Wanderer 29

Chapter 29: Mana channels

“Please tell me we’re done for today.” Elaine groaned.

The trio were sitting on the floor, baldy having already healed them for the dozenth time that day.

“We might as well stop here. I can help us recover again but we still need to eat properly to build muscle.” Archibald said.

PHEW

Elaine didn’t even wait for the second part before waving her hand, manifesting three bubbles of water in the air. Each was about twice the size of a watermelon. They flew over their heads as she let go.

SPLASH

Sniffing a couple of times, she scrunched up her nose.

“Remind me to bring soap tomorrow.” she said, already pushing herself up.

“Is there anything else we need to be doing?” baldy asked.

“Yes.” Percy nodded. “Try to spend a couple hours every night clearing your mana channels.”

“Any specific ones?”

“Nope. We need all of them. Only after our bodies have stopped improving and all our channels are cleared and tempered to their limit can we move to the next step.”

The others nodded in agreement. Percy had already explained the details of the technique before, so nobody felt like complaining. They all understood what a bargain they had struck.

As Percy was about to leave the room, he crouched to pick Micky up from the floor. The bird gave them strange looks after spending all day watching them train. The young man had brought the familiar along as he wasn't comfortable leaving him alone just yet.

"You're the one who taught me this stuff, buddy. I promise I'll do everything I can to help you remember it one day."

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Percy was resting on his bed, looking up at the ceiling. It felt nice his training was finally back on track. His reckless move with Micky had cost him a lot of time, though he didn't regret it.

'I'd do it all again.' he thought as he looked at the bird sleeping soundly on a cushion, in a corner of the room.

Even if Percy put his friend's wellbeing aside and looked at everything from a pragmatic perspective, his gamble would probably pay off in the long term. Micky's potential was difficult to quantify. Right now, he was young and his core only at Red but, with a beast affinity, he would outgrow Percy in no time. The young man wouldn't be surprised if his familiar became his secret weapon at some point.

Sure, his stunt had set him back by a few months, as he'd been unable to begin practicing the Dance before now. Not just that, but his soul core was still out of order. He couldn't use it, or even feed it elixirs and it would be a while until he could send out another clone. But, all things considered, the benefits probably outweighed the costs.

'I guess teaching him how to hunt by himself should be one of my priorities.'

Right now, Percy had to spend a few hours each morning helping the bird out. It was terribly inefficient as they only moved as fast as he could walk, and his traps only caught a handful of meals each day. If Micky could fly around looking for food by himself, he would probably do much better. It would not only

accelerate their souls' recovery but also the familiar's advancement to Orange. Plus, it would free up more of Percy's time to spend on his own magic.

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'That's tomorrow's problem though. For now, let's focus on clearing some channels.'

He sat cross-legged, closing his eyes. Stirring the core in his abdomen, he pulled some mana to his arm. It flowed around his abs and then below his pectoral muscle before turning downwards at his shoulder.

It was easy to think of mana channels as magical veins, as the former facilitated the circulation of mana much like the latter did with blood. Still, the analogy wasn't quite correct, as mana channels weren't physical tubes. It might be more accurate to describe them as the path of least resistance for the mana. Clearing a pathway involved using it repeatedly, wearing down all the obstructions over time to make the flow smoother.

This meant one's mana channels differed depending on their affinity. After all, each type had different properties, subtly affecting how it flowed through the body. Consequently, the path of least resistance for, say, fire mana wasn't necessarily the same as that for air mana and so on. For most people, it didn't really matter. So, what if their mana channels looked slightly different to one another's? They could still clear them and use their magic all the same, right?

'But it does affect me.'

Percy had two cores with different affinities. This meant he also had two entirely separate sets of mana channels. Even if he cleared all his pure pathways, he would have to do it again later for his soul ones. Not just that, but his soul affinity introduced another challenge the others wouldn't have to deal with. Most affinities interacted with one's body, meaning the corresponding mana flowed through it. Percy's soul mana however, flowed through his soul instead.

'Can I even use the Dance with it? How would I strengthen my soul enough to do that?'

He shook his head. This was a problem for after he was done repairing it. Right now, he could focus on mastering it for his second core. Returning his attention to the flow on his arm, he cut it off at the

shoulder, instead diverting it towards his other shoulder. It now had to pass parallel to his collarbone, curving through the space between his spine and lungs. The mana resisted at first, as it wasn't used to travelling along this route. Normally, when Percy wanted to shift mana from one arm to the other, he'd send it through his core first.

'This is more efficient.'

It wasn't just about increasing his capacity. This was simply a faster way to move it through his body. Most people didn't bother, as the channels they normally used were only a fraction of the total. They didn't consider this minor speed-up significant enough to waste months opening the additional pathways. Though clearly, this mindset was wrong. It had blinded everyone to the possibilities Micky's people had stumbled upon.

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Percy was broken out of his concentration by the gentle rays of the morning sun seeping through the window, brushing softly along his face.

'Shit. Don't tell me I was up all night.'

So focused had he been on clearing his channels, that he'd lost track of time. At least, he'd discovered and opened over a dozen new ones. Still, plenty remained in his body.

'Maybe it's not too late for a short nap.'

CAW! CAW!

Guessing his thoughts, Micky – who'd woken up already – flapped his wings angrily as he leapt on the bed.

"Fine! We'll go get your breakfast! Just let me drink my elixir first."

Percy uncorked the elegant vial, gulping its contents in one go. He began the daily ritual of cycling his pure mana between his stomach and core as he fought to keep his eyes open. He sure wasn't looking forward to another twelve hours of physical training with baldy after an all-nighter.

CAW!

"Right! Right! I'm awake!" the young man said, having totally fallen asleep at some point.

Getting up, he opened the door, dragging his feet outside the mansion. The morning breeze gave him goosebumps. It wasn't pleasant, but at least the chill and the fresh air helped flush the last traces of sleep out of his system, leaving only the exhaustion behind. Micky jumped onto his shoulder, content with enjoying his free ride as Percy prepared his food for him. That's when the young man paused, flashing the bird a mischievous grin.

"Starting from today, you'll be flying alongside me, looking for more mice."

His familiar tilted its head, playing dumb, but Percy knew Micky understood him.

CAW! CAW!

The bird continued to protest, but Percy refused to take another step until it began pulling its own weight. It took another ten minutes of arguing, but Micky eventually took off, resigned to his fate. He hadn't stopped mouthing off what Percy could only assume were curses though.

Only then did the young man resume his stroll, gathering some pure mana in his hand, trying to form it into a solid shape. This was pretty much the only time he had during the day to practice his magic, so he wouldn't waste it.

He might have been born at Red, but now he'd finally accumulated a few advantages of his own. Unlike his peers who only had a single core to worry about, he essentially had four between himself and his familiar. He couldn't afford to slack.

SIGH

‘I suppose I’ll just have to work four times as hard then.’