merely the beginning. As if a dam had broken open, a surge of emotions and memories flooded Percy's mind through their bond.

He saw the dimly lit auditorium again, though he was sitting elsewhere this time… there was another prisoner like Tlaloc standing before a sea of impassive faces… the poor guy was only at Orange, his injuries even more severe… in the end, he failed to bear the strain of the technique, his heart giving out before the lecture was over… Leo broke out in tears, weeping until his ribs ached… he received a brutal beating as a reward, leaving him broken and bedridden for weeks… after that, sleep became his enemy, the nights long and filled with grief… the pills helped a little at first, before taking their toll… he started missing classes, worrying his friends…

'Klatz and Lyn!' the boy panicked. 'What did they think of all this?!'

'I'm sorry… I tried to shield them from the truth for as long as I could. They were really worried about you, but I don't think they ever realized you were dead. I did everything I could to bring you back to them. Almost succeeded too. But I never expected things to end the way they did…'

Percy let out a slow breath, his thoughts drifting back to Leo's empty room, where a lone painting still clung to the wall: a quiet testament to a friendship now fractured. Klatz had poured his heart into that canvas, capturing a moment of warmth that now felt like a cruel illusion. What would become of him and Lyn? Would they be left to pick up the pieces, or would Rhaziel's wrath come for them too, punishing them merely for associating with a now-fugitive? Logically, they weren't to blame: they were just a couple of clueless kids. But, knowing how petty the god was, Percy wouldn't put it past him.

"Where are we?" Tlaloc suddenly asked, breaking him out of his thoughts.

"I don't know if you've heard of it, but this is the Vault of Magic." Percy said. "And before either of you ask, I'm afraid this was a one-way trip. I've no way to bring either of you home at the moment. Well, not like you'd want to go back, I guess…"

Turning inwards, he spoke to Leo.

'Kid, I need you to listen to me very carefully. This place is even worse than Felmara. I want you to promise me you won't flip out again, no matter what injustice you run into. I know you've got a good

heart, but you can't stick your nose into matters beyond your control again. I won't be able to protect you a second time.'

The boy didn't reply at first, his mind still hazy as he tried to process all the revelations. But Percy didn't let up, continuing to pressure him until he got a response.

'Ok, I promise.' Leo eventually said. 'Are you not going to stay here with us?'

But Percy shook his head.

"I'll return to my main body soon. There is a lot of important information I need to bring back. That said, I'll do everything in my power to negotiate a good deal for you guys before I go." he said out loud, for the Green-born's convenience.

"That friend of yours… from Huehue… is he alive?" Tlaloc asked, shifting the topic.

"Kinda." Percy replied, before elaborating. "He got killed on Huehue, but I managed to put his soul in a different body back home. Unfortunately, he doesn't remember much. This was why I wanted to return to Huehue…"

Tlaloc was about to reply, when some commotion drew their attention. The crowd soon parted, a familiar pentapus slithering through the mortals.

"Well, well… What mess have you made this time, Percy? I don't recall ever giving you permission to bring passengers along." Metatron said, though the excited gleam in his eyes didn't match his chastising words in the slightest.

"Please, don't insult my intelligence." Percy shrugged. "We both know you're even more happy about the Green-born than you are about the kid."

"A Green-born?" Metatron asked, sounding genuinely surprised. "Are you certain? He's already an adult."

Percy wasn't sure if the titan truly had no way to tell, or if he was just pulling his leg. Either way, he played along.

"He was a prisoner his whole life, so he never got any cleansing resources. But it shouldn't matter much."

Green-borns could live for thousands of years even if they never advanced. Sure, Tlaloc had lost a few decades, but that was barely a drop in the bucket. As long as Metatron fed him some sizian meet, he'd be back on track to reach godhood.

"Very well then. If it's truly as you say, I'll ignore your transgression this once." Metatron said, about to slither away.

"Wait." Percy hurriedly said, stopping the titan in his tracks.

"I have an offer for you."

Chapter 280: Regret

"I'm listening."

"I can give you a powerful spell that anyone can use, regardless of their affinity. It takes some effort to meet the requirements, but I promise you it's worth it." Percy explained.

"What tier?"

"Refined."

Some disappointment flashed in the titan's eyes, yet Percy spoke again.

"I wouldn't look down on it if I were you. It can be used alongside other spells, and it's beneficial even for Violets and Whites. In fact, I'm confident it's been used by gods too, in the past. That said, I don't know how a god's magic works, so I can't say much about it."

“Oh?” the pentapus asked, some curiosity finding its way into his expression at last. “Tell me more.”

Percy sighed internally, knowing he’d captured the god’s attention.

“It’s called Circulation, and it’s a type of boosting art. It increases one’s mana capacity and regeneration, enhancing their physical strength, and even the potency of their spells. Overall, it’s like strengthening one’s core by half a grade temporarily.”

“Show me.”

Taking a few deep breaths, Percy activated the spell, cracking a grin as he noticed the greed in the god’s eyes. The mortals in the crowd also let out shocked gasps, but nobody seemed to care about them.

Of course, he knew the titan could probably steal the technique if he really wanted, but he wasn’t too worried about that. Their exchanges were built on mutual trust, and the god wouldn’t risk ruining that for some short-term benefits.

“And you can teach that to anybody?”

Percy nodded.

“I can, but I won’t. I’ll be leaving soon. Tlaloc over there will be your teacher. Oh, but keep in mind that it requires some adaptation from one affinity to another.”

Turning to the Green-born, Percy gave him a meaningful look, getting a nod back as an unspoken understanding settled between them. Naturally, the man had followed the conversation up until this point, since Percy had spoken to Metatron in Felmaran, the translation device doing the rest. Of course, he didn’t know if this was Tlaloc’s native language but, either way, he’d been exposed to it for most of his life.

Suffice to say, Leo had also followed along, though Percy felt the need to speak to the boy in private, to make sure he also understood.

‘Do you get what’s going on here? No matter what happens, you must never as much as mention the second part of the technique: the thing your people call External Flow. Metatron looks easy-going, but he isn’t a good guy.’

‘Alright.’ the boy replied.

Had it been up to Percy, he wouldn’t have revealed Circulation either. The titan had been plenty powerful to start with, and he already felt guilty providing him with so many two-cored specimens to study.

Alas, he’d known the ship had sailed the moment he decided to bring Leo and Tlaloc here. The god was bound to notice their tempered channels sooner or later, so it was only a matter of time until he pried the knowledge out of them by coercion: at best: or force: at worst.

This way, Percy could at least volunteer the technique of his own volition, improving his relationship with Metatron and even bargaining for something in return.

‘At least, I’ll be able to use Circulation in the combat challenges from now on…’

“Very well. What do you want for it?”

“I want you to treat everyone I bring to the Vault as your honoured guests. And I mean all of them. Both my past and future hosts: the sapients and the beasts. You’ll heal Gabe and Tlaloc’s injuries. You won’t experiment on anyone, you’ll give them a comfortable place to live, and as much sizian meat as they need.”

Metatron blinked a couple of times, seemingly waiting for the punchline.

“Wait, you’re serious?” he tilted his head. “How is that even going to work? If you suddenly decide to bring a thousand people here tomorrow, do you seriously expect me to treat them all like Green-borns for the rest of their lives?”

Percy scratched his head, realizing he might have gone a little overboard indeed. Luckily, it didn't seem the titan was entirely opposed to his proposal, however, offering a more realistic compromise.

Reading on Amazon or a pirate site? This novel is from Royal Road. Support the author by reading it there.

"How about this? I'll accept your terms, but only for those I personally find interesting. That includes all your hosts: since they have the Moirais' Decree: and also this Tlaloc guy: because he's an actual Green-born. But whether any other specimen is worth accommodating will be solely up to my discretion. Outside those, I'll give you a quota of up to 5 additional people of your choosing. But that's it. You'll have to think carefully before you bring anyone."

"Done, but then I also want you to answer a few questions. What have you been doing with my hosts until now?"

Metatron shrugged.

"I haven't dissected any of them on an operating table, if that's what you're worried about. For the most part, I've just been feeding the beasts and teaching them how to use their affinities. As for the sapients, I haven't even touched them. I've treated both Gabe and Nolan as regular residents of the Vault, letting them work for their own resources."

Percy raised an eyebrow. This was honestly… not as bad as he had expected. Of course, it was entirely possible the titan was lying to him, but he somehow doubted the guy would even bother.

"Why? What are you even trying to accomplish? Do you want to recreate the Decree?"

"Ha! Dream on, kid." the pentapus chuckled. "Countless titans have tried: and failed: to do anything even remotely similar. And no, even if I found suitable mates for these creatures, it can't be passed down to one's offspring either. One needs to be born on the Moirais' world to inherit it. For now, I'm just hoping to turn the Yellow-born specimens into gods to bolster our ranks. As for the rest, they might teach me a thing or two about affinity fusion."

Percy sighed in relief upon confirming that he wouldn't be spreading the Decree everywhere he went. It did suck a little that his kids wouldn't get it, but he could still pass it to them with his bloodline. And if they inherited that, they might be able to do the same for their own descendants.

"Alright. Last question. Did you also give them bloodlines? I know you have a titan in the Vault who can grant them."

Metatron clicked his tongue.

"I fail to see what this has to do with our deal. You're just trying to get a free lecture from me."

Percy smiled wryly as he got caught red-handed. Still, the titan decided to humor him in the end.

"It's not that easy to give people bloodlines. They are complicated and poorly understood pieces of magic. Even the titans who grant them cannot replicate them directly: they merely spark the process and let nature take its course. New bloodlines can only manifest at conception. Furthermore, casting a Decree is costly, and Adathan's Decree only affects a single person at a time."

Percy nodded in understanding. So, even if Metatron gave his previous hosts Adathan's Decree, they wouldn't get a bloodline. Their children might, but they wouldn't have a second core, making the whole thing pointless. Not to mention that Metatron would have to go searching for suitable mating partners for all those creatures.

"So, if you're done trying to leech information out of me, I'm happy to go through with our deal." the pentapus said, breaking him out of his thoughts.

"Do it."

Percy barely got a chance to speak the words before the three of them found themselves in a small room. It resembled the challenge cubes a little, but it was only a fraction of the size.

The next time he blinked, he saw a fourth person had appeared beside them, Gabe looking even more confused than the other mortals.

“What the hell?! Percy, is that you?! What’s going on he–”

He didn’t even get to finish the question, when Metatron waved his tentacle, causing three green circles to light up under everyone’s feet. At the same time, three more circles glowed on the ceiling above them, already gathering a droplet of life mana each.

With a crisp sound, the droplets fell, landing on the mortals’ heads, a potent wave of vitality flooding their bodies. Their injuries closed in real time, even the missing limbs and destroyed eyeballs looking as good as new mere moments later. Leo was the first to fully heal, his wounds not nearly as bad as the others’, though it didn’t take long for Tlaloc and Gabe to follow.

“It’s done.” Metatron spat, seemingly in a hurry to get this over with. “None of the others requires any healing. I’ll move the beasts and the half-sapient into larger living spaces later. As for the sapients, they can claim any room they fancy free of charge. Hell, they can kick the current residents out for all I care. Same goes for their food: just ask the cube for your free portions once per day.”

Next, the god turned to Tlaloc who still appeared shaken by all these developments. The poor guy had spent the better part of his life in chains, robbed of his dignity and even his destiny as a Green-born, subjected to endless torment. Yet, in the span of a few minutes, he’d not only obtained some semblance of freedom, but even got his body healed and his future restored.

At any rate, Metatron appeared wholly uninterested in the guy’s thoughts. With another wave of his tentacles, he granted him a translation device of his own, before speaking.

“I expect you to start training Gabe immediately in that boosting art of yours. I’ll have the cube monitor you so that we can develop a training program for everyone in the Vault as soon as possible.”

Finally, he looked at Percy.

“You know… I haven’t missed how you brought them here in a rush, or how you looked like you’d swallowed a fly while showing me Circulation. I know you did all of this to protect them. And that you only even offered me the spell because you knew I’d figure it out on my own. Am I wrong?”

Percy did his best to maintain his poker face, trying to mask his inner turmoil. Once again, the god had seen through him with ease. But Metatron wasn't done.

"You didn't really want me to have it, did you?"

"Life isn't always about what we want." Percy shrugged.

Metatron chuckled.

"I don't know if I should be offended by your caution or impressed by your decisiveness. Or maybe, I should be disappointed by your foolishness… Giving me something so precious just to save a couple of people you barely know? And even wasting an equally precious opportunity to help a few more… I could have offered you so much more for this. I could have helped you send a clone to a world of your choosing. Lent you my rings in the combat challenges. Hell, I could have even given you millions of credits directly, to spend as you please…" he said, gauging his reaction.

But Percy's eyes didn't waver as he looked at him serenely, not a trace of regret in his gaze. This wasn't the first asshole god he'd met today, and he wasn't any more afraid of him than the last one.

"I'd do it all again."