Wanderer 38

Chapter 38: Orientation

The first part of the clerk's explanation wasn't anything too eye opening. He went over some mundane things like how they were expected to conduct themselves within the Guild. The summary was that they were pretty much allowed to do whatever they wanted, as long as they wore the uniforms, treated others politely and didn't kill, steal or cheat.

Each of them was going to be handed 5 contribution points to start with. It wasn't a huge sum, but it was more than sufficient to cover their food and accommodation for their first month. Beyond that, they would have to pay for their expenses out of their own pocket. That said, the bare necessities weren't difficult to earn enough for. The clerk even gave them a quick overview of the settlement, showing them where to find shops, inns, restaurants and other important facilities on a map.

'So far, so good.' Percy thought, suppressing a yawn.

It was the next part of the orientation that caused his eyes to widen. This was what he was interested in.

"The reason most of you are here are naturally the elixirs we all need to advance. Our Guild is where they are produced. You can learn to brew them yourselves, but you can also buy them with contribution points."

"How much does a dose cost?" somebody asked.

The clerk smiled bitterly.

"400 points."

His response elicited sharp breaths from the audience.

"Per day?!"

“That’s enough to buy food and accommodation for 7 years!”

After waiting for the chatter to die out, the clerk spoke again.

“It’s indeed expensive, but you knew that already. It’s not any cheaper to buy it from the Guild than elsewhere. However, you can find all sorts of opportunities to earn contribution points here.”

The room remained quiet, prompting him to continue.

“There are many ways to get them. The simpler ones are jobs like what I’m doing right now.” he smiled. “Although these posts don’t pay that well. We typically treat them as a vacation, for when we want to take things easy for a couple of weeks.”

“Then, what’s the most profitable method?” an initiate asked.

“Alchemy obviously! After all, it’s the Guild’s specialty! There is no better way to earn points than to brew your own elixirs and make a killing selling the excess to others… But I’m afraid there’s a catch.”

Nobody looked surprised by his words. If it was that easy, nobody would bother with anything else.

“Learning the art is a time-consuming process and a colossal money sink. You’ll have to spend months if not years to get any good at it. You’ll need to throw a warehouse of ingredients down the gutter too. Until then, you’ll be losing more points than you earn.”

Everyone’s faces fell, but he continued.

“Consequently, I advise you to forget about alchemy for the time being. If you have lofty aspirations to live a life of luxury and wealth, it might be something for you to work towards in the long-term. For now, your best bet is to venture out into the Fungal Spire and hunt the Starry Wasps.”

“What does that involve?” a young man asked. Percy recognised him as one of the two people who’d arrived earlier than him.

The clerk proceeded to explain how the hunting grounds worked. Essentially, the Fungal Spire was segregated into five levels, based on the grade of the beasts living there. The higher one ascended, the stronger the wasps got. At the ground level, where Micky was currently staying, you could only find Starry Drones, which had Red cores and were about as large as a man's fist. Further up, one could find Starry Workers, Soldiers, Knights and Commanders, which progressively increased in both size and grade, all the way to Blue.

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There was even rumoured to be a Starry Queen with a Violet core hiding somewhere in the depths of the Fungal Spire. However, nobody could verify if this was true, as entering the structure was strictly prohibited. The number of insects living inside the Spire vastly eclipsed the few that wandered outside. Still, the Guild's foremost priority was to preserve the local ecosystem, so people were only allowed to freely roam and hunt on the giant mushrooms.

"What you want to harvest is the special gland that all types of wasps share just a few inches below their core."

According to the clerk, this unique organ contained a few drops of nectar – the primary ingredient for the elixirs. The amount of nectar contained in each gland depended on the grade of the creature. Apparently, the Starry Drones at the bottom level usually carried 5 drops, with each higher grade having three times as much as the one below.

Each drop of nectar was valued at precisely 1 contribution point – or perhaps it might be more accurate to say it was the other way around. Clearly, the entire economy of the Alchemists' Guild had been built around the exotic substance.

"At the end of the day, it all comes down to your combat ability. If you're good, you can kill a lot of wasps per day and make a ton of points. Sadly, it means that some of you may be at a bit of a disadvantage."

Percy didn't appreciate how everyone turned towards him after that statement.

‘They aren’t wrong though.’

Most of these people would be hunting the Starry Soldiers on the third level, while he and Micky would have to make do with the workers on the second one. Still, this wasn’t necessarily a bad thing. He actually liked the idea of having an entire level to himself. After all, he had many secrets. Hunting in a crowded area would be inconvenient.

“Any questions?” the clerk asked after finishing.

Only one person raised her hand.

It was the girl with the glasses who had arrived last. She’d spent the entire orientation face down on the desk, so Percy assumed she’d slept through the whole thing. The clerk didn’t look very pleased either, creasing his brow. He probably thought she was going to ask about something he’d already explained. Still, he didn’t stop her.

“Are we obligated to hunt or brew?”

The man raised an eyebrow, not expecting that question.

“Well, no. Nobody can tell you what to do. If you want to stick to other jobs and only pay for your expenses, you’re technically allowed to do that. But, you won’t be able to afford the elixirs that way. Why even come to the Guild if you aren’t willing to do those things?”

Drowsy girl nodded absentmindedly, seemingly satisfied with the answer. She didn’t say much else, instead falling back to her desk, resuming her nap. The clerk spent another 5 minutes giving them a few more tips and instructions. Next, he politely asked them to leave the room to make space for the next batch after handing them their badges and robes.

Finding a place to stay wasn’t difficult. The Guild was full of empty houses, all made of the same enchanted stone, waiting for new members to claim them. Percy picked a spot near the back gate of the settlement, for easier access to the Spire. He only needed to press his badge against a rune on the door to register himself as the new owner, allowing him to enter and lock as he pleased. At the end of each month, he’d have to pay rent at a designated spot to get the badge recharged.

After a quick look inside, he took a shower before changing into the orange robes. It was still annoying he had to wear them everywhere, but at least they felt comfortable enough to hunt in.

Having not had a chance earlier, he gulped down his daily dose of the elixir, leaving the last few vials in his possession back home, before heading out for some shopping. Despite being quite hungry, he didn't buy much, settling for a loaf of bread. He munched on it on the way back, figuring he could return for more stuff later.

Right now, he'd rather avoid wasting more time. It was already late in the afternoon. He'd accepted he wouldn't get much hunting done today, but he wanted to at least meet up with Micky and explore the first level to familiarize himself with the area.

Leaving through the back gate, he ignored the suspension bridge leading up the first mushroom. That was the way to the second level, which he'd worry about tomorrow. Remaining on the ground, he began circling around the mountain. The entire trip would have taken him several hours, but he'd already asked his familiar to meet him halfway. The bird flew much faster than he walked too.

Although Micky had kept him updated throughout the day, the young man couldn't help but exhale in relief after seeing him in person. This was the longest they had ever spent apart.

CAW! CAW!

Evidently, the familiar felt the same way.

"So, care to show me around your new home? I want to see what these Starry Wasps are all about."