Wanderer 34

Chapter 34: Unexpected boon

The crow glided soundlessly just a meter above the grass as it approached its prey. Micky's black feathers turned him nigh invisible against the dark blanket of the night. Soon, a man enlarged in their shared vision. He was looking the other way, performing his business without a care in the world. They could already hear the soft stream pitter-pattering against the stone.

Percy held his breath. If the ambush failed, his life would be forfeit!

With one powerful flap of his wings, Micky shot through the last 15 or so feet, landing on the man's head. The poor bandit barely managed to turn around, before a talon clamped his mouth shut, as the other clawed his throat out.

PHEW

The young man exhaled the turbid air in his lungs as subtly as he could manage, trying not to alert the others.

'So far, so good.'

Then, Percy inhaled deeply again, directing the pure mana towards his abdomen, before pumping it through his channels. As for the soul mana, he gathered it in his sternum, fighting against his soul's pull.

He walked towards the leader – Rick, if his memory served him. Assassinating the Yellow core was just as important as the previous ambush, if not doubly so.

Accumulating soul mana was difficult at first, but a new stream gushed through the ethereal cord, helping him amass it more easily.

'This is a lot more than expected…'

The largest things Micky had eaten in the past were the wood goblins. Being semi-sentient creatures, their souls were a lot more developed than the rats and snakes they had hunted before. Still, they couldn't possibly compare with a human at Orange. Percy didn't keep the mana in his core for very long though, swiftly drawing it into his fist instead. There, he willed it to condense under the cover of the bandage.

"What's wrong?" Rick asked.

Percy stopped a few meters away.

"I was thinking… Are you guys going to let me go once I've taught you everything? Surely, you won't need anything else from me at that point, right?"

Hearing him, the bandit gave him the most amiable smile in the world, almost like an older brother reassuring his sibling that everything would be ok.

"Of course! You've been a huge help, kid! Just keep cooperating and we might even let you join our gang!"

Rick's casual acting sent a chill down Percy's spine. He was fairly certain they wouldn't let him go. It would be much safer to kill him than leave behind a trail for his family to latch on.

Then, the young man grinned back.

'But I suppose I have no intention of letting you scumbags go either… So, I guess we're even.'

Percy had already gathered enough soul mana, though Rick couldn't see it. Even if he activated Mana Sense, the bandage would take care of it. Next, the young man willed it to harden and take the shape of his insidious weapon, before sending another message to his familiar.

'Draw their attention!'

A shadow shot up from behind the hill, the heads of the remaining bandits all snapping in that direction. Percy didn't care about that, however, as he bolted towards Rick, flicking his hand towards the man's torso. Noticing him at the last moment, the bandit leader pulled up a thick sheet of stone with a wave of his finger.

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

But it wouldn't help him.

Diverting a trickle of soul mana to his eyes, the young man watched the silver dagger phase through the rocky barrier unobstructed, piercing a hole through the man's soul as if it was a sheet of paper. The wound continued to widen even after the projectile popped out the other side. By the time Rick fell to his knees, his soul already sported a hole wider than a fist, his head making a sickening thud as he collapsed forward onto his own wall.

The remaining two bandits took a few moments to catch on to what was happening. By then, the cyan lines had already lit up underneath Percy's skin, as the young man held the Quarterstaff in one hand, a smaller version of the Parting Gift already forming in the other.

He rushed towards one of the bandits. The other was about to help his buddy when Micky dove down, trying to gouge out his eyeballs. While he failed to do so – the bandit having managed to roll to one side at the last moment – the familiar had successfully prevented him from reinforcing Percy's opponent.

The young man on the other hand was having some trouble at first. His footwork did allow him to dodge most of the fireballs, but the few he was forced to parry made his weapon bend and crack, as the dispersed heat scorched his skin, making him wince.

At least, this was the case for a few moments, until his second weapon took shape. Ignoring the sweat and the blisters, he dashed towards the bandit, weaving between the incoming spells, closing the distance.

A well-timed throw later, the third man was on the ground, his eyes glazed over like the two before him.

Micky wasn't having an easy time pinning down the last one. The criminal's air affinity was a bad match for the bird, preventing it from reaching him.

Still, the tables swiftly turned once Percy joined the fight, the duo eliminating the final opponent not long after.

The young man plopped down on the bloodied dirt, breathing heavily. This had been his toughest fight yet. The first real one too. But he'd done it! He'd defeated a Yellow core by himself and even took his henchmen out with him!

'And all of that without dying in the process…'

KRA! KRA!

Percy winced as his familiar pecked his shoulder in protest.

"Ok, ok. We did it together." he smiled. "Now go eat Rick's soul and core before they dissipate."

CAW!

Micky wasn't entirely placated, but heeded the instruction, clearly thrilled at the prospect of such a gourmet meal. The young man rested on his back, a flood of mana soon filling his body. Shocked as the pressure intensified, he activated Mana Sense, only to be blinded by the bright Yellow colour filling his frame. Unable to discern anything, he switched to Soul Vision, but the intense silver glow wasn't much easier to peer through.

'I guess this must be how Micky felt before learning to get rid of the excess mana.'

It was a lot to absorb at once, but Percy didn't ask his friend to stop eating. He knew such an opportunity was hard to come by. Rick's digested soul was by far the richest, most abundant source of soul mana they would come across anytime soon. It was a potent tonic, greatly accelerating his soul's recovery.

Squinting, he just about managed to see his gruesome injuries closing in real time. The sight almost reminded him of the time his grandpa healed his physical wounds in mere moments.

Micky stopped producing soul mana about ten minutes later, but fully processing it took them a couple hours longer. By then, only the crater in Percy's chest remained, and even that had shrunk to the size of an apple.

'Wow, maybe I should thank Rick for targeting me.'

Percy estimated he'd only need one more fight like this to fully recover. Of course, he had no intention of chasing more bandits or provoking other Yellow cores, but even the Orange beasts they would be hunting at their destination should do the trick in a few more weeks. In fact, he figured he could probably refill his core without Micky's help right now.

CAW!

'You're right. Better keep moving.'

The young man was spent, so resting for a few hours before resuming his journey didn't sound too bad. Sadly, the longer he remained here, the greater his odds of running into more trouble were. Getting to the Guild as soon as possible was probably the wisest choice.

Luckily, the bandits had travelled in the same direction, so he hadn't lost much time. Calculating the distance, Percy estimated he should be within a day of his destination. Standing up, he quickly scanned the corpses for anything valuable.

'Nothing…'

The poor bastards were broke. Retrieving his elixirs, he climbed onto his horse. Only one dose was missing from the pouch. Naturally, it would have been too wasteful for them to use the elixirs in their concentrated state. Percy's entire stash would have barely lasted them a week. Their next promotion had probably been decades away, so the elixirs wouldn't have made a dent like that. Instead, they had planned to dilute them all, making each dose last the group for nearly a month, the entire stash well over a year.

‘And just for that one tiny bottle, they paid with their lives…’

SIGH

This was the true Remior, away from his House’s walls. A jungle, where the lowborns like him had to place their lives on the line every single day for a small chance to survive.

‘But I will… No matter what.’