Wanderer 39

Chapter 39: Starry Drones

It wasn't like he hadn't searched for the bugs on the way, but he hadn't found any. The colourful motes impaired visibility and even interfered with Mana Sense.

CAW!

The bird threw a quick glance around, before flying a certain direction. A few moments later, it returned with something squirming in its beak. Its shape wasn't much different from a regular wasp's, but it was much larger. For the most part, its carapace was black. However, Percy didn't miss the numerous tiny dots glittering along the slick chitin, resembling the motes in their surroundings.

'Ok, so they blend in the environment. How did you find it so easily?'

Micky hadn't struggled much to locate the oversized bug, seemingly unaffected by its camouflage. The familiar pointed to its eyes with a wing.

CAW! CAW!

Percy smiled wryly.

'Not very helpful. I wouldn't be able to spot one further than 20 feet away… Unless…'

Gathering some soul mana into his eyes, three silver flames of various shapes and sizes came into view. His own was the largest, followed by Micky's. The wasp's wasn't nearly as bright, merely a wisp on the verge of being snuffed out, but it was there nonetheless.

This was good news. Due to his nature as a familiar, Micky had manifested some unique abilities allowing him to interact with the souls of others. At the beginning, it had only affected his beak, letting him consume the souls of his prey. Following his advancement to Orange, however, it had extended to his talons and eyes. Evidently, while the colourful motes affected both Mana Sense and regular sight, they weren't alive and thus could be filtered out through Soul Vision.

‘It’s nice to know we have at least one advantage over others.’

Still, Percy failed to spot any other wasps nearby. Apparently, they were somewhat scarce. Despite having the ability to see them, he and Micky would have to move around a lot.

‘Eat its core but be careful not to damage anything else.’

The bird heeded his instructions, swiftly putting the wasp out of its misery, cawing in satisfaction after swallowing the tasty snack. Pulling a knife out, Percy carefully sliced open the bug’s thorax vertically, before placing his fingers inside, searching for something. A few moments later, he pulled out a soft, squishy ball about half the size of a cherry.

Taking a small vial out of his pocket, he uncorked it with his mouth before cutting a small hole into the gland and squeezing it above the bottle’s opening. A drop of a viscous liquid fell inside. It glowed in a rich amber colour – looking a bit like magic honey.

‘On second thought… isn’t that precisely what this is?’

The young man compressed the gland more firmly, until he counted five drops. This was already worth as much as what the Guild had given him. Clearly, the clerk wasn’t kidding when he said it would be easy to make a living.

‘Still, I need 800 drops per day for both of my cores…’

It was a huge sum. Percy wasn’t sure if it was even possible to get that much. Micky and Soul Vision would certainly help, but they’d need to hunt 160 Starry Drones on average.

‘Micky. Let’s play a game. Whoever finds the most wasps in the next 2 hours wins.’

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CAW!

The familiar was over the moon, having barely eked out a victory in their little competition. Percy wasn't nearly as excited on the other hand. Although, his loss wasn't what soured his mood.

Stolen from Royal Road, this story should be reported if encountered on Amazon.

'As expected, hunting on the first floor isn't very efficient.'

The two had only found another five wasps by the end. Extrapolating, he estimated that even if they spent all day doing this from now on, they'd only get about 200 contribution points – barely half a dose. A quarter of what he needed.

It was not all bad, however.

Killing the drones was easy as they didn't put up much of a fight, making the ground floor quite safe. He was also certain nobody in their right mind would ever bother with it either, meaning he wouldn't have to worry about his secrets leaking. Finally, he was confident he and Micky would improve with some more experience, increasing their harvest after a few more weeks.

'Still, it won't be enough.' he shook his head.

But that was fine. He hadn't expected this to work. His goal had always been the second level, the Starry Workers there being more suitable for their grades. Even if he ignored the fact they possessed three times as much nectar as the drones, their Orange cores would accelerate Micky's advancement and their souls would do the same for his own recovery.

Squeezing the rest of his loot into the vial, he shook it a few times, marvelling at the expensive liquid swirling at the bottom. It wasn't nearly as much as he needed, but it was a start. His goal for tomorrow would be to do better.

Percy bid his familiar farewell, before heading back towards the settlement. The sun had already set a while ago, but according to the clerk the shops shouldn't have closed yet. The young man hoped to get

some supplies for his new abode. He would be staying there for some time, after all. He might as well make it comfortable.

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Percy was carrying four paper bags full of groceries. While he had come across a lot of exotic spices and ingredients they didn't have back at the mansion, he had kept his shopping fairly barebones. He'd only gone for things like bread, milk, eggs and some fruit. After all, he'd never learned to cook, and he doubted he'd have the time for a new hobby anytime soon.

'Maybe one day.'

He was only a couple blocks away from his new house when an interesting smell caught his attention. It came from his left, where a small stall stood. It was operated by a plump guy lighting a stove with fire magic. This was the first person Percy had seen wearing an orange robe. He looked a bit older than the others too, seemingly in his mid-thirties.

'A Red-born.'

The guy noticed him as well, waving at him to approach.

"First day here?"

"What gave me away?"

"Nothing really. I just haven't seen you before."

He handed Percy something warm, wrapped in a piece of parchment. The young man sniffed a couple of times, trying to discern what it was. It looked a bit like a pancake, dripping with honey. However, it had been rolled up and it was crispy too. Percy struggled to keep himself from drooling.

"What is it? It looks delicious."

“It tastes even better!” the guy grinned. “I call them Honey Rolls.”

“How much?” Percy asked, reaching into his pocket.

The guy shook his head.

“First one’s on the house. Think of it like a welcome gift. Or Red-born solidarity if you prefer.”

“Thanks!”

If the guy was offering, Percy wouldn’t stand on ceremony. He bit a chunk out of the Honey Roll. The dude wasn’t kidding. This was heaven. The thin crust gave way, crunching under his teeth, as the flavour of the honey blended with the warm dough. Maybe he was a little biased, having lived off dried rations for two weeks followed by some bland bread. That said, he’d bet money this would still taste good tomorrow.

Suddenly, a strange thought crossed his mind.

“Don’t tell me you’re using nectar?”

“Ha! As if! What moron would waste an elixir’s worth of nectar on a snack?!” the plump dude chuckled.

“Besides, I doubt it would even taste that good. This is just regular honey.” he added after a moment.

Percy nodded. That made sense.

“Name’s Freddy.” the plump guy said, extending his hand.

The young man hurriedly wiped his on the parchment a couple of times, before reciprocating.

“Percy. Are you also doing this as a ‘vacation’? The clerk from the orientation said you can’t afford the elixirs without hunting wasps or learning to brew.”

Freddy’s face fell at his question, making Percy realize he might have asked something inappropriate. He was about to apologize but the guy spoke first.

“He was right. My Honey Rolls are rather popular if I may say so myself. Still, nowhere near enough.”

He remained silent for a few seconds, before continuing.

“But I’ve given up on hunting. Even after busting my ass, I could barely make 300 points on a good day. It would still be enough to get the expensive elixir every other day or something, but I figured it wasn’t worth the trouble. Right now, I’ve settled on the diluted ones.”

Percy felt the urge to protest – to tell Freddy not to give up. But he suppressed it.

‘What do I even know? I just got here.’

The two chatted for a few minutes, switching to some more light-hearted topics, before Percy left.

His expression was downtrodden by the time he got home. Freddy was a nice guy. A Red-born like him, who had probably come to the Alchemists’ Guild harbouring the same dream. And the cruel reality had chipped away at it for years, until nothing remained.

Percy’s final thought before he dozed off was a resolute one.

‘I won’t let this happen to me.’