Wanderer 381

Chapter 381 – Golden age

Unlike the first hall, which contained information on all sorts of different topics, this one seemed to delve much deeper into a single one. A rather important subject for the Amenthei too.

Their world's history.

Rather than different categories, the columns along the room's perimeter covered the entire chronology of Amenthes, each jumping ahead by a certain increment of time.

'…375,000 BC… 370,000 BC… 365,000 BC…'

Percy was tempted to just skip this room entirely and climb up to the next one. He had already cut his most important alchemy lesson short out of necessity, so why would he waste his time reading about the history of some civilization he hadn't even heard of until a few hours ago.

But he didn't do that.

Even if he sprinted to the top of the pyramid, there was no guarantee he'd find an exit there. This wasn't even the physical world, so expecting to find a regular door leading out of a dream – or whatever this was – wasn't the smartest idea.

'I should at least try to understand what exactly happened to these people, and how they ended up here.'

Obviously, reading everything wasn't realistic, so he'd have to be smart about it. His best bet would be to try and pinpoint the most important events that had led to the creation of this sanctuary. Looking for the oldest date in the hall, Percy soon approached the column with the '432,117 BC' heading. It was both the largest number and the only one that wasn't round. Placing his hand on it, he then skimmed through random sections around the hall, trying to get a sense of how these people had started out.

‘…while this is the earliest recorded date in our history, our scholars believe that our ancestors have been around for a while longer. Traces of eroded tools and destroyed structures suggest that our people first showed signs of true intelligence as early as 780,000 BC…’

‘…the loss of our beast affinities was initially detrimental, placing our ancestors at a severe disadvantage against the monsters surrounding their villages. The variety of new affinities they manifested, coupled with their intelligence and use of tools made up for that to an extent, but it was still a difficult time for our people…’

Percy frowned. The Amenthei had clearly started out no differently than most other civilizations did, which shouldn’t matter much to his current predicament. Walking to the corresponding section of the next wall, he skipped ahead to 330,000 BC, hoping these people had invented elixirs by then.

‘…holding back the raf’henats was almost impossible, as a single Blue specimen could decimate an entire village by itself. At their peak, half a dozen Blue raf’henats had been reported roaming the continent, slaughtering everything in their path…’

‘…our people had been forced to live as nomads, hiding from the monsters. Many of them followed Green-born leaders who had advanced to Blue themselves. Sadly, the amber potions had still been flawed at the time, so nobody had reached Violet yet…’

‘Not yet… they had alchemy, but not enough for fast advancements…’

Percy yawned, before changing to the next section. This time, he didn’t jump ahead too far, knowing he was close to the invention of true elixirs.

‘325,000 BC’

‘…that was when Kalifhon the Wise realized we could still improve upon our potions. Working alongside his colleagues, he spent years trying out different things, though it wasn’t until a long time later that his successors completed his work…’

‘320,000 BC’

‘…finally allowed us to conquer Amenthes and establish our first true cities – some of which have stood the test of time to this day. Since then, the year 319,547 BC has been widely considered to be the dawn of our civilization, marking the beginning of our golden age…’

Stolen from its rightful place, this narrative is not meant to be on Amazon; report any sightings.

Reading this felt a little strange to Percy. Obviously, these years hadn’t been called that at the time. Nobody in their right mind would pick a random six-digit number and start counting backward from there. Clearly, their historians had later gone back and altered all these dates to place them in reference to some other big event. Yet, Percy struggled to imagine what could possibly be more important than the dawn of their civilization, or the invention of elixirs.

Regardless, he was happy he was getting somewhere. Percy started skipping ahead by increments of 20,000 years at a time, looking for anything else of interest. At first, there wasn’t much. The subsequent sections mostly talked about various countries and wars fought between them, as well as the discovery of many of the arts and fields of research he had already seen mentioned in the previous library. Free from their wild oppressors, the Amenthei had finally managed to conquer their planet and elevate themselves.

It wasn’t until six sections later that something caught his eye again.

‘200,000 BC’

‘…the potion-makers thought this was a promising new avenue to pursue, though they had to ask the Daughter of Heaven for her permission and funding to embark on that quest…’

‘Daughter of Heaven? Who’s that?’

She sounded like an important figure, though Percy had missed the details surrounding her rise to power. Backtracking by a couple of columns, it didn’t take him long to find the answer.

‘210,000 BC’

'…and thus, she obtained a power that far surpassed that of any king or queen before her. Her beauty made the stars in the night sky look like pieces of coal, and she held in her hands the strength to shatter mountains and dry up lakes…'

'…in the year 208,989 BC, she single-handedly ended all wars, and finally united the people of Amenthes under her command…'

As far as Percy could tell, this woman was a goddess – this world's first one, in fact. Most curiously, the text had never used that word to describe her though, nor did it ever mention her real name.

A cursory scan of the next few sections confirmed that they had always referred to her as the "Daughter of Heaven". It was almost as if these people didn't even understand what godhood was – that it was just another step on the path of magic. They treated her more like a symbol – a chosen one who had descended upon their world to save and rule them.

Sure enough, Percy failed to find any mention of other gods in the following sections. Apparently, this woman was the only goddess Amenthes had ever produced. In fact, she had to be the one whose soul he had seen when he approached the Sanctuary – she was probably inside the pyramid right now!

'200,000 years is quite young for a goddess though…'

It was a long time for mortals, as even a Green-born who had made it all the way past White would probably not live nearly that long, but it wasn't that much compared to the deities they had on Remior.

If he wasn't mistaken, Phoebe should be over a million years old, and most of the active gods in the Divine Order should be at least half that. Percy had no idea when the first gods had risen on Remior, nor did he know when humanity had first evolved into a sapient species, but he guessed it should have been a couple million years ago at the very least.

Granted, he didn't know how long a year on Amenthes was either, but if it was in the same ballpark as years on Remior, this woman would barely be considered a child among deities.

And so were the Amenthei as a whole, compared to other civilizations he had encountered. It wasn't just their young age that stood out, but also their planet's smaller size. Felmara wasn't a large world

either, but even they had produced multiple gods. Not nearly as many as Remior – and they didn't have a single titan either – but Rhaziel wasn't the only one. Just the most recent holder of the "Proudheart" name. In other words, he was merely the strongest one still around.

'Okay, then… So, it's a young world with a young goddess… Possibly didn't know as much about the rest of the cosmos either, depending on how far the nearest civilization was…'

Either way, Percy had yet to learn what had forced the Amenthei into this pyramid. Was it even located on their original world, or had they fled Amenthes entirely?

Perhaps, this was some kind of spaceship as much as it was a sanctuary? What if the goddess had placed her people in deep slumber and taken as many of them as she could with her, to protect them from some calamity?

Shrugging, Percy continued skipping ahead by large increments, inching closer and closer to the present moment. Skimming through section after section, he still found no mention of a disaster. This entire room seemed to describe nothing more than the golden age of Amenthes, listing the achievements of the goddess as she led her people to prosperity.

It wasn't until Percy reached the '5,000 BC' column, right before the '432,117 BC' column he had started with, that he realized this room didn't even reach the present.

'Actually, didn't the text in Rasef's room say he had lived in the 13,000s or something? And I think it was AC – not BC…'

The dates there had clearly moved forward, not backward, meaning that something major should have happened in the year 0. Percy felt a shiver roll down his spine, the shock even jolting him out of his drowsiness for a couple seconds.

Turning to look at the stairs leading out of the room, he guessed they would take him to a third hall. It was just speculation on his end, but he had a hunch that place would hold the answers to many of his remaining questions…

Chapter 382 – Dark clouds

Rushing to the third floor, Percy couldn't help but lament the monotonous environment of the pyramid.

'It would have been a lot easier to keep myself awake if I didn't have to stare at the same red stone all the time…'

Sighing, he examined the walls along the perimeter of the hall, soon confirming it was another library like the ones before. Sure enough, it seemed to follow the time period directly after that of the second level, though he had yet to learn what the event was, that had transformed the very way in which the Amenthei had kept track of time.

Searching for the first column in chronological order, Percy wondered why the architects of the pyramid hadn't just placed it right by the entrance. It seemed like the structure had been put together rather hastily, the ones responsible not having the time nor the mental capacity to spare on matters of practicality.

It was probably for the same reason that one had to traverse dozens of corridors just to descend to the bottom of the pyramid, where a single staircase could have sufficed. It was almost like all the connections between the various rooms had been installed as an afterthought, with no expectation that somebody would have to use them one day.

In any case, Percy soon found the column he was looking for, though its heading was a little strange. Rather than a numerical age, it was titled 'Emergence of the first cloud'. At first, he had to do a double-take, unsure if this was truly the section corresponding to the year 0. But it was sandwiched between the sections '13,327 AC' and '200 AC', so it had to be it.

'So, this period is much shorter than their golden age… The sections only jump by 200 years each time too, rather than 5000…'

Obviously, that didn't necessarily mean that the year 13,327 AC was the present. Unless the pyramid possessed some magical enchantment that updated the entries in real time, it could have been thousands or even millions of years since the most recent section.

Then again, Percy was confident that wasn't the case.

The mortal souls sleeping inside the Sanctuary were degrading relatively quickly, so he guessed it couldn't have been more than a few centuries since they were placed here. Sure, the goddess might have found a way to preserve them as long as possible, but there was still a limit to how long a soul could survive without a proper body – even when shoved inside some functional alternative and forced into deep sleep.

Shrugging, he placed his hand on the entry, causing the text on the ceiling and floor to shift.

'A well-known saying among the Amenthei since time immemorial is that "treasures are paid for by blood, sweat, or tears, never handed away for free". Perhaps, then, we should have known that our hundreds of thousands of years of prosperity would have come at a price… And what a steep one it was…'

'It was a day like any other, when the first of the dark clouds emerged over the city of Nejubtah. Its inhabitants didn't realize what it meant, thinking it was just a raincloud, like any other. And they weren't entirely wrong about that. They rejoiced as the cloud shielded them from the scorching sunlight, and once the first droplets washed the ground. But it didn't take them long to realize the black liquid pouring down wasn't water at all…'

The next few paragraphs just talked about the first weeks and months of the black rain, while the Amenthei still struggled to wrap their heads around the strange phenomenon. Percy naturally skipped ahead in search of answers.

'The insects were the first to fall asleep, about a decade later. Not all of them either. Our people didn't immediately draw the connection, since it had been so long since the rain started, and there hadn't been any other adverse effects. At the time, they naively assumed it was some unrelated disease that had befallen the pests…'

'…by the end of the century, no Brown creature was left alive, every last one having long been crushed or devoured in its sleep. All the species relying on them for sustenance started going extinct one after the other, as an unprecedented famine overcame Amenthes…'

Percy had to skip a few columns again, as the onset of the disaster had been quite gradual. People had argued over food, but things had still remained fairly calm for decades, since their goddess had kept the peace, and they had found many ways to deal with the famine.

This story has been unlawfully obtained without the author's consent. Report any appearances on Amazon.

Not every species had gone extinct, so the people had been able to adapt, mainly by cultivating crops and cattle that weren't as reliant on the insects for survival. It hadn't taken long for the natives to get used to the changes and return to some level of normalcy. Yet, that hadn't been the end of the disaster. In hindsight, it could be argued that it had barely begun…

'800 AC'

'Throughout this time, the clouds never disappeared. If anything, they only grew more numerous, their dark rain continuing to curse our lands as the filthy liquid formed rivers and lakes, spreading its infernal influence over Amenthes.'

'The Daughter tried to destroy them of course, but nothing she did worked. When she forcefully dispersed the clouds, more of them formed elsewhere. When she removed the liquid from the surface of our world, regular lakes darkened instead, their water being replaced by the filth. It seemed that even the emissary of the Heavens was powerless to stop what was to come.'

'At some point, our people started to fall asleep too. It was easy to wake them up at first. A gentle whisper in their ears was enough… for a while. But it wasn't long before it took a painful slap on their cheeks, or a bucketful of water… Eventually, that didn't work either.'

Percy's knees suddenly gave out. He barely caught himself by leaning against the wall. He was still interested in this section, but he moved on anyway, knowing he was running out of time.

'3,400 AC'

'…the curse didn't have anything to do with one's age or grade – it appeared capable of infecting anyone at random. It only affected a small fraction of our population at first, but their numbers kept climbing at a frightening rate…'

'…our potion-makers worked tirelessly in search of a cure. Or multiple cures, really, each more potent than the last. Eventually, no mundane means could wake the infected, so we had to resort to magic to

save them. Once more, our efforts had succeeded, but we had seen enough by that point to tell we had merely bought ourselves more time…'

Percy's vision began to blur as he neared his limit. If it hadn't been for his frightened heart racing at a hundred miles an hour because of what he was reading, he would have probably fallen asleep too. As things stood, he was fully cognizant of the fact that succumbing to the slumber would spell his doom.

Not having any other choice, he walked to the opposite side of the room, skipping a full seven thousand years at once.

'10,600 AC'

'…differentiating regular sleep from that induced by the curse was all but impossible, so we lived in constant fear. Every night, many slept, and every morning, fewer woke up. All the intricate remedies we invented fell short one after the other, as our population declined. Some resisted the disease a little better, for reasons we never quite managed to piece together, but that didn't mean much…'

Percy practically stumbled around the room, switching to one column after another. He mostly did this to keep himself awake, jumping to another section whenever his eyes drooped. At this point, he wasn't even hoping for a coherent picture of the events – he just wanted an answer to what this place was.

'11,400 AC'

'…the sky was pitch-black already, the hellish clouds plunging our world into darkness. Most of the surface was covered by a dark ocean, forcing the last survivors to flee to the tallest peaks. If that hadn't been enough, insidious shapes crawled out of the abyss, invading our homes and dragging the ones still awake back into the cold depths of the hellish sea…'

'12,000 AC'

'…barely any of us left. We fought to hold the monsters back. They weren't people, nor were they beasts. We didn't even know what they were, nor did we care. We just killed however many we managed, trying to buy the Daughter a little more time…'

’12,400 AC’

‘…the Daughter spent most of her time immersed in the dark waters, fighting against the monsters. She slaughtered them by the thousands, yet nobody could tell if that even helped…’

Struggling to remain upright, Percy made his way to the final column. He had yet to find the answer he was looking for, but he couldn’t stand around reading this stuff either. He’d only fall asleep faster that way. Whether or not he learned how this sanctuary had come about in the next couple of minutes, he’d have to leave this hall and make his way to the apex of the pyramid.

‘If I don’t find an exit there either, I’ll have to self-destruct…’

As scared as he was of losing his life and even failing to bring the new alchemic principle back to Remior, it was better than losing one of his new cords over nothing…

As luck would have it, however, the final section did offer a couple of answers. Most notably, it was a lot shorter than the ones before, barely covering a fraction of the ceiling, the text not even spreading to the floor at all. Furthermore, it was written in a vastly different tone from the previous entries.

’13,327 AC’

‘I don’t know if anybody will ever read this, but this is my last shot at preserving our legacy for a little longer. I am the one the Amenthei have called the Daughter of the Heavens.’

‘I used to find pride in that title, and in all the things I have accomplished for our world, but these days I only feel shame at my failures. Most recently, I have come to appreciate my original name – the one that my mother gave me, all those years ago.’

‘On the off-chance that somebody thinks of me in the future, I implore them to remember me as Nephthys.’

Chapter 383 – Desperate move

Percy drew a sharp breath, his shock at the goddess's message buying him a few more minutes of sobriety. Not wasting any time, he dove into the text again, praying to all the gods present and absent for the information he needed to escape this deathtrap.

'When the calamity first struck, I instructed our historians and our scholars to compile a library of sorts, to preserve the most valuable aspects of our culture in the event of our complete annihilation.'

'You see, the situation wasn't nearly as dire back then, but the disaster had already caused several species to go extinct, and it had even rendered some parts of our world wholly inaccessible – at least to the others. Furthermore, our time was spent searching for solutions, so our people no longer had the time or the energy to pursue the fine arts, nor to further develop our culture. In hindsight, it seems my decision to collect and maintain this information had been the right one – despite how much I wish that wasn't the case.'

'Since I am the last of the Amenthei still awake, I suppose the responsibility of writing this final entry now rests on my shoulders. I'll move a copy of this library inside my sanctuary too, along with the minds of my surviving subjects. I have no idea if I'll be able to last longer than the physical version of the text, but I've resolved myself to survive as long as I can. I doubt it will make the slightest difference to our fates, but I owe it to the countless people who have placed their hopes in me to at least try.'

Suffice to say, Percy could feel Nephthys's sorrow and desperation seeping through every word on the ceiling. And, honestly, he shared those feelings, since he found himself in pretty much the same situation. After all, he had already reached the end of the library and he still had no idea how this place worked.

Based on the text, it seemed he had correctly guessed this wasn't a physical place, but rather something that existed in the deity's body – or more specifically, her mind. But that still didn't explain how he had found himself stuck, nor how he could escape.

Out of options, he sprinted out of the room, tracing his previous steps. Sadly, the third hall only had a single entrance and no exit, which meant he couldn't possibly reach the top of the pyramid this way. He would inevitably have to pass through the previous halls and all the corridors again, much to his dismay.

'Well, I can't really blame her for not thinking things through… She clearly had much on her mind while creating this pyramid…'

At least, Percy found it a little easier to stay awake as he ran through the structure. The curse that had destroyed Amenthes had obviously grown extremely powerful over the centuries, to the point that no mortal had managed to escape its harrowing grasp. If it hadn't been for his spectral trait, he doubted he'd have lasted this long. Even with it, he'd only had a couple of hours, whereas some of these people had endured it for countless years.

'If I'm lucky, Nephthys can still be reasoned with… If I can't find a way out by myself, I can try asking her for help…'

Obviously, it would be a gamble, as he had no idea what her personality was like, nor what state she was in. But given his current circumstances, this wasn't necessarily worse than the alternative. Besides, maybe they could work together to come up with a solution. Between Metatron's Decree and his bloodline, things might not be entirely hopeless.

Sprinting through the narrow corridors, Percy's mind wandered back to everything he had learned today. Despite the pressure he had been under, he was glad he'd had the chance to study the complete history of a lesser spring – even if he'd been forced to do that rather hastily. It had allowed him to confirm a lot of the things he had suspected about the way barren worlds evolved into lesser springs.

First, some sapients would emerge, losing their beast affinities in exchange for true intelligence and other mana types – much like Mrs. Lia had explained on Felmara. Then, they would have to hold their ground against the onslaught of beasts – just like Sol's people had been doing on Melodia. If they got lucky, somebody would figure out a means of advancement, much like the Dying Hero had, on Huehue.

Eventually, some gods would appear, though they would probably be relatively clueless about cosmic matters at first. At least until more of them emerged, and they managed to leave their world and gather some information about the state of the universe. Amenthes had clearly not made it that far, while places like Remior, Huehue and Felmara had. Even with elixirs, it wasn't easy for Green-borns to attain godhood, so that step wasn't immediate either.

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

Thinking of something, Percy couldn't help but crease his brow.

'That still doesn't fully explain where those clouds came from…'

At the start, he had assumed some other faction had attacked Amenthes. However, nothing he had read today had hinted at foul play. The clouds seemed to have been the product of some natural phenomenon… Or rather, a quite unnatural one… Considering everything he knew about the universe, Percy's mind wandered back to one of his previous clones.

'This whole thing reminds me of those black vines that ruined Takeo's home…'

Was that what this was? Another demonic infestation?

The way it encroached upon one's mind, forcing them into eternal slumber… It was simultaneously completely different, but also eerily similar to what the infernal jungle had done to the people of Torui village. It had robbed them of their mana and their willingness to fight, plunging them into despair. It had drunk their blood and consumed their flesh until nothing remained.

The more he thought about it, the more convinced Percy was that he was right.

Over the years, he had subconsciously shoved his fear of demonic infestations aside. Part of it was due to the fact that he hadn't encountered a second one in a long time, making him assume they were quite rare.

More importantly, he had always believed that infestations were things for weaker, less developed worlds to worry about. Takeo's people had likely lacked the means to advance even before the appearance of the jungle, and the insidious vines had robbed them of their ability to use magic entirely. It was no wonder then, that they had been entirely powerless against the calamity.

But a lesser spring like Remior wouldn't have to worry about that, right? They had several gods, so it should be trivial for the Divine Order to deal with an infestation, should one pop up.

Or so he had thought.

'Evidently, not.'

Percy swallowed hard.

Perhaps, he had been naïve about this. The fall of Amenthes was proof that no place in the universe was truly safe. Even a goddess had failed to protect her world from the corruption.

Sure, this place was a lot weaker than Remior, and Remior itself couldn't compare with the peak factions… But was the gap between a lesser and a greater spring larger than the gap between a lesser spring and a barren world? If an infestation dreadful enough to kill one god existed, who was to say an even more frightening one couldn't come to be?

'Though, there's a silver lining…'

At least, he was no longer worried about taking the disease back to his main body. While he wasn't an expert on demonic infestations, he was clear about one thing. It was common knowledge that they infected worlds, not individuals. Based on everything he'd read, Percy was confident the Amenthei would have woken up if they'd simply escaped from their dying planet.

'I wonder why Nephthys didn't even try to grab her people and leave.'

Percy hurried his steps even more, his heart racing like crazy. Outside of his own survival and the new principle he wanted to bring back to his main body, he had suddenly found himself worrying about something even more important.

'I need to bring this information home… I want the original to be aware of it…'

Of course, he didn't doubt that Phoebe and the other gods knew about this already. It wouldn't be Percy's job to defend Remior from threats like this for a very long time. Still, as somebody who frequently roamed the cosmos, he was sure this wasn't the last time he would stumble upon a situation like this.

So immersed was he in his thoughts, that he hadn't kept count of the corridors. If it wasn't for Rasef's empty room whizzing by his side, Percy might have not even realized he'd already returned to his starting point.

But he didn’t stop there, knowing time wasn’t on his side.

Climbing one floor after the other, he reached the end of the Greens, and then the Blues, before spotting the Violets. There weren’t nearly as many people at the higher grades, so he had to be close to whatever came next. Either way, the Violets were sleeping soundly on their beds, their rooms pretty much identical to those of their subordinates. If he didn’t have Soul Vision, he wouldn’t have been able to tell them apart at all.

A wave of weakness suddenly overcame him, as his thoughts slowed down to a crawl.

Percy found himself stumbling frequently or crashing on the walls, struggling to run in a straight line. He’d already exhausted pretty much every mental exercise he could think of, yet there was no holding the infestation back any longer.

He was halfway up what he hoped was the final set of stairs to the top – the last corridor having barely been a few metres across – when he finally lost his footing, tumbling down the steps. The fall itself didn’t hurt that much, but he quickly found himself unable to get up again. Let alone standing, Percy had to lean on the wall to even sit up, his surroundings spinning around him as his head felt heavy.

Smiling bitterly, he pulled some mana from his stash, shaping it into a handful of knives. Pointing them at Rasef’s neck – where his own wisp had taken root – he intended to shred his soul to pieces.

‘Well… This sucks… At least, I won’t feel a thing.’

He really wished he could have made it back, yet it appeared it wasn’t meant to be. There wasn’t much room for hesitation either. Unless he destroyed himself in the next couple of seconds, he might never get another chance.

Gritting his teeth, he was about to launch the constructs, when he felt a gentle grip squeeze his shoulder, stopping him in his tracks.

Chapter 384 – Nephthys

A warm feeling spread through Percy’s body, soothing his mind and relieving him of his exhaustion.

“Please forgive me for not helping you out earlier… I have selfishly indulged in my curiosity. Given the things you have learned about us, I hope you won’t hold it against me.”a female voice said.

It was crisp and clear, bouncing against the crimson walls as its echo trailed through the corridors. It seemed like every inch of the pyramid resonated with the sound, welcoming it home.

Turning to look at the tall woman standing beside him, Percy scanned her slender body from head to toe, making note of her flawless skin and elegant clothes. Unlike the barebones attire of her subjects, she wore a long flowing dress that reached all the way to an inch above her sandals. A thin, winding crown adorned her forehead as a translucent veil fell over her features.

“Nephthys, I presume?” he asked, getting a curt nod back.

Perhaps, he should have acted less casual toward the alien goddess, as he had no way to tell how friendly she was. In his defence, she had just saved his life, however. On top of that, she radiated a gentle presence, far less domineering or suffocating than Metatron’s or Rhaziel’s.

Instinctively, he gathered some fused mana to his eyes, peering into her body. He almost squinted, having expected to be blinded by her divine radiance. To his surprise, he saw nothing in there though, her current body appearing to be little more than an empty vessel.

“You won’t find it in here.” She chuckled. “Think bigger,” she added, gesturing at their surroundings.

“So, we’re truly inside your mind, then?” he asked, still finding that difficult to believe, despite all the clues pointing toward that conclusion.

The woman shook her head, however.

“Not exactly. Even with my mind affinity, I don’t think I’m quite capable of pulling another’s mind into my own. Oh, but make no mistake – this world is, in fact, inside my body. Just not where you have imagined it to be.”

Percy frowned, thinking back to what he knew about gods – which was admittedly very little. Though there were a couple of things he had read about them while growing up, one of which he thought might apply here.

“Your internal world?”

Nephthys was the one to raise an eyebrow this time, having probably not expected him to guess accurately.

“I never quite gave this ability a name, since there wasn’t much of a point. After all, I was the only person on Amenthes to reach my current level. But yes, that sounds like a suitable descriptor.”

Percy nodded.

He didn’t really know much about internal worlds, other than the fact that only gods had them. Apparently, it was what became of their domains once they attained divinity… Or, wait, was he remembering this incorrectly? Was it what their mana cores turned into? Was that why he hadn’t seen a core in Metatron’s body?

“It’s actually both,” Nephthys smiled, startling him. “If you ever make it this far, your core and your domain will merge, giving rise to this… internal world – as you call it.”

Percy wasn’t in the mood to discuss divine magic, however, focusing on something more serious.

“You can read my thoughts?!” he asked, furrowing his brow.

“Only in here. Once again, I must ask for your forgiveness at my lack of discretion, but you are the one who’s barged in here uninvited.”

The revelation shook Percy to his core, but he had to admit she was right. He’d invaded her most private place – albeit unknowingly – so he didn’t have any room to complain that his thoughts had leaked.

“When did you notice me?”

“As soon as you stepped foot in the pyramid.”

Find this and other great novels on the author's preferred platform. Support original creators!

“Then, why didn’t you show up earlier?”

Nephthys shrugged.

“Like I said, I was curious. I wanted to see your genuine reaction upon exploring this place and learning about Amenthes. And to possibly figure out how somebody at such a low grade had even managed to get here. No offense.”

“And have you satisfied your curiosity?”

“Very much so. Gods and mortals… lesser springs… demonic infestations… I was genuinely humbled by the wealth of information you have unwittingly shared. It would appear Amenthes was both extremely lucky to have made it as far as we have, and exceptionally unlucky to have encountered such a horrific calamity so early…”

The goddess sighed.

“I can’t help but wonder what would have happened if I had been more proactive. Could I have pushed others to attain divinity faster? Could I have worked harder to become one of those titans you’ve thought of? Would it have even made a difference? But I suppose it no longer matters – what’s done is done. I won’t keep you here any longer.”

Percy suddenly felt his connection to his main body return, causing his eyes to widen.

“It was you! You were the one preventing me from leaving!”

Nephthys gave him an apologetic smile, before speaking.

“It wasn’t my intention to harm or frighten you. I just never imagined I would ever get a chance to meet another person in my life, so I didn’t want you to go too quickly. I assure you, you were never in any danger.”

Percy frowned, contemplating the goddess’s words. She didn’t seem to be lying, though he couldn’t help but feel apprehensive toward her. After all, she was not only a goddess, but one with the mind affinity. There was no telling what she was even capable of. Then again, he couldn’t even hide his thoughts from her, so his apprehension was worthless.

“How did you banish my lethargy anyway? I don’t suppose that will last very long?”

“It will not. Even with that ‘spectral trait’ of yours, I doubt it will keep you awake for more than a couple hours. It will be even less effective the second time I try it. The Slumber is great at adapting to all of our countermeasures. The only thing that seems to work for an extended period of time is attaining divinity – which is not something anyone can accomplish… If not for this, my people wouldn’t have been reduced to such a sorry state.”

Percy nodded, deciding to just go with the flow. If Nephthys wanted to harm him, there was nothing he could do to stop her anyway. Rather than worrying about the things he couldn’t affect, he figured he might as well look for a way to help these people.

“I appreciate the sentiment, but I don’t think that portal of yours will help.” she replied, not even waiting for him to voice his question. “My physical body has already succumbed to the Slumber. I’ve barely been able to preserve a sliver of my consciousness in here. I don’t think I can even twitch my fingers, and if I was to abandon my body entirely, my soul, my mind and my internal world would fall apart rather quickly.”

“Why didn’t you escape with your people while you were still awake?” Percy asked.

“How would I have done that?”

“I don’t know – you’re the goddess here.” Percy shrugged. “I was under the impression that gods can traverse the cosmos, but I have no idea how it works.”

Nephthys appeared to ponder his question for a few seconds.

“If this is truly an ability that all deities share, it is unfortunately one that I have never mastered. Though, it might simply not be compatible with my mind affinity.”

Percy remained silent for a while, thinking about a great many things. He could ask Zoris about internal worlds and the method gods used to travel from planet to planet, but it would be too late to help Nephthys by then.

Granted, the goddess hadn’t even asked him to help, probably guessing this was a problem well outside a mortal’s capabilities. And she might be right about that. Still, he didn’t feel good about escaping by himself and abandoning these people to their grim fates.

“So, have you read all of my memories?” he suddenly asked. “Are you sure there’s nothing we can do?”

The goddess shook her head.

“I can’t read your memories – only what’s at the forefront of your mind. Why? Do you have any other ideas?”

Some hope flashed in Percy’s eyes, but he pressed it down, not wanting to get the goddess excited over nothing. During the next few minutes, he went over everything he could think of – telling the goddess about souls, about the universe, and about his bloodline, just in case it gave her some well-needed inspiration.

“Hmmm… This is fascinating stuff, though most of it isn’t applicable here, I don’t think… Except for that bloodline of yours. That thing you did years ago, turning your friend into a familiar... Do you think you can do it again?”

Percy tilted his head in confusion. Sure, he'd shared everything about his bloodline with Nephthys, in case it gave her an idea, but he didn't think that aspect of it would work in this situation.

"I'm confident I can do it again – and, in fact, I was planning to do exactly that in the next few years… But I think that would only work with my hosts. I can try bringing Rasef's soul back if it's not too far gone, yet I seriously doubt I can help anyone else…"

"Why not?" Nephthys asked.

"Well, my bloodline only allows me to possess a single soul at a time. After it's used up, I can't exactly change hosts, unless I return to my body first. Rasef is the one I've possessed – not you, or any of the others."

Nephthys leaned back on the wall, sliding down to sit next to Percy. He was a little surprised to see her acting so casual with him. Had it been Metatron or Rhaziel, they would have probably found the very notion of mingling with a mortal like this quite insulting.

It only made him feel worse about this whole mess, however. Why did the good goddess have to watch as her entire world got destroyed, while the asshole deities got to plunder and pillage anyone they wanted with no consequences?

"Maybe there's some hope after all!" Nephthys exclaimed at some point, breaking him out of his thoughts.

Chapter 385 – Murmurs

Percy flashed her a questioning look, prompting her to continue.

"If I've understood this correctly, you activated your bloodline twice the last time you created a familiar. The first time had been to possess your friend in his original world, and to subsequently bring his soul back to your own. The second instance had occurred when you placed him in the egg."

Percy nodded along, realizing where she was going with this.

“I suppose only the second instance is actually important. As long as we can somehow get you back to my world, it won’t matter that I haven’t possessed you yet. My body will be there to activate the bloodline again when it’s time to place you in a new body.”

“Correct.”

The goddess smiled, before continuing.

“Right now, I just need to hitch a ride with Rasef. Since he and his soul are currently residing within my internal world, it won’t be too difficult to anchor myself to you during the return trip.”

Percy frowned, thinking of a potential problem.

“I don’t know. That might work, but I don’t think I can carry you back. Last time, I struggled a lot to bring even a fragment of a Yellow’s soul back. It had felt extremely heavy, and it nearly tore me apart – even after discarding most of Micky’s soul. He lost all his memories in the process, and he has yet to recover. Despite all the progress I’ve made over the years, I’m not confident I could bring even a Violet’s soul back, let alone a god’s…”

Sure, his higher grade and his blessing would help, but the gap between mortals and deities was simply too vast to bridge. Not to mention that Nephthys was probably not just thinking about herself. She clearly wanted to bring her entire Sanctuary along, filled with hundreds of other souls.

“I believe I can help with that part,” she said, causing him to raise an eyebrow. “I might not have a soul affinity, but once a mage reaches my level, they gain some awareness of their mind and soul. I can’t survive without a body like you, and I certainly can’t split my soul into multiple functioning pieces or possess others, but I’m not entirely powerless.”

“Meaning?”

“Well, I can selectively discard chunks of my soul and compress others, to forcefully shrink it down to the level of a mortal. I can do the same for my subjects. It will leave us all severely crippled, but we might be able to recover later, after you give us a new body. I think I can resist my world’s pull too, to make my soul easier for you to carry.”

“You sure you want to risk all of that though? If we fail, that’s the end for you and your sanctuary. I make no promises that any of this will work.”

“I don’t expect you to.” Nephthys shrugged. “As things stand, we are doomed anyway. We can probably last for a few more centuries like this, but this isn’t much of a life. I doubt another person willing and able to help us will show up anytime soon. It’s pretty much this or nothing.”

Percy nodded grimly, practically feeling the goddess’s presence brimming with determination.

“Even if this works, you understand you and your people will be stuck in the same body. A crappy one too. It’ll be the mortal body of a beast, and not a high-grade one either. I have no idea if it’s even possible to separate you.”

“I understand the risks. And, also, how much of an inconvenience this may be for you. I won’t insist that you do this for us, but know that the people of Amenthes will be eternally grateful to you if you choose to try, whether you succeed or not.”

Percy waved her concerns away, however.

“Like I said, I was planning to create another familiar in the near future anyway, so this won’t change much for me. At most, I might have to expedite my plans a little… Say, do you have any preference as to what type of beast you want to be placed in?”

This tale has been unlawfully obtained from Freewebnovel. If you discover it on Amazon, kindly report it.

Over the next few minutes, Percy gave her an overview of the animals they had on Remior. Last time, he hadn’t had the luxury of choice, but Nephthys appeared confident that she could keep her soul from crumbling for a couple of years. That should give him plenty of time to search for a suitable host for the Amenthei.

Of course, he had originally wanted to create a wasp familiar, and he had even been prepared to spend decades working toward that goal if necessary. However, he wasn’t going to selfishly force these people into the body of an insect against their wishes. They’d suffered enough already…

“Actually, I don’t think that’s a bad choice.” Nephthys said, much to his surprise.

“Are you sure?”

“It sounds like these Starry Wasps have it the best out of every beast on your world. If we end up targeted by your gods at some point, it might serve us well to possess such a valuable body. It will give us the option of negotiating with them for the right to remain.”

Percy nodded.

“I don’t know if I can get my hands on the egg in the next two years though. If I fail, I’ll be forced to put you inside a different body. Also, remember that I’m a mortal, and a wanted criminal at that. This is a disclaimer I wouldn’t typically bring up to a prospective familiar, but since you are a goddess and everything, please be aware that you’re signing up for a huge downgrade.”

Nephthys tilted her head in confusion.

“Reading your thoughts earlier, I was under the impression you were aiming to become a god yourself. Is that untrue?”

Percy shrugged.

“It’s not, and I want to tell myself I’ll get there one day. But you know better than me how hard it is, so think long and hard about whether you want to place your hopes on me. I don’t even know how many Green-borns on Amenthes have failed to follow in your footsteps – let alone a Red-born. Even if I manage to give you a body, there’s no guarantee you’ll live longer than you would have if I just left you here.”

The goddess sighed.

“I’ve mentioned this already, didn’t I? What my people currently have isn’t a life. In fact, it can barely even be called ‘survival’. If you’re offering us a chance at something better, we would be fools to turn you down… Ah, but I might have a way to help you a little with your ambitions!”

Jumping to her feet, Nephthys ran up the stairs, gesturing for him to follow. Percy stood up too, rushing behind her, though he couldn’t help but wonder why she couldn’t just teleport them around the pyramid.

Reading his thoughts, she chuckled.

“I can, but it feels nice to walk around for a change, even if I know it’s fake.”

Shrugging, he remained quiet as they exited the corridor at the top of the structure, entering a hall similar to the ones at the base of the Sanctuary – albeit much smaller. Nephthys didn’t pause, however, taking a few stairs to another hall right below the first one, and then a third after that.

Percy frowned, scanning the walls in passing. He was trying to figure out why this set of libraries hadn’t been connected to the ones below, forcing him to go all the way around the pyramid to reach them.

‘Family… Hometown… Early life… Friends (Age 0-1,000)… Friends (Age 1,001-3,000)… Friends (Age 3,001-8,000)…’

“Are these…?”

“My own memories.” she smiled, though her expression appeared a little melancholic this time. “Once you’ve lived as long as I have, you might find that your loved ones can’t accompany you forever. As a goddess with a mind affinity, I was generally good at recalling even the most obscure details of my past. Sadly, the Slumber hasn’t made things easy for me. I ended up writing some of it down before secluding myself in here, to keep it close to my heart.”

Hearing that, Percy retracted his gaze, not wanting to snoop any more than he already had. This only caused Nephthys to chuckle again, however, her melodious laughter echoing through the vast structure.

“Considering that I’ve asked you to turn me into your familiar – I think we are well past such concerns.”

Percy smiled too, not disagreeing with that.

The two didn’t stop until the fourth room. It didn’t look like it was the last one either, but Nephthys didn’t bother to take another step, as they had already reached their destination. Percy’s eyes fell on the object standing in the middle of the vast hall – the only thing he had seen in the entire pyramid other than the people and their beds.

It was a massive urn, large enough to fit a dozen men, standing on a metallic tripod.

Interestingly, the moment the two had entered the room, Percy had felt a little different, various ideas springing inside his mind one after the other, filling him with endless inspiration. And this wasn’t the first time he had experienced something like this, though it was far more pronounced than before.

“Wiseman’s Dust?!” he blurted out, his incredulous expression probably betraying his shock.

Nephthys shrugged.

“You’re gonna have to explain what that is.”

“Right, sorry.”

As much as Rasef’s mind helped him communicate with Nephthys, it couldn’t really do much when it came to terms that either him or the Amenthei lacked the words to translate to. Over the next couple of minutes, he gave the goddess a brief rundown of his time on Felmara.

“I see…” she said once he was done with his explanation.

But she shook her head the following moment.

“This is something quite similar to what you’ve described, but it’s not exactly the same thing. I’m sure I’m not the first one to discover it, yet I have no idea what its name is. For now, let’s just call it…”

“…Wiseman’s Murmurs.”

Chapter 386 – Ark

“Isn’t it the same thing?” Percy asked.

“Not quite. Remember that this isn’t a physical world.” Nephthys explained. “I did produce that thing you mentioned during my ascension. It was useless for me, so I gave it to my subordinates. It seemed to help them develop their magic, but it got used up after a couple of centuries.”

Percy creased his brow.

“What about this?” he asked again, pointing at the urn. “It sure doesn’t feel any different. Or rather, I’d say it’s even more potent, though that might just be due to its quantity.”

Nephthys shrugged.

“The thing you call Wiseman’s Dust came from my body’s impurities. This thing came from my mind instead. You may want to think of it as the ideas, thoughts and beliefs I discarded while becoming a goddess. I suppose I wouldn’t have even noticed it or managed to collect it if I didn’t have a mind affinity, which might be why you haven’t heard of it before, but I can’t be certain about that.”

“How come you didn’t lend this one to your subordinates then?”

“I tried. It manifested in here during my ascension, and I haven’t been able to take it out. It just disappears if I do, and I didn’t have the heart to get rid of it. The only way for somebody else to use it would be to come in here, but they’d have to lose their bodies for that. Leaving the obvious problems with that aside, they wouldn’t even have a core in this place, so they wouldn’t be able to practice their magic anyway.”

“And you think I’ll be different?”

“Well, if my soul – and whatever’s left of my internal world – are going to be floating inside your own for the next couple of years, as we are hoping they will, there’s a chance.”

Percy nodded.

Part of him wanted to refuse, not quite ready to accept something this precious. Even a handful of Wiseman’s Dust was valuable enough that the entire academy had guarded it and carefully rationed it for centuries, let alone such a massive stash.

But he dismissed his silly thoughts fairly quickly. First, it was clear that nobody else was even able to use this thing. Furthermore, Nephthys’s very survival was going to be tied to his own, so there was no better investment for her than to gift him this.

“I’m glad you understand!” she said, smiling brightly.

“Are you ready to start?” he asked, feeling a bit anxious.

“I am. Keep in mind that I’ll have to sacrifice much of my soul and my internal world so that you can carry it. I will probably fall into deep slumber even after you bring us out of Amenthes. I doubt I’ll be in any condition to talk to you before you place us in the new body.”

Percy frowned.

“But what if I need to ask your opinion on something? I might be forced to give you a different body, or to do something risky.”

Nephthys shook her head.

“Just go with your judgement. We will follow your decisions whatever they may be… Well, it’s not like we have much of a choice in the matter anyway. All I will ask, is that you keep my people’s well-being close to your heart.”

Hearing her words, he clenched his jaw, the weight of the deity's hopes and dreams feeling heavy on his shoulders.

"That's a lot of trust you're placing on somebody you've just met," he muttered.

"It's true that I haven't known you for long, Percy, but I do trust you," she nodded. "I'm sure you can't quite say the same about me, however, since you can't read my thoughts. Don't think I didn't notice those fleeting suspicions passing through your mind every few seconds."

Percy felt some heat gather in his cheeks, but he didn't deny her accusations. The truth was, he didn't fully trust the goddess yet. How could he?

She had certainly done a great job presenting him with the most approachable image possible, but he'd be a fool to believe everything a stranger told him – certainly when talking about one as old and wise as her. She was obviously powerful and desperate enough to do whatever she had to, to survive.

He was also worried that she had done something to mess with his thoughts. It wasn't impossible, given her affinity. At the same time, he hadn't forgotten Metatron's claim that hijacking his main body through his clones would have been difficult to pull off, even for one such as her.

Regardless, Percy didn't want to doom an entire civilization due to his mistrust, so he had tentatively decided to help Nephthys back for now, and ask Zoris for his opinion before doing anything more. In any case, she was about to butcher her soul quite extensively to make the trip, so he doubted she'd be in any position to harm him later, even if she harboured ill-intentions.

By the time they reached Remior, she would probably be even weaker than a mortal. If Percy wanted to create another familiar, he'd have to trust somebody anyway, so he might as well give her that opportunity.

This novel's true home is a different platform. Support the author by finding it there.

The goddess chuckled again.

“Don’t be ashamed of your suspicions. I would have been a lot more reserved about placing my people’s future in your hands, had you been gullible enough to believe me without question. But I didn’t lie to you, nor do I wish for anything but our mutual benefit. I hope you come to realize that sooner, rather than later.”

Percy was about to respond, but the goddess never gave him the chance. A deep rumble permeated the structure, as cracks formed on the red stones all around him. Chunks fell one after the other, shattering into dust before they even hit the floor. The dust didn’t last long either, quickly fading away into nothing.

Unable to stand his ground against the violent quakes, Percy fell to his knees, holding himself up with his palms.

The room started to shrink rapidly, and it wasn’t the only thing. Rasef’s body appeared to shrink right with it, as did the goddess’s. Red shards fell off from them too, as if they were nothing more than a couple of animated statues. Their clothes and skin stretched, twisted and squirmed, filling the newly formed gaps, ensuring they looked exactly the same, regardless of how tiny they got. Even his host’s soul started to crumble, silver wisps peeling away in quick succession, as Percy’s own soul spilled out of the ever-narrowing gaps.

There were only two things in the room that weren’t affected by the transformation in the slightest.

The first, was naturally Percy’s soul. It retained its original size throughout the whole thing, though it looked like it was growing with respect to everything else. Of course, Percy himself could only see it via his host’s eyes, so from his perspective, it looked like a grey substance was pouring out of Rasef’s body, flooding the room.

The second object was the urn. Or rather, it was its contents – the Wiseman’s Murmurs – as Nephthys had hastily nicknamed them. The urn itself did shrink at first, before shattering from the internal pressure, as a translucent, pink dust filled the room.

Shifting his attention to the shrinking goddess, Percy noticed she was staring intently at the hieroglyphs on the walls. The cracks spread through the text, ruining the entries – the stored memories – at a frightening rate. The past that Nephthys had worked so hard to preserve – both her own and that of her people – was crumbling right in front of her eyes. She gritted her teeth, clearly trying to control where

the cracks appeared, and which sections of the Sanctuary broke or shrunk, in an attempt to protect as much of it as she could.

Nephthys had maintained her composure throughout their conversation, appearing casual and unaffected by the horrors she had endured over the years, but Percy could tell that was just a front. Forced to choose between her people's future or their past, she had clearly picked the former, willing to toss everything else in the garbage, and to even place her trust in a mortal, a myriad times younger than her.

"I'll do my best to live up to your hopes," he said, his eyes burning with determination.

Nephthys didn't even turn to look at him, but he knew she had heard him. He could tell, by the faint smile tugging at her lips, washing away some of the sorrow in her expression.

It didn't take long for both Percy's soul and the rising tide of pink powder to fill the hall. The latter gushed through the exits, already rushing through the neighbouring rooms, while the former wasn't bound by such constraints, phasing freely through the floor and ceiling.

At some point, he lost access to Rasef's senses. Or rather, he voluntarily retracted from many of the man's injuries, unwilling to worsen them as his soul continued to grow – relatively speaking.

He kept part of his soul inside his host's body, however, as he couldn't afford to forsake their connection entirely, lest he wasted all of Nephthys's efforts. The rest, he wrapped tightly around Rasef's fake body, anchoring himself as best as he could to the shrinking Sanctuary.

A few seconds later, he felt more souls pressing against his own. They were small, like Rasef's – feeling more like pebble-sized dolls than people. Under other circumstances, he would have questioned whether they could even survive like this, but he understood the goddess had overseen the process, carefully compressing and protecting her subjects using her internal world.

Eventually, Percy's wisp felt as large as the entire pyramid, struggling to grow any larger. Or rather, the Sanctuary continued to shrink like before, but an external pressure now forced his soul to shrink with it.

It was the inviolable radiance of Nephthys's own soul, bright, dense and absolute, cutting his expansion short. This was his first time being near such a powerful soul, which caused him to shudder at first, thinking that merely touching it would incinerate his wisp in an instant.

However, that couldn't have been farther from the truth. The silver sun appeared just as gentle and warm as the goddess herself, taking great care not to harm him.

'Try to empty some space in the pyramid for me,' her crisp voice suddenly said, ringing through his mind. 'I have to squeeze as much of my soul in there as I can.'

At the same time, the dense substance surrounding him receded a little, giving him room to expand outside the structure. Following her instructions, Percy withdrew as much of himself as he could, leaving only a single tendril reaching into the pyramid, wrapping around and inside Rasef's body – that, he had to keep, else he would lose his ability to interact with everything else.

Nephthys didn't miss the opportunity to enter her internal world herself, torrents of silver rushing into the object. Percy watched with his non-existent mouth agape, unable to fathom how she could exert such delicate control over her soul even without his bloodline, affinity, or experience to help her. Then again, he'd be a fool to expect any less from her.

Once it felt like the pyramid couldn't shrink any further, nor contain another drop of her soul, Percy felt a loud shockwave reverberate through him. At first, he didn't understand what had happened, at least until he felt the colossal chunks of silver around him drift away one after another.

Nephthys had detonated the rest of her soul, literally destroying anything she had failed to stash inside the pyramid!

Without Percy's gifts, this was the only method she had to help him carry her home.

'Let's do this then.'

Wrapping his wisp around the object – the whole thing was about as small as a tangerine right now – Percy then tugged at his cord, trying to unlodge himself from the goddess's dying body. The pyramid did

feel quite heavy, but not nearly as much as he had expected it to. The goddess hadn't lied when she told him she could help with this.

Pulling with all his might, he felt his soul stretch and tear. Luckily, the pyramid budged too, filling him with hope. The pain was great, but he'd felt worse – and so had the Amenthei. Gritting his figurative teeth, Percy kept at it for a couple of minutes, eventually blasting away at a dizzying speed. He shot toward Remior, hundreds of souls sleeping soundly in his embrace.

There would be many obstacles to overcome before he could help any of them – be it verifying the sincerity of the goddess's words, getting his hands on a suitable host to stuff them in, and hell, even surviving long enough to make all of that happen. But one thing was crystal clear…

'I'll do my best.'

Chapter 387 – Tracked down

A giant bird was gliding over the lush forest, close enough for the rustling canopies below to be heard. The whistling gales rushing against its plumage did cover the sound somewhat, but they didn't impede its movement all that much. If one paid close attention, they'd notice that the wind parted by itself before touching the creature's strangely coloured feathers, aiding rather than hindering it in its flight.

Sitting on its back, surrounded by glowing lines of three different colours, was a tall, lean man. His long, unkempt dark hair was fluttering behind him, a few strands stuck to his face by the pressure. He didn't seem to pay them any attention, however, his piercing gaze focused on the blueish-grey mana in his hands.

The ethereal strings held for a while, but eventually snapped when he pulled at them with enough force.

"Almost there," he said as he scratched his scruffy beard, not letting his millionth failure dampen his mood.

This was naturally Percy, riding on his familiar as the two travelled across the continent, trying to lose any potential pursuers.

He'd already made a ton of progress with the mana threads, and he was confident they'd be finished in the next couple of weeks at the latest. He was currently mixing six variants of his reinforced mana, and he only had to fine-tune the substance a little more before he was satisfied with its properties. Of course, it wasn't as easy to concentrate while airborne, but he knew he had to get used to working like this, as they'd be spending a lot of their time on the move for the foreseeable future.

It had been several days since they left the Valley, and they'd covered a lot of ground. The forest they were currently flying over wasn't even the first one they'd encountered. Percy didn't know its name, but he could tell they had reached the wildlands by the northern side of the continent.

Granted, they hadn't travelled in a straight line – Percy had instructed Micky to vary his path every few hours, and to stay closer to the ground – to lower the odds of them being spotted. Their caution had served them well so far, though it appeared their luck had finally run out.

'Percy.' Micky suddenly said, opting to do so via their connection.

'Yeah… I noticed them too.' Percy replied, nodding grimly.

A few hundred metres to their left, two men were currently floating above the trees, slowly approaching them. One of them was sitting on an azure mat made of a squirming blob of water. The other required no aid to fly – the air itself holding him up. Percy didn't even turn to look at them. His Mana Sense was more than enough for him to discern both their affinities and their grades.

'Two Blues… You feeling good about it?'

'I'll do my best.' Micky sent back.

Percy sighed, knowing there was no avoiding the fight. Not that Micky was too slow to escape – quite the opposite, in fact. Even before his recent advancements, the crow had managed to keep his distance from Acton for multiple days, let alone now.

But they couldn't avoid fighting forever. Sooner or later, they'd get in a situation where fleeing wasn't an option. They should probably take advantage of this opportunity to get some more practice fighting

Blues. A couple of them would make for a reasonable challenge – neither too few, nor too many. It was exactly the kind of opposition they needed to grow.

Of course, Percy had already killed one, and he was confident his boosting art had placed his fighting strength solidly in that grade. Still, he wasn't arrogant enough to think he could suddenly beat every Blue on Remior with ease. He'd certainly never fought in the air before, so he knew he'd be at a disadvantage against these people.

'All the more reason to go through with it though…'

At least, Micky would be in his element.

In any case, their opponents seemed to realize they'd been spotted at some point, abandoning all caution. They approached them quickly, though they still paused some distance away, clearly not in a rush to engage.

Another thing Percy noticed, was that the Blues appeared strangely confident in their chances, not a hint of nervousness showing in their expressions. Obviously, it was true that they were strong enough to give him and Micky a tough fight, but they shouldn't know that.

'Did the Root not spread the fact that we've killed five Blues in total? Or did they never figure it out in the first place?'

Both possibilities held merit. From his perspective, the events inside the Valley had transpired over entire decades. From the outside, however, just over a year had passed. Perhaps, the Root's higher ups had never realized how many of Acton's guards had advanced by the time they died. It would have been a rather absurd assumption to make too, since it would imply Percy's group was powerful enough to take an entire House on.

Or, maybe, they fully understood what had happened, and they'd just chosen to keep the information to themselves. After all, they clearly wanted other Houses to help them hunt Percy down – if only to put more pressure on him and force him to stay on the move. Telling the whole world that their target was nearly as strong as a Violet would have deterred over 90% of the noble Houses from sending their Blues to their death.

The narrative has been illicitly obtained; should you discover it on Amazon, report the violation.

‘Well, it doesn’t matter. They might not know the full truth, but Elaine is no longer with us, so it works out the same…’

Standing up on Micky’s back, he faced the two mages. Judging from the occasional strand of grey hair on their heads, he could tell they were probably Orange-borns, having lived for centuries to reach their current grade. They didn’t look old per se, just middle-aged.

‘Definitely more experienced than Acton or Femel though…’

Pushing the Carnival to its limits, he felt his muscles swell with strength, his skin reddening and even tearing in a couple of spots. The grey wisps danced erratically around him, leaving burning trails in their wake as their shrill cries filled the air. Percy had grown a lot better at handling the spell over the past couple of months, but he’d still prefer to finish the fight quickly if possible.

Two powerful domains suddenly descended upon him and Micky, causing them both to shudder. The pressure was immense, especially when stacked like this, but they could still move, which elicited some surprise from their opponents.

“It appears the rumours are true. I suppose it’s only to be expected, considering that it’s the Root spreading them… Still, I admit I was a little sceptical at first,” the water mage said.

His voice wasn’t very loud, and the two sides were separated by over a hundred metres, but everyone here had enhanced hearing – enough to communicate without issue.

The second man nodded.

“When our patriarch told us Femel was slain by a Yellow, I thought he had lost his mind. I guess I only have my own lack of imagination to blame. Who would have thought such a freak would appear on our world?”

Listening to their words, Percy couldn’t help but raise an eyebrow.

‘Femel? Is that what they’re focusing on?’

Granted, the deceased young man had been a Holy Child, so it wasn’t surprising that his death would anger the noble Houses. However, Percy still found their choice of words rather odd. They hadn’t even mentioned Acton or any of his other crimes, despite the fact that Percy’s grudge had initially started with him…

Thinking of something, he scanned their clothes, paying closer attention to their insignias. They weren’t as flashy as those of some other Houses – they merely depicted a pair of hands held together. Percy had never learned Femel’s surname, since the Green-born had been dressed in the Order’s colours by the time Elaine killed him, but the symbolism seemed to fit with his bloodline.

“Was he from your House?” he asked.

“Afraid so. We don’t much care about your other issues with the Order – at least not enough to send two Blues after you. But our patriarch will never forgive you for killing his youngest son – the pride of our family.”

Percy sighed.

“I don’t suppose you’ll tell me how you found us so quickly?” he asked back.

He’d definitely raised some commotion while leaving Kronos’s Decree, but he didn’t think enough time had passed for people to not only piece the situation together, but to also spread the news about him across Remior, deploy a bunch of Blues after him, and even catch up to him this far out. Something else was clearly at play.

“Why would we tell you that?” the water mage asked with a frown.

“How about we make a deal?” Percy replied with a question of his own.

Next, he took out a folded piece of paper from his spatial seal that he'd prepared beforehand, tossing it at them. The fragile object would have never made it across by itself, but the air mage grabbed hold of it with his mana, having a gentle breeze carry it to his hand. Opening it, his eyes widened as he read its contents.

Curiously, the water mage's expression also lit up in surprise just a moment later, despite the fact that he was too far to read the note, and that his friend hadn't uttered a word. He hid his shock quickly enough, but Percy hadn't missed it.

'Telepathic communication? They must have the same bloodline as Femel…'

It would be troublesome. They were from the same family too, and they'd probably fought countless battles together. Considering how crude his teamwork with Micky was, by comparison, their best bet would be to separate them.

"Why are you giving us this?" the air mage suddenly asked, oblivious to his thoughts.

What Percy had written down was the secret of the Aurora Dew, and instructions for mastering the Dance. Of course, he'd only given them half of the information for either topic, the rest hidden in one of his spatial amulets.

"Tell me what I want to know, and you can loot the rest of the information from my corpse. Or I can just destroy it before we even fight."

"You're lying. Why would you give us something so important?" the water mage asked.

Percy shrugged.

"It won't be of any use to me if I die – though I'm not planning to. I'd never intended to take this information to my grave. I'd always wanted to spread it to the rest of Remior at some point, after giving myself a head start. If you beat me, I'd actually prefer that this knowledge lives on with you. If you don't… Well… I suppose I'll get to keep my secrets for a while longer."

What he'd left unsaid, was that he wasn't the only one aware of this information. Elaine, Nesha, Galahad, Archibald and Orin all knew much of this too, so these discoveries wouldn't really be lost if he died. However, Percy didn't want his friends and family to end up in the same position as him. Surrendering his secrets was his way of protecting them – at least the ones who hadn't been captured already.

"I see…" the water mage said, seemingly appraising Percy once more, his eyes looking at him in a new light. "Perhaps, the rumours aren't quite right about you, after all. You seem more sensible than they give you credit for."

He sighed, exchanging a glance with the other Blue, the air mage nodding back.

"We didn't track you. We tracked him," he said, pointing at Micky with his chin. "Our patriarch used his Secret Art to place a mark on Femel's body. It allows anyone with our bloodline to find him – dead or alive. Since we didn't find any trace of him inside the Valley, it wasn't hard to guess you'd fed him to the crow."

Percy grimaced upon hearing that, not happy about this at all. Though he calmed himself down the very next moment. He didn't know how many Blues their House possessed, but deploying even one shouldn't have been easy, let alone two. Once they died, their patriarch would have to think twice before sending another.

"How long does the mark last?" he asked, trying his luck, though he didn't really expect an answer.

Sure enough, the air mage shook his head.

"That wasn't part of our deal."

Percy shrugged, summoning a pair of scythes to his hands. There was no point worrying about the mark anyway. Not before they made it through this fight.

Jumping off Micky, he allowed the grey wisps to ignite his weapons. Each of the Harvesters broke into a dozen pieces, multiplying rapidly as the ambient mana flooded their enchantments. Mere seconds later,

a storm of crescent blades spun around Percy, a couple of scythes soon crossing their shafts beneath his feet to arrest his fall.

The Blues followed suit, unleashing their apocalyptic spells upon him and Micky, torrents of water and wind covering the aerial battlefield. The crow pushed his boosting art to its limits too, as the four combatants prepared for battle.

They all understood that half of them – at best – wouldn't live to fight another…

Chapter 388 – Aerial combat

Mages could use their mana to fly as early as Green. The ease by which they did that often depended on their affinity and whatever else they had going for them, but it was generally possible for them to manoeuvre for at least a limited time in the air.

It wasn't until Blue that this skill became effortless for everyone though – enough to fight for an extended period of time while airborne. This was something Percy had always looked forward to as a child. In his opinion, the sheer freedom that came with soaring through the sky with one own's power was one of the greatest allures of magic.

Obviously, he was neither a Blue nor a Green just yet, but he'd guessed he had more than enough mana, as well as sufficient control over it, to pull this off. Sure enough, it hadn't been that difficult for him to use his replicating scythes as footholds, leaping from one crossed pair of shafts to another. His phantoms clung to the burning constructs, like loyal soldiers holding their weapons up for their emperor to tread on.

'If only these bastards would give me a few minutes to enjoy it…'

Sadly, Percy had his hands full with dodging the relentless onslaught of the two Blues. Violent torrents of water and sharp gales of wind alike tried to shred him to pieces, as he struggled to keep the number of Harvesters steady inside the stacked domains.

Glancing over at Micky, he quickly realized his familiar wasn't having a great time either. Sure, he didn't have to go through so many hoops to stay in the fight – he was both faster and more experienced than him at flying. However, he was also less nimble and much larger, offering a better target for their enemies.

And that wasn't even the only problem they had to deal with.

'You two doing okay?' Percy asked his clone, before suppressing the cord again.

Ever since the upgrade to his Secret Art, they had been forced to use the connection sparingly, as they weren't ready to handle the excess information yet. In theory, they could effortlessly tap into each other's thoughts and senses, but they currently found that more confusing than helpful. Artificially handicapping themselves was quite pathetic, but they understood that mastering the new spell wouldn't happen in a month or two.

'Not really. We got hit a bunch of times already. Nothing serious yet, but we won't be able to keep this up forever.' the clone replied.

As for Micky himself… he was probably too busy avoiding the attacks to join the conversation.

Percy gritted his teeth, trying to think of a way out of this mess. Resisting two domains at once was already hard, and that was without considering how skilled the Blues were at covering each other. No matter what, they'd have to split them up. Of course, this was something he had realized even before the start of the battle, but making it happen wasn't that simple.

The water mage was clearly in charge of defence. He had manifested several azure serpents, some of them coiling around him for protection, while the rest roamed the battlefield. Whenever his teammate was about to get hit, they got in the way of Percy's attacks. Whenever they were free, they attacked him or Micky instead, putting pressure on them both. Meanwhile, the air mage was almost impossible to grab a hold of. He constantly whizzed around them, shooting smaller but much faster spells from every angle.

'I don't see us budging the water mage from his spot anytime soon. Our best bet is to pile on the other guy and force him away. As soon as their domains stop overlapping, it'll be easier to keep them apart.' Percy suggested at some point.

It wasn't much of a plan, but it was the only thing he could come up with.

‘Alright. Let’s focus our spells on him as soon as we get an opening,’ the clone replied after a while, having probably discussed their strategy with Micky.

Over the next few minutes, Percy and Micky stayed on the defensive, the former trying to amass as many scythes as he could for the attack, while the latter did everything he could to minimize the damage he took.

Eventually, an opportunity presented itself.

Percy jumped through the narrow gap between two of the azure serpents, closing the distance to the water mage. Meanwhile, the air mage had overextended a little while pursuing Micky.

This narrative has been unlawfully taken from Freewebnovel. If you see it on Amazon, please report it.

‘Now!’ he said, aiming all of his free Harvesters at the water mage, the burning blades closing in on him from every direction.

Raising an eyebrow, the water mage retracted more of his own constructs, forming a handful of dense rings spinning rapidly around him in an attempt to block the incoming attacks.

Percy’s lips curled up, however, as he diverted the spell at the last second, sending two thirds of his constructs after the air mage instead. Caught by surprise, the latter had to halt his attack on Micky, propelling himself away from the flock of weapons.

Having expected that, Micky opened his wings wide, using the rush of wind to slow himself down. Falling just behind the air mage, he sent a barrage of sharp icicles at him, joining forces with Percy to block the man’s escape path. Left with no other choice, the air mage flew ahead, the burning scythes and the frozen shards rushing after him.

Of course, the water mage didn’t just sit back as Percy and Micky ganged up on his teammate. Sending some of his serpents after Percy again, he put some pressure on him to weaken his assault on the air mage. Sure enough, Percy withdrew some of his weapons, his flock growing clumsier, slower and less accurate as his attention got peeled away from the pursuit.

Micky wasn't about to let their efforts go to waste, however. Picking up the slack, he unleashed a lot of his spare mana, shooting more icicles to prevent the air mage from circling back. Draining his reserves would obviously make the subsequent fight much harder, but he probably understood that the removal of the second domain would help even more.

Clearly unwilling to concede his advantage so easily, the air mage also went all out, crushing some of the shards as he evaded others. At the same time, he desperately searched for an opening to return to his companion. He might have succeeded too, if he hadn't already travelled far enough.

Percy soon noticed that the second domain was already a lot weaker. It wasn't entirely gone just yet, but he found it easier to dodge the azure serpents, and he guessed his familiar should have experienced some changes too.

Tossing a fleeting glance at the other end of the battlefield, he confirmed that the crow was flying and attacking a little faster than before. He was glued behind the air mage, chasing him farther and farther with each powerful flap of his wings, and each brutal barrage of icicles he unleashed. Before long, the domains fully separated, allowing Percy to exhale in relief.

"Finally!" he spat, shifting the rest of his attention to his own opponent.

Splitting them up hadn't come without a cost. Micky had used up much of his mana, and Percy had been forced to sacrifice more than half of his accumulated constructs. Still, he was confident they could both build their strength back up again if they fought cautiously for a few minutes. Everything considered, he felt good about their chances.

That only lasted until his opponent grinned, however.

"That was a lot of effort you've put into splitting us up… Did you think this would give you an advantage?"

Percy didn't even get a chance to reply, when the water mage released a lot more mana from his core, causing his constructs to enlarge, and to accelerate. A series of giant rivers snaked all over the place, covering the battlefield in countless chaotic arcs. Ferocious serpents descended upon Percy one after another, causing him to dodge by the skin of his teeth.

Whenever he was about to avoid a blow, the domain around him intensified for a moment, slowing his body down, and messing with his control over his mana. His steps grew sluggish, many of his scythes even failing to repair themselves as each of his opponent's attacks came closer to injuring him than the last.

Knowing he couldn't just keep defending, Percy sent many of his spare scythes after the water mage, trying to lift some pressure off himself. The weapons spun toward their target, about to sink their curved edges through the gaps between the azure rings.

That never happened, however.

Suddenly, the rings sped up in two directions. The water flowing through them did so much faster, and the rings also revolved around the mage rapidly, blocking all of Percy's attacks without fail. The Harvesters made crisp tings as they collided against the compressed water, their edges shattering into a million pieces.

Percy frowned at the sight.

'This feels more like trying to stab through stone with a toothpick, than slashing through water with a blade…'

The only silver lining was that the pressure around him had lessened momentarily, allowing him to move a little faster for a few seconds. That didn't last long, however, the force returning as soon as the rings were done diffusing his offensive.

'He's so much better at manipulating his domain than Acton!' Percy realized grimly.

This person didn't even have an earth or a mud affinity – just water – yet his defences were even harder to breach than the deceased Green-born's. Even worse, he was able to move his domain around seamlessly, alternating between enveloping the entire battlefield to slow Percy down, or using it to empower his spells.

“Don’t feel so bad,” the old man consoled. “Separating us was a smart move. Unfortunately for you, our enemies have been using it against our House for centuries. I’m afraid we’ve long learned to fight separately as well as we can together.”

Percy had no retort, knowing the man was right. What the two veterans had lost in coordination or their stacked domains, they’d clearly made up for in other ways. He didn’t know about the other guy, but the water mage was able to use both his domain and his mana a lot more aggressively now that he didn’t have to worry about getting in his companion’s way.

So focused had he and Micky been on splitting the old monsters up, that they’d played right into their hands…

Chapter 389 – Countered

The speed of the azure serpents alone wasn’t enough to corner Percy, but that wasn’t the only issue. The man’s domain didn’t just slow him down – It also made it much harder for him to multiply his scythes, which served not only as his sole means of attack, but also as the footholds he relied on to remain airborne.

Worse still, the water mage was clearly experienced enough to see through Percy’s moves after a while. It wasn’t long before he started attacking the scythes directly, using his domain-infused constructs to destroy the weapons even when he failed to catch Percy. He often blocked Percy’s path too, knowing his movements were limited to leaping from one pair of scythes to another.

Of course, Percy hadn’t remained idle either.

His eyes had long adjusted to the man’s spells, allowing him to predict their trajectories and move both himself and his constructs away. Whenever they were damaged, he kept them at a fair distance from the battlefield. This gave them a chance to repair and replicate themselves, before he brought them back in. Even his own moves had continued to grow sharper and more complex with each step he took, as he rapidly adapted the Carnival to its aerial variant.

That said, he was still at a severe disadvantage.

Trapped between the raging rivers, Percy didn't have much breathing room. He couldn't really approach nor escape from his opponent, and a lot of his attention was spent just surviving the relentless onslaught.

His eyes may have adjusted to the man's mana, but they had a much harder time predicting the sudden shifts of his domain, since that only relied on willpower. It wasn't entirely impossible to peer through the water mage's intentions, since Soul Vision still worked, but it wasn't nearly as informative without Mana Sense complementing it.

Another issue was that his counterattacks had been doomed from the start.

Percy had never stopped looking for an opening to fight back, but his scythes never managed to carve deeper than an inch into the dense rings protecting his opponent, no matter how many he used, or what formation he placed them in. Not that he could afford to stop trying. He certainly needed the occasional chance to catch his breath that his attacks bought him, but he understood he'd never win like this.

'Come on… think. There must be something we can do…'

The water mage's greatest strength was clearly his defence. Not that his speed and offense were lacking, but Percy could at least deal with those. On the other hand, he just couldn't come up with a way to breach the rings. His scythes were already made out of reinforced mana, enchanted with some of his best runes. Even if he could invent something better, he wasn't confident he could do it in the midst of combat.

From what little he'd managed to communicate with his clone, he knew Micky wasn't doing well either. The air mage was also free to use his magic without constraints, having already landed countless blows on the crow. His spells weren't as powerful as his companion's, and Micky was a lot tougher than a regular Green beast, but the damage was piling up quickly, the bird already a bloody mess. It wouldn't be long before it caused his fighting strength to dip. And it would all go downhill from there.

'This isn't sustainable. The bastards have tricked us into some bad match-ups...'

Strictly speaking, their opponents were still a little weaker while separated than they had been together. Joining them up again would be ill-advised. But the enemy mages had certainly done a great job forcing him and Micky to each pick the wrong opponent.

Micky's attacks hit harder than Percy's, so he might have managed to break through the water mage's rings with his Rending Tornado. At the same time, Percy was confident he would have done a better job evading the air mage's attacks had he been in his familiar's shoes.

'Can we try swapping?' he wondered.

It was the obvious solution, though it wouldn't be an easy one to execute. They'd gone through so much trouble to split them up in the first place, and even holding them apart had been a challenge. Micky had probably been forced to eat several blows to keep his opponent from escaping. The air user wasn't faster than Micky in a straight line, but he was definitely the most agile person on the battlefield right now.

This narrative has been purloined without the author's approval. Report any appearances on Amazon.

'No… Even if we managed to do it, I'm not sure I can catch that guy fast enough by myself…' he thought, dodging another serpent shooting for his head.

It was speed.

Their greatest limiting factor in this fight. Offensive power too, but he didn't think he could improve on that in the short term. Speed, on the other hand, he might be able to do something about.

Over the next few seconds, Percy focused on his boosting art, examining the flaws in his technique. The Carnival was already an extremely advanced Masterful spell, so he didn't delude himself into believing that he could upgrade it anytime soon. However, it was also an entire fighting style, and Percy was fully aware that he had barely scratched the surface of his potential during his fight against Acton.

In fact, it would be quite greedy of him to ask for a stronger spell. Foolish of him too, to neglect what he could still accomplish with this one. Percy should have all the tools he needed to solve this puzzle – he just had to try a little harder to fit them together.

'My timing can use a lot of work…' he realized.

He was currently moving by jumping from one pair of crossed shafts to another, but that seemingly simple action involved countless components. There was the force exerted by the muscles in his legs, but also that of his willpower acting on the mana inside his channels, pulling him around like a marionette on its strings.

There were the constructs – his very footholds – bending and snapping back under his weight, their strength and their enchantments keeping them from breaking. There was also the momentum of the scythes. If they flew toward a certain direction before he stepped on them, they could pass some of their energy to him during the collision.

Then, there was his armour. He could manipulate the mana inside it too, dragging his body around. Yet, that was but a single aspect in which his Regalia contributed to his movements. Another was his ability to turn parts of it intangible. He could do that selectively, while flying, to minimize both his weight, and the air resistance slowing him down.

Finally, the fused mana spilling out of his pores could also be harnessed. It wouldn't be as good at this as air or fire mana, but he could still use it to propel himself some more if he timed it right.

His best bet was to fine-tune all these elements to maximize his speed.

'It could work… But I need to get there fast, or Micky is screwed.'

Not wasting a moment, Percy immersed himself into the spell, examining how all these components came together. Lifting part of his attention off his opponent instantly put him at a disadvantage, as the water serpents came closer and closer to ripping him apart, occasionally even glancing his armour and shredding pieces of it off.

But the improvements started to make up for it.

Every jump was a little faster. The difference was miniscule at first – barely noticeable. But it was consistent, and it kept accumulating. Percy tested the strength of his constructs, trying to figure out how much they could bend without breaking.

He lost his foothold a few times, nearly getting hit by the water spells. Fortunately, Percy managed to get away each time, the suddenness of his failures catching his opponent by surprise. The grin on the man's face still widened, the fool probably thinking it was Percy's exhaustion getting to him, not realizing he was just experimenting with his spell.

It didn't take Percy long to understand how far he could push the weapons, however, his speed climbing as a result. Next, he worked on his muscles. He didn't just use the ones in his legs, but also the ones in his torso, trying to summon every drop of strength his body could muster with each step.

His mana was actually even easier to use. His feet could only exert force while they were in contact with the scythes, but the same limitation didn't apply to the mana inside his channels or armour. That, he could use even while he was in flight, to keep accelerating between jumps. The only thing he had to worry about was to shift the direction of this force at the right moment, to minimize the losses.

Soon, he found himself whizzing around his opponent no slower than the air mage had done at the start of the battle. It didn't take him long to start avoiding the man's spells well in advance, bolting through the battlefield like a grey streak, leaping from platform to platform.

Even better, the more accustomed he grew to his own movements, the easier it was for his phantoms to replicate them. At some point, there were dozens of ghostly figures looking just like him, mirroring his actions to confuse the water mage. Destroying them or at least identifying the original with his domain wasn't hard, but each of those solutions forced the man to spread his willpower thin, allowing Percy to move even faster.

Still, Percy wasn't in a rush to escape toward Micky.

If he tried to swap with him now, their opponents would follow suit. With both of them moving closer, their domains would mix again long before Percy bridged the gap. It wasn't enough to just get a little faster than the air mage – he had to outrun both of them combined.

'What did you do?' the clone asked. 'This guy suddenly got more anxious.'

Percy grinned. His opponent had clearly realized what he was up to, relaying the information to his teammate. Either way, it wouldn't matter.

‘I need you to buy me a few more minutes. Can you manage?’

Chapter 390 – First Parade (1)

A wave of annoyance seeped through the connection, but the clone didn’t say anything, tacitly agreeing to let him do his thing.

Not wasting a moment, Percy focused on his developing technique once more, fully aware that he was operating on a strict timer. None of this would be worth it if his familiar was seriously injured by the time he was done. Regardless, he understood this was their best shot.

The good news was that he no longer had to worry about his opponent landing a hit, as his speed had already eclipsed the water mage’s spells. New issues had emerged, however. Percy’s whole body hurt – even the parts not directly involved in his high-speed movements. The pain in his hands wasn’t as bad as that in his legs and torso, but he had kept the Carnival active for quite a while now, and it was beginning to take its toll on him.

His surroundings had turned blurry in his vision, as even his mutated eyes struggled to keep up with the influx of information. It didn’t help that he had to keep his gaze locked on his opponent’s frame. He couldn’t afford to stop predicting the man’s spells, or he could easily run into them by accident.

‘It’ll have to do…’ he nodded internally after a while.

There was still room for improvement, probably, but he was already experiencing diminishing returns. Practicing any longer would hurt both himself and Micky with very little to show for it.

‘We’re swapping,’ he sent through the cord. ‘I’m gonna need you to hold the other one busy for a while. I know it’ll be tough, but I’ll try to make it quick.’

Percy didn’t even wait for an answer, sending all his scythes toward Micky’s general direction, leaping from shaft to shaft at a ridiculous pace. In an instant, the water mage was dozens of metres behind him, though he was already on his tail. At his current speed, he wasn’t going to catch up anytime soon, but they both understood he didn’t have to. He only needed his domain to reach that of his teammate to make Percy’s life a lot harder.

Gritting his teeth, Percy ran as fast as he could manage. This was his first time fighting in the sky, but he'd never travelled like this on land either. Before long, he vaguely caught sight of a large shape brushing just under him. He didn't get a good look at Micky, but from what little he did see, Percy could tell the crow's injuries were even worse than he'd imagined.

'Hang in there, buddy.'

Right behind the bird was the air mage, also doing his best to meet up with his companion. By the time Percy reached him, the two domains had actually touched again, but the stacked effect was weak enough to mostly ignore for now. That said, it was still in Percy's best interest to push him away. Or kill him – whichever came first.

Naturally, the man didn't just wait passively for his execution. The moment Percy approached, he shot countless crescents of wind at him, trying to slice him to pieces. Caught up in his momentum, and having trouble scanning his surroundings, Percy nearly got hit.

He barely managed to leap out of the way at the last second, the green blades carving through the scythes he had just stepped on as if they were butter. Clearly, his opponent had infused his domain into the spells.

Percy responded by hurling some of his spare constructs at him, forcing him to dodge. The man unleashed controlled bursts of wind from every part of his body, whizzing around like the world's most annoying mosquito. Then again, Percy shouldn't be complaining, since he was no less difficult to grab a hold of himself.

'Doesn't matter. I'll have to figure this out… Micky won't last much longer…'

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

Sadly, his opponent made things harder for him, by expelling a lot of his stored mana to form a colossal hurricane dozens of metres wide. Layering his domain on top of the cataclysmic spell, he forced the raging gusts of wind to fly even faster, like thousands of tiny blades making grating sounds as they collided against one another.

The individual attacks weren't strong enough to injure Percy too badly. Even if he phased his armour through them, they would barely nick his skin. However, the pressure slowed down his movements, accelerating those of the air mage.

Percy bounced around the hurricane, fighting against the wind. With each leap, he closed the gap to his slippery opponent by a few metres. Two scythes were gripped tightly in his hands, their curved edges gleaming with impatience as they hungered for the man's flesh.

Of course, the veteran mage wouldn't go down without a fight. The more Percy struggled to approach, the more he fought to keep his distance, continuing to unleash more spells at him to block his path. He wasn't even trying to hit him – everyone knew the battle would end the moment Micky died, so the Blue was more than happy to waste Percy's time.

Percy evaded the green constructs one after another, until he figured he was close enough to his target to bridge the remaining gap with one last jump. Stomping hard on a pair of scythes, he twisted his torso to avoid an incoming spell, shooting at his opponent like a grey comet.

Just when he was about to land the final blow, he faintly caught a savage grin on the man's face, however. The air user's soul flickered at the last second, betraying his intention to attack.

Caught off guard, Percy crossed his weapons in front of him to block the blow. Not a drop of mana left the man's core, making Percy second-guess whether his opponent had merely feinted to get him to halt his offensive.

His confusion didn't last long though, an invisible blow slamming into his Harvesters the very next moment. Both their shafts shattered, the blast continuing right to his chest. Percy barely managed to twist his torso again to deflect some of the force, but he was still sent flying back. The attack had shaved two layers off the left side of his breastplate and even cracked the third.

The mage didn't wait for him to catch himself either, shooting more spells at him to turn him into minced meat. Percy managed to kick against a stray scythe spinning in his path, evading the attacks at the last second.

"Ughh… fuck…" he groaned, sputtering a mouthful of blood as the pain registered.

It took him several seconds to resume his rhythm, each leap sending a jolt of agony through his body. He wouldn't be surprised if that last attack had broken a rib or two. Not to mention that he hadn't been in the best condition to begin with, having struggled to endure the strain of his own movements.

'It's the same thing Acton did right at the end of our fight.'

A concentrated blast of willpower. It clearly wasn't easy to pull off, as the move had caused the domain around them to weaken. Even now, several seconds after the man's attack, it hadn't fully recovered. But it made for a very quick and deadly trump card. One that involved no mana, thus making it several times harder for Percy to predict.

Percy sighed, emptying a couple vials of healing potions into his stomach. Unfortunately, he hadn't replaced his tattoos since the fight with the Green-born, though he didn't regret it. He'd spent most of his time training with Micky instead, which was probably the only reason his familiar was still alive.

Over the next couple of seconds, he evaded his opponent's spells as he waited for the potions to relieve some of his pain and fatigue. At the same time, he reflected over his mistakes.

He couldn't stop his opponent from sneak attacking him with his domain, but getting hit by it had partly been his fault. Losing his patience, he had foolishly charged at the man in a straight line. His movements might have been fast, but they had also been way too predictable.

'Not good enough. I need to vary my steps more. And I'll only get one more chance at this…'

He couldn't afford to get hit again. Even if the next blow didn't kill him directly, he doubted he'd be in any condition to fight after another mistake like that.

Gathering his scythes around him again, Percy leapt from foothold to foothold, his gaze sinking into his opponent's frame once more. The two mages flew against the violent gales, the booming shocks of Percy's steps breaking through the cacophony of the grating winds and the shrill cries of the burning wisps.

Percy rapidly closed the distance to the Blue, though he wasn't in a rush to go for the finisher this time, knowing this was exactly what the man was waiting for. Instead, he focused on his movements again, searching for another way to improve his technique.

'I don't think I can move any faster than this, but I can probably do it in a smarter way…'