Wanderer 301

Chapter 301: Accelerated plans

“Good news first?” Nesha tentatively asked, her voice tinged with uncertainty.

“It seems to be the off-season.”

Percy had been able to tell due to the size of the floating globules. Their very existence was unique to the Valley, brought about by the different flow of time on either side of the Decree’s boundaries.

The rainwater falling into the Valley from above was tens of times slower, relatively speaking. Meanwhile, any pools of water inside the Valley tended to evaporate much faster. The accelerated steam thus mixed with the slower rainwater, forming countless bubbles that blanketed the sky like an artificial ceiling.

It made for quite a visual spectacle too, as the days and nights inside the Valley stretched for entire weeks, and the sunlight could only ever pass through the film of bubbles, bathing the barren land in a soft, azure colour.

Over time, the bubbles were further twisted by the temporal magic, their nature shifting almost entirely. The water and the steam blended more seamlessly, the bubbles condensing into the toxic globules Micky had shown him. The globules were heavier than the bubbles too. They fell closer to the ground, floating all over the place.

During the slower seasons, the globules were smaller and more numerous. It was only during the faster seasons that they grew scarcer, fusing together into larger orbs as big as watermelons.

Suffice to say, Percy was glad they were currently in the middle of the slower season.

There were a couple of downsides of course: like the fact that his time in there would be half as productive: but the positives vastly outweighed the negatives.

For one, they had a lot more time to prepare. It shouldn't have been more than a couple of years since Acton reached Blue, so the boy was still nearly half a century away from Violet. Meanwhile, everyone in Percy's group was a little over a decade from their next promotion, thanks to the Aurora Dew and their head start. This gave them over a year of leeway until Acton overtook them.

Had it been the faster season, they wouldn't have had as long.

It also meant that Micky's second core wouldn't fall behind as quickly. Percy would still have to prioritize brewing and delivering some Aurora Dew to his familiar, but at least the damage would be minimized now.

Finally, the environment inside the Valley was more favourable for them. They would have to spend years hiding from everyone in there, which would have been much harder during the faster season, when the place was full of people. The Valley was massive, yes: over a hundred miles across: but scurrying about like rats was still going to be a challenge.

At least, it was a lot more manageable now that they only had Acton to worry about. Micky would warn them of the boy's movements, and the lower visibility would help too.

"What about the bad news?" Nesha asked again, bracing herself.

Percy grimaced.

"He isn't alone. They've assigned him another group of guards, no weaker than the last one."

Nesha drew a sharp breath, the implications not lost on her.

This was a problem. A huge one, in fact. The Greens wouldn't just twiddle their thumbs inside the Valley. They'd cleanse their cores too, and they were likely even closer to their next promotion than the kid. Percy had no idea how close, but he was willing to bet at least a couple of them would beat Elaine to Blue.

In the worst-case scenario, even if he and his companions all advanced before Acton, they might have to face a total of six Blues in combat! On top of that, the boy would grow stronger too. It wasn't just about his advancement: he'd have decades to upgrade his spells and get used to his domain. Not to mention that he could use Micky against them.

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"Shit! What are we going to do?!" she asked, her voice cracking.

"What else? This doesn't really change anything. We'll just have to get in there as soon as possible."

The worst-case scenario wasn't a certainty. If Percy got lucky, maybe none of the guards would advance before his group did. Ok, maybe that was just wishful thinking. Still, Elaine should be able to handle multiple Blues once she got a domain of her own.

As bad as things were, there was still hope. Percy was confident in their ability to outgrow their enemies.

Nesha nodded, her expression grim.

"How is the mushroom doing?"

Percy had planted some spores on a piece of chicken breast back when they moved to the 11th district. He'd wanted to figure out how fast it would grow without Baldy's clones.

"It's almost fully grown. It'll take about a week in total. And given how much space its taken, we can fit about a hundred per square metre."

Nesha tilted her head, probably mathing it out.

“Alexander is lending us an abandoned warehouse in the 44th district. About thirty-by-thirty metres, five stories tall. He’ll provide the manpower and the meat, so we just have to make sure that’s enough space for our needs. Though the stench will be bad…”

“It won’t be.” Percy corrected her.

“How so?” she raised an eyebrow. “The place will be covered in rotten meat for weeks.”

“Not sure. But the meat in my room doesn’t smell. Nor is it covered in maggots, as you’d expect. I think the mushrooms release something in their “soil” to slow down the decay.”

“That’s good.” she exhaled in relief. “At least we won’t have to worry about the neighbours complaining. Though I guess Alexander would have handled that… So how many mushrooms is that…? 450… thousand?!” she blurted out.

Then, she did a double take, apparently finding the number hard to believe.

“That’s per batch.” Percy confirmed. “My cauldron won’t be ready for a few more weeks. By the time I can mass produce the potions, we’ll have over a million mushrooms at hand. Maybe more.”

“That’s too much. Several times what we can realistically sell. Should I tell Alexander to leave a few floors out?”

“Nah.” Percy shook his head. “I have some ideas on what we can do with the excess.”

“You mean…?!” Nesha failed to contain the excitement in her voice, probably guessing what he had in mind.

“I did promise you. I’m sorry it took so long.”

Percy was naturally talking about her second core. He'd already agreed to give her the Decree, but they'd put it on hold, as there wasn't much of a point in doing that before they had the life mana to repair it.

Finally, the solution was right in front of them.

"That's still too many mushrooms though." Nesha quickly realized.

"Only if it was just you. But I think I can do the same for Azure, given the circumstances."

Originally, he'd been afraid to injure Elaine, as he hadn't been sure he'd be able to heal her in time. He would have only dared to try if he had Micky to help him, by eating a Green's soul. Not to mention that there had still been the issue with the life mana, and he'd promised Nesha to help her first.

But now, it seemed that all the chips had fallen into place. Not only would he have enough mushrooms for both of them, Micky would be able to provide all the soul mana he needed. After all, he'd be stuffing his face full of Yellow and Green souls for the foreseeable future. In fact, he'd be doing that twenty times faster than normal.

Hell, Percy felt confident he could have given Galahad a second core, had he been around.

"We'll still have plenty left. Can you try to get us some more elixirs? Sell some of the potions cheaper if you have to. Maybe sell the mushrooms directly too." he suggested.

"Not sure I'll be able to. How important is it?"

"It's not the end of the world if you can't, but it would help."

His original calculations had suggested that they had enough elixirs for everyone to advance, but he hadn't included the losses from the scaling principle, nor had he taken the girls' second cores into account. After all, he couldn't have predicted that Acton would capture Micky and force them to rush their preparations like this.

If they failed to get more elixirs, Elaine and Nesha would have to ignore their new cores during their stay in the Valley. It wouldn't be ideal, but making sure that everyone's first core advanced was much more important.

Of course, Micky and Percy would still have to cleanse their second cores too. The crow needed it to manage his hunger, and Percy was a Red-born. He had to squeeze every potential second of lifespan out of his body, and it might still not be enough for him to reach his goals.

He had no idea if Nesha or Elaine wanted to become gods one day, but it wouldn't be as difficult for them.

'Anyway, let's not give up pre-emptively.'

If Nesha could get him some extra elixir to cover everyone's needs, it would be ideal. Every little bit of extra power might make the difference in the end.

Chapter 302: Checkpoints

Carving the final stroke into the enchantment, Percy scanned the whole thing once more, verifying he hadn't made a mistake. Well… not a visible one, at least…

'It's good, I think.'

The heat rune he'd just drawn was affixed with a whopping five control runes. That was more than the enchantments on his old cauldron had, allowing him to adjust the temperature of his brews with even greater precision. That was the plan, anyway.

But he still had to check that the enchantment worked as intended.

Pouring some mana into the rune, he observed it with bated breath. At first, the enchantment lit up like it was supposed to, releasing some heat. A great start. Playing with the control runes, Percy then began to cycle through the 32 intensity levels, to ensure that everything was in order.

Sadly, it wasn't meant to be.

About halfway through, the enchantment flared even more brightly for an instant, before frying itself. If that wasn't enough, it even sent a deep crack through the reinforced mana, ruining a bunch of other runes in the process.

'Another twenty minutes down the drain…'

He sighed.

Advancing his runecrafting skill to this level had taken him ages. It had already been about a month since Micky entered the Valley, placing Percy under a lot of pressure. After all, the crow had already lost over a year of core purification, and he'd likely lose another one, at the very least. Probably more.

Suffice to say, Percy hadn't dared to relax for a second longer than necessary, doing everything he could to get some Aurora Dew to his familiar as soon as possible. If he was honest with himself, mastering such complex enchantments so quickly was nothing short of impressive. But it still wasn't good enough in his eyes.

'Oh well… It would've been so much worse if I hadn't thought of that trick…'

The cauldron Percy was trying to craft was quite a complicated piece of magiscript. He wanted to attach five heating enchantments, five rotation enchantments, five pressure enchantments, five concealment enchantments and one self-repair.

And that was only for each half of the finished cauldron!

Once assembled, it would contain 42 of them! On top of that, other than the self-repairs, they each had to be fitted with five control runes, meaning that Percy had originally needed to draw a total of 204 runes on the whole thing!

Obviously, this was quite the ambitious undertaking. While Percy had improved enough to carve these intricate enchantments, he wasn't very good at it. Each attempt took him about twenty minutes, and he only succeeded about once every five tries.

Unfortunately, that wouldn't cut it.

Whenever he failed even once, it meant the entire half of the cauldron would go to waste. He'd have to destroy it and start over, until he managed to draw all 21 enchantments correctly on the first try. With such a low success rate, doing that would have taken a ridiculous amount of time. Time that Micky didn't have.

One solution had been to just get better at drawing the runes, but that wasn't very feasible. Improving his success rate got harder the more complex the enchantments were, and he would need to improve a lot to overcome the compounding effect of his failure rate. That was why he'd turned to a different, arguably more novel solution.

The self-repair enchantment.

Percy had always planned to outfit the cauldron with those, so that he could maintain the construct with ease. If he didn't, he'd have to replace the whole thing every few days, which wasn't something he was willing to consider.

However, the self-repair enchantments couldn't really help him during the crafting process. At least, not in their simplest form. As early as back when he was forging the latest iteration of his armour, Percy had discovered that the self-repair enchantment had to be added last. If not, the memory runes would store an incomplete blueprint of the object. That meant that the enchantment would then try to restore his construct to an earlier form, erasing any additional runes he carved afterwards.

Luckily, Percy had thought of a way to bypass this issue:

To equip the self-repair enchantment with a control rune of its own. That way, he could turn it off and on again, to essentially reset the stored blueprint in the memory rune.

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Now, he could safely carve the controlled self-repair enchantment before all the other runes, rather than after, and he could take advantage of it to erase only his failures, while preserving his successes.

Whenever he made a mistake, he could just use the enchantment to restore the cauldron to its previous stored blueprint. Whenever he succeeded, he could reset the blueprint instead, adding another enchantment into its memory. Essentially, Percy could create checkpoints of his progress, completely eliminating the compounding nature of his error rate.

'In hindsight, it's not exactly the most ground-breaking idea. I'm sure somebody must have thought of it.'

Percy didn't recall seeing any mention of this in the books he'd read. Then again, he hadn't read that many of them to begin with. Chances are, he had merely reinvented the wheel.

Still, that didn't take away from his achievement in his eyes.

Grinning, he spun the half-spherical construct in his hands, soon finding the controlled self-repair rune. Luckily, the cracks hadn't reached that one. Activating it, he watched the cauldron repair itself rapidly, both the cracks and the dysfunctional enchantment soon erased, as if they'd never been there.

Next, he gathered some more mana to his fingers, before beginning another attempt…

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Percy screwed the two halves of the cauldron together until he heard a satisfying click. They were nearly identical, except that the top half had a small hole in the middle, so that he could pour the ingredients into the cauldron.

Taking two more objects from his spatial seal, he attached them to the cauldron. The first was his Spiritforged Effigy: the small bust of a crow's head that he used to generate teal powder.

Placing it into the hole at the top of the cauldron, he twisted it until it latched into place. There wasn't any practical purpose for this: he'd just made the hole the right shape so that he could use the Effigy as a lid, thinking that it would make for a nice little decoration.

The other object was a tripod, also forged out of his reinforced mana, equipped with self-repair enchantments of its own. Placing the spherical cauldron on it, he set it on the ground in front of him, taking a few seconds to marvel at his creation.

Then, he activated the enchantments again, one at a time, to ensure he hadn't made any mistakes. The heat, pressure and rotation runes themselves weren't that different from the ones his old cauldron had, but the concealment runes were a new addition.

He'd tested them in isolation, of course, yet he still hadn't fully shaken off his worry that they might not work as intended.

Dropping a teal dagger inside the cauldron, he willed it to float in the middle of the sphere. Next, he turned the cauldron itself invisible, looking at the dagger with his eyes. The weapon was visible in the regular part of his vision, but the cauldron fully obscured it in his Soul Vision and Mana Sense, looking like a glowing orb of Orange and silver.

Pouring some mana into the concealment runes, Percy soon caused everything to turn invisible in his sixth and seventh senses: both the cauldron and the dagger inside it.

But he wasn't too distraught about that, having expected it.

Next, he played a little with the controls, dialling the effect of the concealment runes down, until the dagger turned visible again at about a quarter of the enchantment's intensity. The dagger was faint and blurry at first, so he kept going.

Its details grew clearer and clearer, though Percy had to stop at some point, once the walls of the cauldron began to reappear in his vision.

'Alright, I think 5 parts out of 32 give me the best view.'

It wasn't perfect, since he could only see the dagger about 90% as clearly as he could in his old cauldron, as that wasn't made of mana. Still, the old cauldron was opaque, completely obscuring the regular part of his vision.

All things considered, the new cauldron was a net improvement, allowing him to discern more information overall.

Even better, he was confident he could improve upon this in the future too. Perhaps, adding a sixth or seventh control rune to the enchantments would let him fine-tune them with greater precision. Learning to make the walls of the cauldron thinner without compromising its structural integrity would further reduce the interference.

‘Still, it’s more than good enough for now. Definitely an upgrade.’

Taking his old cauldron out of his spatial seal, Percy placed the two side-by-side.

Other than the obvious difference in their shapes, the new cauldron was a little wider, its diameter about one-and-a-half times larger. This, along with the fact that he could fill it to the brim now meant he could brew a lot more at once.

Filling the old cauldron with water and emptying it into the new one, he soon confirmed once more that its volume was exactly five times greater.

Finally, the runes decorating its surface were a lot denser. This was inevitable, since he’d not only added more control runes to all the enchantments, but he’d increased the number of enchantments too. The old cauldron was equipped with only three heating enchantments, and just as many pressure and rotation enchantments. Meanwhile, the new cauldron had ten of each type. If that wasn’t enough, Percy had added the concealment and self-repair enchantments that hadn’t been there before.

Sure, the surface area of the new cauldron was greater, and the Vault’s runes were much more compact, but Percy had drawn on every square inch, to ensure he could apply all their effects as uniformly as possible to his concoctions.

Examining the fruit of his labour, Percy couldn’t help but crack a grin.

There was plenty more he needed to do, of course. He had yet to actually master the scaling principle. On top of that, he’d have to meet the quota they’d promised Alexander before the man gave them the secondary ingredients he needed for the elixirs.

And before he dove into alchemy, there was one more little thing he'd promised to do for his companions.

But all of that could wait a few minutes.

Right now, he wanted to take a moment to enjoy his achievement, reading the inevitable notification.

[Congratulations! Your spell has evolved: Spiritforged Effigy: Refined -> Spiritforged Cauldron: Refined!]

Chapter 303: Intimate moment

'Only Refined? What a scam…'

Percy would be lying if he said he wasn't a little surprised. His Status had registered the Phantomscale Regalia as a Masterful spell, and the runework that had gone into his new cauldron was more than a couple steps beyond that.

Then again, it wasn't completely unreasonable. His armour involved a few additional things, outside of its enchantments.

In any case, Percy wasn't an expert in spell classification, but he was confident this latest addition was at the very top of the Refined tier, only a needle's breadth away from its ceiling. Meanwhile, the Spiritforged Effigy had probably been lower than that, while his armour was likely at the very bottom of the next one.

He shrugged.

'I guess it doesn't really matter what label the Status sticks on them… as long as they do what they're supposed to. Besides, my eyes draw information from them all the same.'

Unlike alchemy, Percy didn't have a dedicated section in his Status related to magiscript. This meant that his eyes only benefited from whatever enchantments he'd included in his spells. Even then, the

contribution was minor, though still valuable. His eyes couldn't help him draw the runes better, nor to visualize their effects more clearly, but they could help him indirectly.

Each rune consisted of features that had to be drawn precisely, without room for even the slightest deviation, as well as features that were more flexible, allowing them to be bent or twisted slightly. The latter were useful when one was trying to compose more intricated enchantments: involving multiple runes: as they made it easier for the symbols to be synthesized together.

Percy's eyes did give him some feedback in that regard, allowing him to get a more instinctive understanding of which features were more rigid than others. His most recent entry had just added a few more enchantments to the list, which would make his life a little easier from now on.

'Though it would be nice if I could upgrade my Status again at some point…'

Not that he was keen to experience the splitting headache associated with Ea's Decree again, but the benefits he'd gained from Atlantis were undeniable.

And he wasn't only thinking of magiscript either. Any new addition to his Status would likely enhance his eyes in all sorts of unpredictable ways. Plus, that was without even considering any other abilities that might come bundled with the next Decree he got his hands on.

Sadly, it didn't seem that Metatron had a titan like that in his ranks. Percy had no idea how long it would be until he stumbled upon one on his own. His last fifteen or so clones certainly hadn't brought anything interesting back, even though he'd made a point of sending them out one after the other for the past month.

The most recent one had returned while he was drawing the final enchantment on his cauldron, ruining his attempt and forcing him to start over. Had this been any other day, he would have already started preparing the next clone, but he had something else planned for today.

Pulling the curtain aside, Percy realized the sun was about to set. Taking his clothes off, he popped into the shower for a few minutes, before packing his things and leaving the inn.

'Man, how long has it been since I left my room?'

Unlike Elaine and Nesha whose tasks forced them to travel all over the city: albeit each with a different level of caution: Percy had spent the whole month sitting on his ass, either brewing Aurora Dew for everyone, or working on the cauldron. He'd only left the place once or twice a week, to hand his companions their share of the elixirs, or to get more ingredients from Elaine.

Well, tonight he was planning to meet Nesha again, for an entirely different reason. And they were about to reach a level of intimacy they'd never experienced before during their relationship…

Over the next couple of hours, Percy made his way to the 44th district.

He passed several districts of both colours along the way, marvelling at the differences between them. It was easy to think of Twilight City as having just two types of districts, but that was an oversimplification.

If one paid closer attention, they'd quickly notice that even districts of the same colour came in all sorts of unique flavours, setting them apart from one another. Some white districts had cleaner streets, taller buildings and more carefully tended gardens. Others were in poorer condition, with smaller and older-looking houses.

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'I guess the nicer ones are where the rich folk live…'

A similar dynamic was present in the black districts. All of them were rather lively right now, as it was getting a bit late. Still, there were some subtle differences between them. Some seemed home to "cleaner" fun: bars, restaurants and gambling dens. Others were full of hookers, drugs and all sorts of shady people up to no good.

In any case, Percy tried to travel mainly through the white districts, taking a bunch of inconvenient detours to avoid as much traffic as possible, still a bit shaken by his meeting with Clarity.

Eventually, he reached his destination.

It was a warehouse of medium size, sitting in some relatively quiet corner of the 44th district. It was a few stories tall, a Green-cored woman standing in front of the entrance alone, guarding it.

Percy casually strode forth, the guard moving aside to let him into the building.

Now that his new cauldron was ready, he hoped to start mass-producing the potions as early as tomorrow. Martina would be in charge of harvesting and delivering the mushrooms to Nesha, who would then hand them over to him. After all, neither Alexander nor his associates were supposed to learn of Percy or Nesha's involvement in the operation. This was why they'd bothered to install a proxy in the first place.

But there was a reason Percy had visited the warehouse in person tonight. He was planning to do something that required utmost secrecy: something he'd rather avoid doing back in the inn.

Stepping into the warehouse, his gaze brushed over the countless green mushrooms growing on the carpet of spoilt meat, landing on the lone figure leaning on the opposite wall: another person who wasn't supposed to be here.

"Was it difficult to get her hired?" he asked, walking towards her.

"Not really. Greens are highly sought after in this line of work." Nesha replied.

They were naturally talking about Elaine. She was the person who was standing outside the warehouse: who'd just allowed Percy in. Unlike him and Nesha, his cousin wasn't a fugitive yet, so they weren't as wary of getting her involved in the operation. In fact, the benefits of getting her to guard the warehouse were numerous.

Other than having somebody they trusted to look after their stuff, Elaine would turn a blind eye whenever they needed to sneak into the warehouse to do something shady. Of course, she hadn't quit her job at the water manifestation company. She still worked there during the day, though she'd made time to take some night shifts here.

"Have you talked to Martina about this?"

Nesha nodded.

“Yeah. She knows we’ll take the mushrooms tonight, though she doesn’t know the reason. Well, it’s not like it matters to her, as long as we deliver on our promises.”

Alexander had no idea who the alchemist was, nor how high his brewing yield was. In fact, as far as he was concerned, it wasn’t a single alchemist, but a whole crew. After all, nobody on Remior knew about the scaling principle, nor could they guess that a single alchemist was capable of brewing as much as Percy was about to.

Needless to say, the Radiant Lord would never know if a fraction of the mushrooms went missing. Besides, the mushrooms themselves cost peanuts to grow, as Percy provided the spores, and Alexander only had to get them some trash to plant them on, and some labour to tend to them.

It wouldn’t be until Percy started brewing the ink and the magic potions that Alexander would have to invest money out of his own pocket. By then, they’d already be making a profit off the healing potions.

“How are things on your end?” Nesha asked, sounding a little nervous.

Percy didn’t blame her for it either. As much as she trusted him, he understood how much pressure she was currently under. She’d gone to great lengths to orchestrate every detail of their operation, but it would all come crashing down in an instant if he failed to do his part. Everything hinged on his ability to brew over a thousand doses of potions per day: something completely unheard of.

He grinned.

“Don’t worry. The cauldron is ready. I just need to wrap my mind around the scaling principle. My output should be up there by the end of the week.”

Exhaling in relief, she allowed herself to slide down the wall weakly, sitting on the ground.

“What’s the matter?” Percy asked, raising an eyebrow. “I thought you’d be more excited about this. You’re the one who asked for it, remember?”

“I am. It’s just… I was thinking about what you said. You were right, you know...”

He tilted his head in confusion, prompting her to elaborate.

“Back then, you told me there wouldn’t be a point in giving me a second core unless I was willing to put in the work. The truth is, I have yet to make the most of my first core… Isn’t this a waste of time and elixir?”

Listening to her, Percy gave her an appraising look, comparing the hard-working woman in front of him with the lazy girl who’d followed him out of the Fungal Spire. He was keenly aware that she’d been training non-stop over the past two years, even if she hadn’t achieved all of her goals just yet.

Placing his hand on her shoulder, he gave her a gentle squeeze.

“Nesh– Ebony, I mean… I don’t think I’ve ever wasted a single drop of elixir on you. Every dose I ever gave you, you paid back for it in spades. I doubt I would have ever made it this far without your help. And I’m not just talking about your bloodline and your trading skills. I’d have probably died in the Grisly Bog if it wasn’t for you. So what if your combat spells could use a little work? You’ve already made faster progress than anyone else I know, and I’m sure you’ll get a hang of the new core too.”

Hearing him, some tears glistened by the corners of her eyes as she wrapped her arms around him, resting her face on his chest.

Percy hugged her back, having honestly missed spending time with her.

‘As soon as we rescue Micky, we’ll make up for the lost time.’ he promised himself.

The two remained locked in their embrace for a couple minutes, before Nesha let go.

“I’m ready.” she whispered.

Her voice was soft, but firm, her eyes burning with determination.

Percy nodded.

It was finally time to give Nesha her second core.

Chapter 304: Intent

Checking up on his familiar, Percy waited fifteen minutes: or around five hours from the crow's perspective: for him to start hunting again with Acton.

Strictly speaking, Micky's help would only be indispensable when it was Elaine's turn to receive her core. Percy was confident he could heal Nesha on his own. Still, it wouldn't hurt to have some extra mana on the side, just in case.

Rolling up a strip of cloth, he handed it over to her, asking her to bite down on it.

"You realise this will hurt a lot, right?" Percy asked, getting a nod back.

Next, he activated Synchronization, gathering some soul mana to his fingers. Employing utmost caution, he proceeded to surgically inflict lots of minor incisions on Nesha's soul.

Every time he cut her, she shuddered, the colour draining from both her face and her clenched fists. He could tell she wanted to scream as tears streamed down her face, though, to her credit, she never asked him to stop, nor did she make a peep.

Percy himself wasn't having a great time. He'd never hated his bloodline as much as he did right now, knowing full well how much agony his girlfriend was currently under. He wished he could take her place. Not that the soul injuries didn't hurt him, but he'd grown used to them over the years. Meanwhile, Nesha had never experienced them before.

Alas, he also understood that great power often came hand in hand with equally great sacrifices. And she was the one who'd asked for this, fully aware of the price she'd have to pay. The best he could do was to keep his hands steady, and to get this over with as soon as possible.

A few minutes later, he was done. Nesha had already stopped reacting to his actions, her eyes now dazed and barely responsive. Still, her injuries weren't severe enough to fully lower her soul's resistance quite yet. Percy had been careful not to overdo it. If everything went according to plan, her state should continue to deteriorate while he prepared his clone, leaving her open to being possessed by the time he was ready.

Sitting in front of her, he pushed his boosting art to the very limit, asking Micky to start munching on something. At the same time, he pulled a part of his soul out, pumping it full of mana using his family's technique.

Preparing the clone took less time than ever before, thanks to both their combined efforts and his own insistence on putting an end to Nesha's suffering.

'Should I pass her a part of my storage seal too?' he wondered.

Giving her and Elaine an eighth of the seal each wouldn't set him back too much. Then again, it wouldn't benefit them much either, as the internal space would barely exceed that of their spatial amulets. Still, the seals were more convenient to use. Not to mention much harder for their enemies to detect.

But he shook his head a moment later, realizing it was probably a bad idea.

Neither of them had soul mana, nor the ability to sense their own soul. Chances are, they wouldn't even be able to access the seal, making it completely useless for them. Plus, he'd have to injure and possess them again to take it back later.

Satisfied with the size of the thrumming orb in front of his stomach, he activated his bloodline, watching as the ghostly hand dove into the clone, severing it from the rest of his soul. Even Percy had to grit his teeth during this part, as it hurt far more than anything else he'd done.

Regardless, the bloodline did its job, the clone soon shooting into Nesha's body like a teal comet. He stretched and spilled into the cracks in her soul, filling them up.

'Now, for the last step.'

The clone had been equipped with more than enough mana to stitch her wounds up by himself. Still, Percy pitched in with his main body, sending more mana through the cord, to accelerate the process. A lot of it got wasted, yet he didn't care. The only thing that mattered to him was healing Nesha as quickly as possible, efficiency be damned.

Taking advantage of the flood of soul mana, the clone put the Weaving trait to good use. Drawing one preservation rune after the other, he patched all the injuries up, starting from the most severe ones.

Only when he saw the final wound get stitched shut did Percy let out a tired breath, a wave of relief washing over him.

He was about to check up on Nesha, to ensure that everything was alright, when something unexpected happened.

[Congratulations! Your spell has evolved: Spectral Art: Soul Stitching: Refined -> Hybrid Art: Core Bestowal: Masterful!]

He creased his brow upon reading the notification, the Status's words raising multiple questions.

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The most obvious ones had to do with the classification of the spell. After all the effort he'd put into upgrading his other spells, getting an upgrade to Masterful so easily felt cheap. Not that injuring, possessing and healing somebody was a trivial matter, but it certainly hadn't taken him as much time and effort as his armour or his cauldron: and only the former had even qualified for this tier.

Then again, Percy's perspective was probably skewed.

The Moirais' Decree was one of the most valuable Decrees in the universe: the greatest treasure of a peak faction, standing tall even among the rest of the greater springs. A mortal passing this Decree over to another mortal wasn't a small feat by any stretch of the imagination. It was something that had only become possible for Percy through a series of unbelievable coincidences.

In fact, this was probably why his Status had called this a “Hybrid Art”. Percy guessed this was what happened when one of his spells involved both his bloodline and his spectral trait. Maybe it would have been the same if he’d thrown his mutation into the mix too.

Though there was one more question swirling in his mind.

‘Why now?’

This wasn’t the first time he’d granted somebody a second core. Not by a long shot. He’d done it to half a dozen individuals in the Vault alone, and that wasn’t even all of them. Shouldn’t his Status have recognized the spell years ago? If not when he healed Gabe: since he hadn’t done that by himself: then certainly in Enki’s case.

Strictly speaking, what he’d just done for Nesha was functionally identical to what he’d done for the kid. Sure, he’d grown a bit better at stitching soul injuries, and his familiar had provided him with more mana, but none of it seemed like a big deal.

‘Is it because it wasn’t on purpose before?’

In hindsight, Percy had never created a clone with the goal of giving somebody the Moirais’ Decree. He’d possessed his past hosts for various reasons, ranging from his search for knowledge to his infiltration missions, and even healed a bunch of them out of kindness or necessity. As for their second cores, they’d all received them mostly by accident.

Of course, Percy had long known he was capable of passing the Decree along on purpose, but he’d never attempted to do that directly until tonight. This was the first time he’d activated his bloodline with the explicit goal of giving somebody a second core.

Still, it was quite bizarre for his Status to decide whether to register such a high-level spell based on such a flimsy reason.

‘Or maybe it isn’t…’

Could something brought about through sheer happenstance ever be described as a spell? Wasn't the caster's intent ultimately a key part of the equation?

Regardless, it didn't matter.

Shaking the pointless thoughts out of his head, Percy grabbed Nesha's wrist, checking her pulse. Next, he summoned his Status. Ignoring his own information, he gazed at his girlfriend, pulling up her own.

___

Nesha Veritas (Percival's clone)

Mana cores:

[Mana core 1 – Yellow – Space][Mana core 2 – Seed – ???]Bloodline:

[Truthseeker]: Sense when somebody is lying.Spectral trait:

[Weaving]: Boosts one's proclivity in manipulating one-dimensional structures.Spells:

[Secret Art: Soul Resonance: Refined][Soul Harvester: Refined][Reinforcement: Refined][Spiritforged Cauldron: Refined][Spectral Art: Phantomscale Regalia: Masterful]Alchemic principles:

[Extraction]: Separate and condense an ingredient's essence.[Pacification] – Delay an ingredient's activation rate.[Redirection] – Adjust an ingredient's effect.[Deattunement] – Prevent multiple conflicting ingredients from reacting with one another.[Bonding] – Enrich an ingredient with crystallized pure mana.[Restructuring]: Alter an ingredient's phase.Decrees:

[Phoebe's Decree]: Grants access to your Status.[Iapetus's Decree]: Grants a bloodline.[Moirais' Decree (Incomplete)] – Grants the seed of a second mana core. Requires potent life mana to

germinate.[Metatron's Decree]: Open a one-way portal to the Vault of Magic at will.[Ea's Decree (Modified)] – Augments and enhances your Status.___

As usual, his clone's Status didn't list Nesha's spell: only the abilities Percy could use while staying in her body. Other than that, there wasn't anything unexpected there, besides the confirmation that he had successfully passed her the Decree. Then again, his own spell upgrade had been proof enough of that.

'Don't worry… she's alright.' the clone's voice suddenly rang through the cord.

'The injuries?' Percy asked, still somewhat nervous. Logically, he knew nothing had gone wrong, but he couldn't help being a little irrational.

'All handled. I'm talking to her right now. She'll be back to her feet in a couple of minutes. We'll drain the mushrooms on the top floors. Start storing the ones here.'

Percy reluctantly nodded, choosing to let the clone handle the situation. Technically, the clone's work was already done, so he could leave Nesha's body immediately if he wanted. Still, they'd rather repair the Decree completely while he was still there, as they didn't know if she'd need mind mana for that once he was gone.

Getting up, Percy walked to the nearest mushroom. Luckily, he didn't need to reach down to pick it. He could deposit it directly into his seal as long as he touched it with his boot, making his job a great deal easier.

It didn't take long for Nesha to get up too, just like the clone had said. She still looked a little shaken, but she gave Percy a reassuring nod, before heading upstairs.

It wouldn't be long before the sun rose, so they had to clean up the whole warehouse by then. That was when Elaine's shift would end, and Martina would be coming here with the new guard as well as the workers responsible for planting the next batch of mushrooms. Needless to say, Percy and Nesha would rather not be seen by all those people if they could avoid it.

Thinking of Elaine, Percy couldn't help but grimace.

Giving Nesha her new core had been a dreadful experience, and he wasn't looking forward to doing it again for his cousin a few days from now.

Chapter 305: Trouble?

Percy walked into the warehouse for the third time in the past couple of weeks, his steps hurried and his breath short. Once again, there was nobody here besides Nesha and Elaine.

"Why did you bring me here? Did something go wrong?" he asked, fearing the worst.

His last two visits had been to grant his companions their new cores. This time, he had no idea what to expect. Nesha had met him the night before, saying they needed his help with something, but she'd refused to elaborate.

"Show him." Nesha said, nodding at Elaine.

Stepping into the building too, his cousin took the spatial amulet off her neck, pouring some mana into the enchantment. She set it on the ground as it expanded to its original size, before opening it. Then, she stood in front of it, seemingly using her body to shield its contents from Percy's view. She spent a couple seconds doing something in secret. Percy even heard the sound of a match lighting, a faint glow flickering inside the device.

"Can you two stop being cryptic and just tell me what's going on? Did we get busted?" he demanded, frustration mounting.

But neither of them spoke a word.

Instead, Nesha stepped closer, wrapping her arms around his waist and leaning into his side. Elaine, meanwhile, finished her work and finally turned around, beaming.

"Happy birthday, Percy!" they exclaimed together, their voices overlapping as they tried: and failed: to whisper.

Elaine held up a cake: handmade, from the looks of it. The crumb was a deep pink. Hopefully strawberry. A single candle stood alone in the centre, its tiny flame barely illuminating the musty floor around her.

“Sorry about the smell, but this was the safest place to do this.” Nesha explained.

While the mushrooms certainly did something to massively slow down the meat’s decay, they couldn’t completely eliminate the unpleasant odour. Percy hadn’t noticed it back when he’d planted a single mushroom in his room, but it was hard to ignore it when surrounded by tens of thousands of them, in an enclosed space.

Suffice to say, it wasn’t the most appetizing setting.

Still, Percy felt some warmth gather in his chest. He hadn’t even known it was his birthday today, having stopped keeping track of it years ago. What was he: 23 now?

Evidently, Elaine hadn’t forgotten.

“Thanks guys.” he said, blowing out the candle. “But you realize we just violated every safety protocol we set up since coming here, right?”

They weren’t supposed to roam the city unless necessary, nor to meet each other without a good reason. They certainly shouldn’t all gather at the same place either if they could avoid it, nor use their real names. Hell, Elaine was arguably slacking off from her guard post right now.

Of course, this wasn’t the first time they’d done this, but the previous two had been an exception. After all, Percy had needed to spend a few hours each time to grant them their cores, with the third person keeping watch.

She shrugged.

“Relax, cousin. It’s just a few minutes. Nothing will happen.”

“You should have seen how paranoid he was back in the Guild! He used to interrogate the Oblivious Agents to make sure they’d erased their memory!” Nesha chuckled.

“Hey, in my defence, we did everything we could and still got caught.” he replied.

Though, maybe they were right. People rarely approached this part of the district, and they’d have to be really unlucky for someone to walk in on them right now.

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Sighing, he used his mana to carve a large slice of cake for himself. But he opted to toss it into his storage seal than eating it on the spot, since the stinky warehouse wasn’t the best place to enjoy a meal. The others followed suit, everyone silently agreeing to eat their share later, in their rooms.

Then, they found a relatively clean spot against the wall, sitting side by side. The past couple of months had been a nonstop grind. It was nice to take a short break once in a while, the moment of normalcy feeling almost surreal.

“You know…” Percy murmured. “…this might be my last birthday.”

“Wow, way to ruin the mood!” Nesha pinched his side.

“Ouch! What was that for?!” he yelped.

“What happened to your usual optimism?” Elaine asked, furrowing her brow. “Are you planning to get yourself killed inside the Valley?!”

Percy blinked, only now realizing that they’d misunderstood his words.

“Wait: no. That’s not what I meant. It’s just… we won’t really know when our birthdays are once we enter the Valley.”

Time would flow very differently in there, days and nights stretching over entire weeks. They'd roughly know how long they stayed, of course, but would they be able to narrow it down to a specific number of days?

It was a strange thought. Magic gave people so much: stronger bodies, longer lives, impossible abilities… But every now and then, it robbed them of things they took for granted. Sometimes, it was something as simple as a birthday. Then again, they had it a lot better than people with blighted bloodlines like Rambert and his family.

Elaine was quiet for a moment. Then she smiled.

"Drama queen much? We'll just pretend it's the same day as always. Nobody will know."

"I suppose that works." he chuckled, before getting more serious. "Listen, Elaine… I'm really sorry about your affinity."

The words hung in the air for a few seconds, nobody saying anything.

Nesha's expression darkened, as she gave Elaine a sidelong glance, sympathy evident in her eyes. Both girls had had enough time to clear the first few channels and to fully awaken their new cores. Nesha's second affinity was earth. Not the most exciting element, nor was she particularly pleased about having to discover another Circulation pattern by herself. Still, it was more than useable.

Elaine's on the other hand…

"Why are you apologizing? Are you the one who chose our affinities for us?" she asked.

"Well, no… but I still got your hopes up for nothing." he replied.

Back when he got his own pure affinity, Percy had thought it'd been the worst possible outcome. Yet, he'd made it work, somehow. He'd found countless applications for his second core over the years, until he even turned down the opportunity to change his affinity to water.

But even he wasn't sure if Elaine's new affinity could be salvaged.

It was water.

Like the first one.

Percy hadn't even known this was possible. Then again, he couldn't think of a reason why it wouldn't be. Perhaps, he'd just been lucky it hadn't happened to his hosts before.

Sadly, Elaine now had two cores in name only. She'd still get all the passive benefits: a stronger physique, a longer lifespan… It would also expand her mana capacity. But that was about it.

She wouldn't be able to use affinity fusion, nor would she gain the same versatility that the others had. Even worse, this didn't mesh well with Circulation. Her situation was actually the exact opposite from Micky's. She now had more cores than sets of mana channels. Her boosting art was doomed to stay weaker than Percy's or Nesha's.

The only silver lining is that it wouldn't require much extra effort from her. She'd still have to clear a couple additional pathways to link the new core with the rest of the network, and maybe even adjust the pattern slightly. But that was several times less demanding than a brand-new affinity would've been.

That said, Percy didn't envy her.

Yet, she smiled against all odds, shaking her head.

"Don't worry about me! I'm still a Yellow-born, remember? I've been treated like a princess my whole life, and that was before you even started showering me with all sorts of crazy treasures. I'd have to be a complete idiot to complain about this. It's still a good thing, isn't it?"

Percy nodded, albeit reluctantly. With two cores, Elaine could now potentially live long enough to attain divinity, even without Aurora Dew. However, he still wasn't happy her new affinity hadn't worked out for her.

‘I should look for a way for her to change it. Since the lotus exists, there must be other treasures like it…’

He was about to say something, but Elaine stood up.

“Anyway, I’ll get back to my post before anyone tries to sneak in.”

As soon as his cousin left, Percy turned to Nesha, handing her a spatial amulet.

“Might as well give you the first batch of potions, since we’re here.”

“How many?”

“Around 6000, give or take.” he sighed. “I haven’t registered the scaling principle yet, so I was only able to brew a fraction of what I wanted.”

Putting the device away, Nesha shook her head.

“It’s enough to get us started. With this, we can pay Alexander back for his expenses. I’ll get him to buy us the rest of the ingredients in the next few days.”

Percy nodded.

“Then, I’ll make sure to register the principle by the end of the week. That should kick my yield up to the next level.”

Chapter 306: Rapid improvement

Batch after batch, hour after hour, day after day, Percy continued to brew inside his room, rapidly consuming his enormous stash of green mushrooms. By now, a rich herbal aroma permeated the inn: maybe the entire neighbourhood: all day long.

Luckily, nobody had bothered him about it. It wasn't an unpleasant scent: mostly the minty odour of the life mana, since that was the ingredient he used in the bulk of his brews. On top of that, he'd made sure the innkeeper was the kind of guy who respected his customers' privacy before starting.

Besides, what he was doing wasn't that unusual in Twilight City. While alchemists were much rarer outside the Guild, there were still plenty living here. Most of the residents had likely encountered one before.

Of course, if anybody peered into his room, they'd be left speechless by the sight. Whether it was the strange shape of his cauldron, or the sheer scale of his brews, he doubted his neighbours had seen anything even remotely similar.

In any case, he was free to pour all his time and effort into the operation, and the results spoke for themselves. Yet, no matter how fast he brewed, he couldn't possibly keep up with the steady flow of ingredients Nesha provided him with.

She'd already had Martina discuss with Alexander the possibility of exporting the mushrooms directly. That was not to say that there was anything wrong with the quality of Percy's products: all three of them were selling like hot cakes. But they could make a lot more money if they weren't bottlenecked by his brewing speed. Plus, a lot of people would be interested in an alternative source of life mana. Especially one that was so much easier to grow.

Still, this wouldn't be without its downsides. Contacting the right people to set this up would take even longer: easily another two or three months. For now, they'd have to rely solely on Percy's output. That said, this arrangement suited him just fine, as he had yet to register the scaling principle, and his yield hadn't reached a high enough level for him to consider moving to Aurora Dew.

But time wasn't the only issue with selling the mushrooms. Such a grand upheaval of the market was inherently risky. Their competitors weren't idiots: it wouldn't take them long to figure out how to grow the mushrooms by themselves. From there, it would only take them a few weeks to optimize the process and eliminate Percy and Nesha from the equation.

In other words, Nesha would make some quick money the moment she sold their entire stock of mushrooms, but that would mark the end of their operation. The mushrooms, the healing potions and the tattoos would become far less profitable soon afterwards.

That said, they didn't mind as much, as they were only interested in the short-term profits. As long as they managed to prepare everything they needed to bring into the Valley, they didn't care if they lost their business afterwards. If they needed money again in the future, they'd just have to figure out something else. Given how fast Percy improved, it shouldn't be too difficult. After all, they'd done that twice already.

In any case, managing everything was Nesha's job. Percy's focus was on alchemy.

Right now, he needed a couple hours per day to brew enough Aurora Dew for himself and his companions. He used his old cauldron for that, prioritizing efficiency over speed. The rest of the time, he switched to the new cauldron to mass produce the potions and the ink.

It had been another week since his birthday, and he'd brewed a lot more stuff than the week before. Over 5000 doses of healing potions. Everything considered, they cost Alexander less than a single contribution point per dose to produce, and were sold at fourteen points apiece. Of course, the Radiant Lord had negotiated for 30% of the profits, which meant that just over nine points ended up in Nesha's pocket.

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Percy had even found enough time to brew around 500 doses of magic potions. The recipe hadn't been difficult to invent: he only needed to extract the juice from some fist-sized fruit called mana apples. It had barely taken him a couple hours to find the right temperature and pressure settings for the extraction. Even better, these potions sold even more easily, and at a slightly higher price: sixteen points per vial: since the demand for them was greater.

However, Nesha had asked Percy not to prioritize these, as their profit margin was smaller. The ingredients cost around eleven contribution points per dose, so only a fraction of the money ended up in their pockets, despite the fact that they took Percy no less time than the healing potions to brew.

The tattoos on the other hand were their favourites. The mud mana ingredients were common and cheap, only costing three contribution points per portion. On the other hand, Nesha was charging a whopping 63 points per finished tattoo!

Of course, Percy had to spend twice as long to brew the ink, and he wasted more of the ingredients in the process. Still, even after taking the losses into account, the ink was nearly twice as profitable for them.

Sadly, they couldn't focus solely on that, because the market for it was much smaller. Plus, drawing the tattoos was a time-consuming process in and of itself, so they'd only managed to sell about 300 of those over the past week.

Nesha had asked Martina to take over that part of the business, since she'd rather not involve any more strangers into the operation than necessary. Luckily, she'd accepted: for reasonable compensation: as she had a sick husband and a couple of young kids to provide for.

Overall, they'd make over 100,000 contribution points once they managed to sell all their current stock. It was a lot of money for the average person, though not nearly enough to cover their needs. Unfortunately, they could only buy about a third of the ingredients for the Aurora Dew with that. Plus, it had taken Percy three weeks of non-stop brewing to get there.

If they were to extrapolate their current results, they'd need another six weeks just to gather enough money for the secondary ingredients. After that, it would take him half a year to convert all the elixirs into Aurora Dew.

All things considered, it would mean that Acton's group would get an extra fifteen or so years in the Valley. It wasn't the worst possible outcome, since they'd still beat the boy to his next promotion, which was their priority. However, it wasn't ideal either, as his guards would get that much closer to Blue, making their eventual clash significantly more dangerous.

Fortunately, this was under the assumption that Percy's yield remained stagnant, which couldn't have been farther from the truth.

Granted, his current efficiency was quite poor. It varied depending on what he was brewing, as he was less familiar with some of the recipes, and they didn't all involve the same number of alchemic steps. On average, his yield with each step was about 53%.

Admittedly, that was embarrassingly low. If he'd tried to brew the regular elixirs with such a yield, he'd only preserve around 15% of the nectar: not enough to even qualify as a professional alchemist. This

was especially stark, considering that it had been over twice as high back when he left the Guild, even before he got the Sorcerer's Eye.

After obtaining his mutation, his yield had climbed to a whopping 75% per alchemic step, or 42% when it came to elixirs: just two points below Orin's.

So, why had it declined this much?

Naturally, it was due to how thin he had stretched himself, tackling so many different frontiers at the same time. He was trying to familiarize himself with a bunch of new recipes, to get used to brewing five times as many ingredients at once inside his upgraded cauldron, and to register the scaling principle.

The truth was, his lower yield was nothing but a fleeting illusion. Percy's alchemy skills had never been sharper than they were at this moment, and they continued to improve rapidly with each brewing session. Every batch brought with it many lessons, and every day, his yield grew by a couple percentage points.

It was a monstrous achievement, that would have left any other alchemist flabbergasted. Even novices: who had a much easier time improving: didn't do so nearly as fast.

At the rate it was climbing, Percy was confident his yield would catch up to what it used to be in about three weeks. Not just that, but he guessed it would probably continue to grow past that, for a little bit longer.

Yet, even he seemed to have underestimated himself. Just two days later, something happened that accelerated everything.

By a lot.

[Congratulations! You have mastered a new alchemic principle: Scaling!]

Chapter 307: Intersection

The moment the scaling principle finally registered, Percy's stepwise yield instantly jumped by ten percentage points. On top of that, his daily gains picked up: at least for the first couple of days: bringing him back to 75% by the end of the week.

That was certainly impressive in and of itself, but the improvements went deeper than just his yield. Literally.

'Wow… I can see twice as deep into the concoction now!'

Percy watched a lump twisting and swirling five centimetres beneath the surface of the potion, tuning the heat and pressure enchantments up to dissolve it. More than the numerical improvement, it was the way his vision had expanded that interested him.

Even with his mutated eyes, there should have been a limit to how deep he was capable of seeing, considering how mana-dense the concoction was. Whether it was his regular sight or his passive Mana Sense, they should have run into too much interference long before he reached this point. Yet, somehow, his eyes seemed to have bypassed those limitations entirely.

'I guess this is a separate sense, brought about by inference.'

It was a bit like his Wild Arts. Greater Foresight and Wild Dance didn't actually show Percy the future. They merely drew from his understanding of himself and his enemy, projecting that into a shadow: a prediction of the most likely outcome. The depth of his understanding was directly proportional to the accuracy and duration of the shadow.

And this new sense of his wasn't that different: it drew information from the surface of the concoction, to let him guess what was going on just a little deeper. Perhaps, his yield would grow even more steeply if he truly gained the ability to see through objects at some point.

In any case, all the alchemic principles Percy had mastered helped him even when he wasn't using them directly.

Even when he used his old cauldron, the scaling principle allowed him to peer further into the concoction, improving his yield. Of course, no alchemist had a complete understanding of what was going on inside their cauldron, regardless of whether they could observe it or not.

Alchemical reactions were way too complicated to be understood. The sheer number of magical concepts interacting at various levels was staggering: too much even for gods to fully fathom. Instead of trying to comprehend and calculate the outcome of a reaction from first principles, alchemists relied on a few high-level rules to inform their actions, to guide the concoctions to the desired outcomes as swiftly and efficiently as possible.

Every brewing session was different. Lumps and bubbles wouldn't always form at the same time, nor with the same intensity. And the alchemist could never be entirely certain of what had caused them. Sometimes, it would be due to imperfections in the ingredients, reacting when mixed together. Other times, they were brought about by the heat or the pressure.

But alchemists could develop certain rules to handle all these issues when they emerged. These rules weren't easy to teach. There was only so much one could learn from a book or a mentor. From there on, it was all about experience: about developing one's own instincts through years of gruelling practice.

At least, Percy had a few advantages that others lacked. His eyes showed him more than most, giving him a lot more information to build these instincts on. And every alchemic principle he mastered further expanded his understanding of alchemy, allowing him to develop more esoteric rules.

Another example was how the restructuring principle aided him even when he wasn't brewing the tattoo ink. When somebody wanted to turn a mundane ingredient: such as a glass of water: into steam or ice, they simply had to adjust its temperature or pressure, and let nature take its course. But things weren't as simple when magical ingredients were involved, since their behaviour was largely governed by the different mana types they contained.

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One could try to boil a healing potion into an inhalable the traditional way, but the most likely outcome would be to waste over 90% of the potion. The solution was to attack the problem from a different angle: to alter the very nature of the ingredients by introducing new mana types, such as air, water, earth or mud, depending on what the goal was.

Yet, it turned out that this knowledge was far more broadly applicable than Percy had originally thought.

Even when he was brewing simple healing potions, the restructuring principle helped him better understand all the different factors at play. How the liquid part of the potion interacted with the bubbles and the lumps, and how everything was affected by the heat and pressure.

This information then fed into the scaling principle, allowing him to see deeper. In turn, that gave him more information to decipher through the restructuring principle, forming a virtuous cycle amplified by his mutation and strengthened with every brewing session.

'It's like an intersection of three schools of alchemy…'

His mutation, the scaling principle, as well as the shape and size of his cauldron had all come from Atlantis. Meanwhile, the restructuring principle had come from Felmara. Then, there was everything he'd learned on Remior under Orin's tutelage. Finally, there was the bonding principle he'd discovered on his own, though he guessed many of the greater springs had stumbled upon it too.

All these seemingly disparate building blocks came together to expand his foundations more than he'd ever thought possible.

[Congratulations! You have mastered a new spell: Wild Art: Alchemist's Intuition: Crude!]

Percy blinked twice, staring at the notification in disbelief. He was certainly happy with his recent progress, but he hadn't expected to register a new spell while brewing.

He grinned.

'I bet the Atlanteans would be shocked if they saw this.'

Ea's Gift was a Decree originally designed for alchemy, lacking the ability to register spells. This was something that had only changed in Percy's case, after merging with Phoebe's Decree. And it had greatly boosted his combat strength ever since.

But this was the first time the opposite had happened. Unlike before, it was Phoebe's side of the Decree and its ability to register spells that was feeding back into alchemy, allowing him to improve even faster.

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Percy had registered the scaling principle by the end of his third week brewing, and the new spell by the end of the fourth. Yet, it wasn't until the fifth one was over that his yield finally stabilized.

'80%?! That's insane!'

An 80% yield per alchemic step translated to about 51% when it came to the regular elixirs. This was already much higher than Orin's. In fact, according to his old mentor, the highest recorded yield in the Alchemists' Guild was only 56%.

In other words, Percy was nearly at the level of the five Violet-cored elders leading the Guild!

Of course, his achievement was the result of all sorts of cheats, more so than hard work. Not that Percy was lazy: far from it: but one's brewing yield simply couldn't climb that high in such a short period of time through traditional means. From what Orin had said, each percentage point past 30% took years or decades. Meanwhile, each point past 40% took centuries, and each point past 50% took entire millennia.

Percy had essentially skipped over a thousand years of alchemy practice thanks to his clones!

Then again, stealing Decrees and alchemic principles from under the noses of alien gods and titans was probably harder to pull off than merely living for a thousand years…

At any rate, this was just the start. Now that Percy knew his Status was capable of registering alchemy-related spells, he already had a few ideas. In fact, the path to raising his Alchemist's Intuition to Refined was already clear in his mind.

Since the spell was so similar to his other Wild Arts, why not take a page out of them directly, and incorporate some kind of future sight into it? That way, he wouldn't just be able to see deeper into the concoction: he'd be able to directly predict the lumps and the bubbles too.

Of course, hypothesizing how the next level of his spell would work didn't mean it would be easy to get there. He certainly didn't think it would be possible before they entered the Thirsty Valley.

For now, he was more than satisfied with how much his output had climbed.

Taking a peek into his spatial seal, Percy's eyelid twitched. So focused had he been on exploring his growing skillset over the past two weeks, that he'd lost track of how much stuff he'd brewed.

'Nesha will have a tough time selling all this… Then again, that was the goal…'

Once he handed everything over tomorrow, he could receive the first batch of ingredients he needed for the Aurora Dew.

It was finally time to begin the next phase of their plan.

Chapter 308: Profits rolling in

The best part about Percy's growing yield was that it didn't just increase his output. It also stretched their profit margins, since he started each session with the same number of ingredients regardless of his yield, but he ended up with a greater dosage of the final product if his yield was higher. In other words, their operating costs remained constant, but their revenue continued to climb.

Earlier, the magic potions hadn't been worth his time. The ingredients had cost about 60% of the final price, making them far less profitable than the healing potions. But this changed once Percy's yield stabilized, that number dropping below 30%. A good thing too, because the market was already almost saturated with healing potions, so he'd had no choice but to diversify a bit more, giving attention to the other products.

Another thing that had changed was his brewing time. Alchemy was essentially a race to process the ingredients as quickly and as efficiently as possible. Getting better at it didn't just increase one's yield. It also shortened the duration of each session. Before his latest improvements, Percy had needed about eight minutes per alchemic step, but he only needed around six now.

So, a lot of co-dependent factors had changed favourably all at once: his yield, their profit margins and his brewing time. Adding the impact of the scaling principle, it was easy to see how steeply Percy's output had increased.

"20,000 doses of healing potion, 10,000 doses of magic potion, and 1,500 doses of healing ink." he whispered, handing the spatial amulet to Nesha.

"This much?! In just the last two weeks?!" she asked, her voice incredulous.

He shrugged.

"I made a couple of breakthroughs." he replied vaguely.

She remained silent for a few seconds, seemingly running the calculations in her head.

"It'll take us some time to sell everything, but we should be able to make around 350,000 contribution points from this stuff. Adding the 100,000 we made from the last batch, and we'll have over 1.5 times the money we need for the secondary ingredients." she eventually said.

Percy nodded. He hadn't bothered to work this out by himself, but he'd expected nothing less after realizing how much stuff he'd brewed recently.

"I'm ready to switch to the… you-know-what. Do you think you can get me the ingredients in the next couple of days?" he asked.

They were currently standing outside an abandoned building in the 11th district. This had been Percy's and Nesha's meeting spot since they abandoned the 115th district a couple months ago. It was dark, and there was nobody around as far as he could tell, but Percy still spoke with caution.

Nesha grinned.

“Way ahead of you.” she said, handing him a spatial amulet of her own. “This is only a third of the stuff you need, but I trust it’ll be a while until you use it all up.”

“At least a month.” he nodded.

“Alright. I’ll have the rest ready before then.” she replied.

He estimated he’d need a total of three months to convert the entire stash. Adding the nearly two-and-a-half months that had already passed, it would mean that Acton and Micky would spend an extra eleven years inside the Valley. Not ideal, but still much shorter than their previous estimates.

More importantly, Percy should have Micky’s share of the elixirs ready in around two weeks. Once he delivered those, the crow’s second core would stop stagnating. By then, Micky would have only spent around four-and-a-half years without Aurora Dew.

Perhaps, he could have sent a clone over to bring his familiar some teal powder, that he could turn into paste, minimizing his losses. This was what the rest of them had done until he finalized the new recipe. But if the clone got stuck in the crow’s body, he wouldn’t be able to send him Aurora Dew later, so the bird would lose even more time overall. For now, their safest bet was to wait.

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‘I wish I had taught him Crystallization… Then again, he can’t really use it in front of Acton.’

But he shook his head. There wasn’t any value in crying over the losses. A couple of wasted years were still regrettable, but not that significant in the grand scheme of things. Hopefully, the familiar’s second core would still advance before the first one.

“What about the mushroom deal? Any update on that?” Percy asked.

Taking into account all the time they’d already spent cleansing their cores, Percy estimated they’d need to stay in the Valley for about thirteen years for all of them to advance. Granted, Elaine had switched to

Aurora Dew a few years after him and Nesha, but she'd also reached Green five years sooner than Percy, so their current progress wasn't that far apart.

Considering that everyone besides Micky had two cores to cleanse, and that they had to do that three times per day, they would drink just over 110,000 doses of Aurora Dew. This included the amount Micky would consume by himself, by the time the others joined him.

With his current yield, Percy would need around 220,000 doses of elixir to get that much, meaning he was over 45,000 doses short. He was hoping Nesha would find a way to bridge the gap by then.

"We've already contacted a bunch of interested parties, willing to buy the mushrooms for around five points apiece. I know it's not that much, but we have a lot of them left."

They'd had more than enough mushrooms to cover all of Percy's needs by the end of the first week alone. But they'd never stopped growing them in the warehouse. By the end of the entire 5-month period, they should have over 10 million mushrooms. At the price Nesha had negotiated, they'd earn about 50 million contribution points, 35 of which would end in their own pockets: after Alexander got his share.

'Kinda makes me wonder why I even bothered brewing non-stop for the past month...' he smiled bitterly.

Percy had worked himself to the bone, yet all the revenue he'd brought the team barely amounted to 1% of what they'd earn from the mushrooms. It was a little demoralizing. Yet, that only proved how valuable the mushrooms were, given the ease by which they could be mass-produced.

Besides, it wasn't like Percy's efforts had been wasted. If they'd relied solely on the mushrooms to make money, he would have had to stall his alchemy progress by a few more months. That was time they couldn't afford to have wasted.

And it wasn't like they could have sold the mushrooms in batches either. Even if they'd found a buyer willing to buy a fraction of them earlier, they would have been hesitant to do that. Their operation would likely come to an abrupt end the moment they handed the first mushrooms over.

‘Anyway, this is enough money to buy almost twice as many elixirs as we need.’

Percy had no intention of brewing all of them before entering the Valley. Just the amount they’d have to drink during their stay. This would delay their infiltration by another two weeks, but it was a small price to pay to ensure nobody ran out of Aurora Dew in there.

The rest, he’d keep for later. They should last for a couple more years after they left, which would give him a chance to look for more. Still, he wasn’t very happy having to constantly run from one place to another, always thinking of a way to extend his stash for another year.

‘At that point, I might be strong enough to return to the Fungal Spire…’ he thought.

Percy had never given up on his idea to create a wasp familiar. He knew it wouldn’t be easy, but he should be able to create Blue clones by then. Hiding from the Divine Root and infiltrating the hive might be more manageable. If he succeeded, he’d permanently solve his elixir problem. And he’d have to at least try that, at some point, since it was the only way for him to ever grow truly self-sufficient.

Alas, this was a project for later.

For now, he was happy with their arrangements. Percy was done brewing potions and ink, allowing him to switch to Aurora Dew full time. Two weeks from now, he’d have Micky’s share ready, so he would have to send a clone over to deliver it. Then, it would be another three months until Nesha got him the rest of the elixirs and he managed to prepare all the Aurora Dew they’d need.

Satisfied with that, he turned his attention to a different matter.

“What about the actual infiltration? Any information on that?”

Suffice to say, none of their preparations would matter if they ultimately failed to sneak into the Valley. Naturally, figuring out how to do that was another of Nesha’s responsibilities, as her skillset made her the best person for the job.

“Some. I have a clear picture of how the perimeter is guarded. I’ve also got a few ideas on how to break through. But I’m still working out the details. I promise I’ll have a plan ready by the time we get everything else in order.”

“Good. I’ve included a few red mushrooms in the amulet. Can you get them to grow a few of those in some corner of the warehouse?”

Even though the red mushrooms were just as easy to grow as the green variants, there wasn’t much demand for them. Still, Percy wouldn’t mind getting some for himself now that they had the means for that.

“I’ll brew some trollsfury ink too, when I find the time. We should all get ourselves some tattoos from Martina.” he added.

On top of that, he’d have to leave a couple days to reforge his scythes and armour before they entered the Valley. He’d need to replace them with a stronger set once he reached Yellow, but he’d rather not enter such a dangerous place unarmed.

Percy intended to use everything at his disposal, to teach that sadistic kid a lesson he’d never forget…

Chapter 309: Possessing a crow

‘There. That’s got to be him.’ Percy thought, diving into the only healthy soul in his vicinity that didn’t push him away.

Sneaking into Micky’s body was a vastly different experience to what he was used to. The bird’s injuries had healed a long time ago, so his usual strategy of slipping his soul wisp into the cracks wouldn’t cut it.

Luckily, his familiar’s soul seemed to welcome him with open wings, shrinking slightly into its body to make space. Still, it was a bit stuffed in there. Percy had to wrap himself around the crow tightly, like a thin, invisible film.

‘It’s probably better this way. It would have been even harder to leave afterwards if I got lodged into his wounds…’

This was nothing like his other hosts. Usually, he had to put some effort to stick to their souls, fighting tooth and nail not to get kicked out. This time, he had instead found himself glued to Micky almost instantly. It was prying himself off that would probably be a challenge.

That said, it shouldn't be a problem in the short-term. Percy was confident he could still leave right now if he wanted to, but he'd have to be careful not to stay too long, or he might end up permanently fusing into his familiar.

'Hey, buddy. Been a while, hasn't it?' he asked, allowing his senses to blend with Micky's.

The crow didn't say anything, but Percy felt a wave of warmth spreading through his friend's soul. The bird was clearly elated to have him by his side, even temporarily.

He sighed internally, fully aware of how tough the past few months had been for the crow. He still didn't know how old the original Micky had been, but the bird was quite young. Sometimes, it was easy to forget that, due to how rapidly he was growing, but he'd only been alive for around seven years before he got captured by Acton.

For Percy, only a few months had passed since the Holy Child had dragged Micky into the Valley, but for him, it had been several years: a significant chunk of his life. And he'd never spent nearly this long away from Percy.

Alas, if they wanted to make their reunion permanent, they had work to do…

Looking through Micky's eyes, Percy scanned his surroundings carefully, gazing at the strange environment inside the Valley with awe. Granted, Micky had sent him some images before, but their usual connection wasn't nearly as direct as a full possession.

Fortunately, the water globules were still small and dense, indicating that the Valley had yet to enter its faster season. Each season was supposed to last for several decades, but they had no idea how close the current one was to ending. Nesha had naturally tried to ask about it, but it was much easier to gather information about the Valley's perimeter than its interior, as the former was visible from the outside.

‘Is it difficult to deal with the globules?’ he asked.

Rather than replying directly, Micky chose to show him instead. He waited a few seconds for one to drift near him, pushing it away with a soft burst of wind. The globule was quite light, and the crow’s mana expenditure had been minimal. That said, constantly keeping so many of them at bay must’ve been unpleasant.

‘You kinda get used to it after a couple of months. At first, Acton’s guards had to take shifts while the rest of us slept, but we’ve all learned to do it passively by now.’ Micky explained.

‘What about the beasts? Don’t you have to keep watch?’ Percy asked.

‘You’ll probably have to do that when you enter… but we don’t. The beasts can sense Acton’s Blue core from a mile away. Nothing dares to approach, even when he’s asleep.’

Percy nodded.

As a mage advanced through the grades, their senses: both mundane and magical: grew sharper and more defined. The boy had explicitly ordered Micky to behave, but even if he hadn’t, Percy would have advised him not to attack him in his sleep. It would have most likely failed, and the consequences would have been dire.

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‘I’m really sorry you have to go through all this, buddy. I wish I‘d been strong enough to stop him from capturing you…’ he smiled bitterly. ‘But I swear I’ll free you. Just wait a bit longer.’

Micky shook his head.

‘Don’t worry about it. He hasn’t done anything to me since Goldenfield town. He’s only asked me to hunt down a bunch of beasts, but I would have done that anyway…’

Percy remained quiet. It was good the boy had stopped torturing Micky, but knowing that a murderous psychopath held absolute power over his friend wasn't a good feeling.

Looking inwards, he soon located the spatial seal inside his soul wisp. He'd brought a quarter of the seal with him, as an eighth wasn't large enough to contain over a decade's worth of Aurora Dew.

Next, he used some of his stashed mana to push the seal into Micky's soul. The object resisted as it exited his own wisp, and then again as he tried to force it into his familiar. Still, it only took him a couple seconds to pass it over.

'Can you access its contents?' Percy asked.

Micky stood still for a few minutes, seemingly trying a bunch of different things.

'I can sense it inside my soul, but I can't do anything else with it.' he eventually said.

'Hmm… try borrowing some of my mana.' Percy suggested, passing him a sliver from his stash.

Normally, he was able to use the cores of his hosts to attach his own willpower to their mana, but they had no way to do the opposite. Luckily, Micky wasn't just a typical clone: he was also his familiar. They already had the ability to freely share each other's mana.

Sure enough, the crow took control of the mana as easily as breathing, pushing it into the seal. And the results were immediate.

'Ok. I'm in!' he cawed softly, struggling to contain his excitement. Getting his talons on some Aurora Dew for the first time in years must've felt good. 'Wow! You've brewed a lot!'

'You should be able to drink them directly from the storage. Just imagine the liquid appearing into your stomach, without the vial.'

Percy had already tested this months ago.

With that, Micky's progress was back on track. In fact, other than the few years of missed core-cleansing, his familiar seemed to have done a great job staying on top of his training. Percy had already noticed that Micky had both Circulation and Regulation active.

'I see you've figured out the ice pattern.' he noted.

Not very surprising, given how long the crow had worked on it. Still impressive though.

Other than the green and azure lines glowing on Micky's plumage, there was a third type. These were pale, decorating his feathers in an intricate, hexagonal grid. Even more notably, the centres of the hexagons appeared to function as intersections of the three networks, allowing him to freely fuse or separate the ice mana into its components even outside his core.

'How curious… I wonder if this is how all the composite affinities work…'

Percy would have to check with Gabe and Leo the next time he visited the Vault. Other than that, he really wanted to start working with Micky on their combination spells right away. To teach him pre-casting and to begin exploring the mysteries of the ice affinity alongside him. To see if they could fuse it with pure or soul mana, or to incorporate it into his armour and weapons…

But this wasn't the time to lose themselves in their experiments, nor to boost Micky's fighting strength.

'What else have you done?' he asked.

'I avoided working on my other spells, like you told me to. I've only focused on Circulation and Regulation. But I'm much better at them now. I can keep them up while sleeping.'

'Seriously?' Percy would have raised an eyebrow if Micky had any.

This was something that even he couldn't do. Granted, he'd never tried to learn it, since he didn't really need his boosting art while sleeping. But Micky was a different story. The crow needed every drop of mana he could get, to manage his hunger.

‘Your conversion efficiency seems quite high too. I think you’ve surpassed me there as well.’ Percy noticed.

He used to have an edge over Micky at this, being able to convert about 30% of his pure mana into soul mana. But he wasn’t that surprised his familiar had overtaken him. It was bound to happen sooner or later, given how much time and effort he was putting into Regulation. The accelerated time only sped up the process.

From a cursory glance, it seemed Micky was converting about 35% of his mana: his mutations probably playing a huge role in it.

‘Yeah, I think I can last multiple weeks without food now, assuming I don’t exert myself. Though I haven’t had a chance to test it.’

A wave of relief flushed over Percy. He’d long hypothesized Micky would reach this point, but guessing wasn’t the same as knowing for sure.

Still, they couldn’t relax just yet. This balance that his familiar had reached after years of painstaking efforts was extremely fragile. It would be broken if his first core advanced before his second. They’d have to make sure his elemental core kept up for as long as possible. Even then, they’d merely be delaying the inevitable.

‘Oh well… No sense in stressing over that right now… So, where are the bastards?’

Chapter 310: Percival’s clone

Micky walked around a large boulder, leading Percy to the others. The sky was a bright azure colour, indicating that it was daytime on the rest of Remior, though Acton and his guards were sleeping right now.

The group wasn’t that far from where Micky stood, but they had to get pretty close to see them through the dense cloud of water globules. Percy’s eyes first landed on the Green-born, widening in disgust as he saw his friend’s tormentor in the flesh. That said, the boy looked quite different from the last memory Micky had sent him.

Unlike his guards who were all adults, Acton had entered the Valley as a young teenager. Naturally, his appearance had already changed a lot and would continue to do so during his stay. He was already in his mid-teens. His hair was long and unkempt, much like the others'. But he was the only one in the group without a full beard, some scarce hairs lining his upper lip instead, as a stubble was barely visible on his chin.

'He'll be a much more dangerous opponent by the time we fight…' Percy sighed.

The way things were going, he was confident they'd beat Acton to his next promotion. Still, he wasn't sure that would be enough. He wouldn't be the same inexperienced kid with the paper-thin domain he'd met before. Acton's age would catch up to his own by the time they joined him in the Valley, and the Holy Child would have decades to get used to his domain and his mud affinity.

'Please tell me he hasn't made any progress with Circulation, at least…'

'Some, but not enough.' Micky confirmed, much to his relief. 'He did clear the rest of his channels, and he also tried to copy my water pattern at first, but he gave up after a while. He doesn't know he's supposed to train his body or temper his channels. I think he just assumed it's a beast thing.'

Percy smiled. This was indeed the logical assumption, given the limited information the boy had available. Not completely wrong either. Percy had long learned that Circulation was better tailored for beasts than sapients: they even passively used a weaker version of it by instinct. Thinking about it some more, he wondered if Micky's ancestors had drawn inspiration for the Dance by observing how beasts fought.

Regardless, it didn't matter, as long as Acton didn't learn it…

'How about the others? Anyone we should be wary of?'

Percy didn't have his mutated eyes right now, so he couldn't read their affinities. But he didn't have to. Micky had spent years fighting alongside these people.

‘As far as I can tell, they all have common affinities. If they have any bloodlines or composite affinities, they’ve never used them in front of me.’ Micky said.

He then proceeded to brief Percy in on the specifics. Nothing revolutionary there, though he’d relay the information to Nesha and Elaine regardless. Their confrontation was still years down the line, but it wouldn’t hurt to have some idea of how their opponents fought. Every little help might mark the difference between victory and death.

‘Any idea how close they are to advancing?’

Telling a high-born’s age from their appearance alone wasn’t easy. Entire decades could go by without a single grey hair appearing on their head, or a wrinkle on their forehead. Percy hoped that his familiar had heard them speaking about this at some point.

‘I know for a fact the blond guy sleeping over there is an Orange-born, still centuries away from Blue. You won’t have to worry about him. But those two will probably advance before you guys. I’m not sure about the last two.’ Micky replied, pointing at each of them with his beak.

Percy nodded. Facing a minimum of three Blues wasn’t ideal, but at least the worst-case scenario was looking slightly more optimistic. Either way, they’d have to prepare for whatever hand they got dealt.

‘Do you want me to start eating less?’ Micky suddenly asked.

Percy thought about it for a couple minutes. Now that his familiar could sustain himself with his own mana, food was mostly an optional means of advancement. He could hold himself back if he wanted. Still, Percy was reluctant to recommend that.

‘Don’t. It would be a waste of the environment here.’

Even if Micky’s beast core advanced first, there was more than enough food inside the Valley for him to survive. And they had plenty of Aurora Dew to get his second core to Yellow, re-establishing the current balance between his cores. They could always halt Micky’s advancement later, if it looked like he was about to hit Blue.

Percy didn't want his familiar to slow down his progress unless absolutely necessary. Beast or not, Micky was still a Red-born like him, so he wasn't sure if he'd make it past White. He didn't know how long a crow's base lifespan was, nor did he know if the treasures he brought from the greater springs would even be compatible with him. It would suck if Percy managed to overcome his own limitations one day, only for his friend to fall behind.

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'Ok. What should I do with the rest of my time?' Micky asked again. 'I don't think there's much more I can learn about Circulation or Regulation. Drinking Aurora Dew will only take a few minutes per day.'

'I guess there isn't much harm in experimenting with your ice affinity a little. Maybe work on splitting the mana up into its components more easily. But try not to develop any offensive spells with it.' Percy replied.

Chances are that Acton would turn Micky against them. In theory, Percy could try possessing him with a clone: just like he was doing right now: but that wasn't a perfect solution. He couldn't control his hosts without their consent, so his freedom in Micky's body would ultimately depend on how Acton phrased his commands.

Consequently, the situation could develop in all sorts of directions. Maybe they could get Micky to fight alongside them, or maybe Acton would send him after them. The safest option would be for Percy to possess him, drag him away from the others: far out of earshot: and leave him in some corner of the Valley until his captor was dead.

'Such an annoying bloodline…' he clicked his beak.

Alas, this was a problem for the future. At least, the situation was stable for now. As bad as Acton had treated Micky in the past, it didn't seem the crow was in any immediate danger. As long as he didn't antagonize the Holy Child, he should be fine.

He sighed.

Catching up with his familiar was nice. He wished he could have stayed here a bit longer, but he couldn't do that. Percy would much rather return to his main body, to send out another clone sooner. If they got lucky, one of his clones might stumble on something else that could raise their odds.

Though there was one last thing he wanted to check before leaving. His Status. Not that there was anything particularly important there, but he was really curious to see how it would handle his strange situation.

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Mictlantecuhtli (Percival's clone)

Mana cores:

[Mana core 1 – Yellow – Beast][Mana core 2 – Orange – Ice]Mutations:

[Soul Predator] – Allows one to more easily interact with the souls of others.[Wind Dancer] – Allows one to augment their flight using air mana.Spectral trait:

[Weaving]: Boosts one's proclivity in manipulating one-dimensional structures.Spells:

[Concussive Blast: Crude][Secret Art: Soul Resonance: Refined][Soul Harvester: Refined][Reinforcement: Refined][Spiritforged Cauldron: Refined][Spectral Art: Phantomscale Regalia: Masterful]Alchemic principles:

[Extraction]: Separate and condense an ingredient's essence.[Pacification] – Delay an ingredient's activation rate.[Redirection] – Adjust an ingredient's effect.[Deattunement] – Prevent multiple conflicting ingredients from reacting with one another.[Bonding] – Enrich an ingredient with crystallized pure mana.[Restructuring]: Alter an ingredient's phase.[Scaling]: Brew a greater volume of ingredients at once.Decrees:

[Phoebe's Decree]: Grants access to your Status.[Moirais' Decree] – Grants a second mana core.[Metatron's Decree]: Open a one-way portal to the Vault of Magic at will.[Ea's Decree (Modified)] – Augments and enhances your Status.___

'Fascinating…'

Apparently, his Status currently treated Micky as a regular clone. As with all his clones, it only listed the things he personally had access to. This included Micky's cores and mutations, but not his spells, as Percy couldn't use those.

Instead, it listed Percy's spells. At least the ones he could use in the crow's body. Curiously, Concussive Blast had made the cut this time. It hadn't been there when he possessed Elaine or Nesha. Probably because they didn't have the right affinity for it.

Shifting his attention to the ethereal cords, he noticed they had two of those, both linking back to his main body. It didn't seem he could access the 'familiar' side of Micky's Status right now. In the eyes of Phoebe's Decree, Micky was the original Percy's familiar, not the clone's.

'Still, we should be able to use Soul Resonance a lot better…'

Normally, they only had one cord, so they couldn't both send mana at the same time. It made their experiments a little clunkier, as they had to wait for one packet to arrive, before sending another in the opposite direction.

With this, that wouldn't be a problem. They'd be able to establish a two-way communication with his main body. Suffice to say, Percy already had a few ideas on how they could leverage it.

But now wasn't the time for that.

Bidding his friend farewell, he tried to cut himself lose. It was surprisingly difficult, as their souls had already partially merged in the brief time he'd been here. To remove himself from Micky's body, he was forced to use his fused mana to practically scrape his soul wisp from the crow's soul. A rather painful experience for both of them.

Even that wasn't enough. After severing their connection, he still had trouble returning to his own body. Unlike his other hosts, Micky wasn't pushing him away, and his own body's pull hadn't grown strong enough yet. On top of that, this was all happening on Remior, so he couldn't rely on the world's rejection either.

Not giving up, Percy clawed intensely at the cord, only managing to eject himself a couple minutes later. Clearly, his ability to possess his familiar could use some work.

Still, he'd achieved what he came here for. Even better, their little experiment had opened a bunch of interesting doors for them to explore in the future.

'We'll have to improve upon this by the time we rescue him though, or we won't be able to stay like this for long…'