Wanderer 41

Chapter 41: A poor showing

The young man wiped the sweat off his forehead with his sleeve for the billionth time. Luckily, it trickled down the enchanted fabric without being absorbed, else he would be soaking by now.

‘At least the robes came with self-cleaning runes.’

Percy was trudging down the final bridge linking the first and second levels, his eyes half-closed and his breath rugged. The wind caused the flimsy structure to sway every so often, but he’d grown used to it by now, having walked several miles on the bridges already. That said, the exhaustion made keeping his balance more challenging. He briefly considered using his Quarterstaff as a walking cane, but that would only take more effort.

‘Let’s just treat it as another obstacle to overcome.’ he shrugged.

Today's hunt had been gruelling, and the results abysmal. He and Micky had only managed to kill fourteen wasps in total, averaging less than one per hour. Evidently, the Starry Workers were on a whole different level than the drones – both literally and metaphorically.

Finding them wasn’t that hard. If anything, their larger size made them spottable from further away, but they were slightly less abundant than their weaker relatives, so it worked out about the same.

Killing them was a different story, however. The best strategy they had come up with involved Micky distracting the wasps while Percy fired Parting Gifts, praying they landed. Despite reducing the size and increasing the quantity of the projectiles – launching three smaller daggers with each shot – hitting the beasts came down to sheer luck. He also had to take extra care not to hit his own familiar with the deadly spell, complicating things further.

Another issue was that he couldn’t keep Circulation active all day. Everything had progressed relatively smoothly during the morning, but it all went downhill once he grew too tired to use the technique in the afternoon.

The final nail in the coffin was that he had only harvested 12 of the 14 glands, as they had accidentally ruined a couple while fighting the creatures.

‘We made even less nectar than on the ground floor.’ Percy frowned.

Although he had only tested it for a couple of hours, he had estimated they could reliably hunt around 40 drones per day, which would get them about 200 drops of nectar. Today, they had only earned about 180 from the workers!

‘But there’s more room for improvement here.’

The difficulty in killing the Red variants was non-existent, so the only issue was finding them. Perhaps, they could get better at that after learning the ropes, but they would still be capped by how fast they could travel. Meanwhile, there was more at play on the second level. There, they could also work on their combat ability and teamwork to increase their gains.

‘Let’s give it a couple of weeks. If we don’t improve much, we can consider downgrading.’

Soon, he reached the gate, waving at the guards who returned the gesture. Entering the settlement, he headed straight towards Freddy’s spot, craving another Honey Roll. However, he paused upon seeing another new stand that had popped up at some point.

‘This wasn’t here last night.’

Of course, the roads inside the Guild’s camp were filled with all sorts of stalls with people bartering and trading. Not all were open this late, but plenty still were. That said, there was a reason why this one caught his eye. Percy recognized the owner! A strange phenomenon considering how few people he had met. It was a petite girl dressed in a brand-new yellow robe. Her tousled hair was black and only barely reached her shoulders. She wore a pair of glasses too.

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‘The drowsy girl from the orientation… but what is she doing?’

True to the nickname he had given her, she was resting face-down on the counter once more. Right next to her, there was a translucent jar with five red coins – she clearly hadn't spent any of her allowance yet, nor had she made any effort to earn more.

'She seems to be serious about not hunting or brewing.' Percy shook his head.

Next, he glanced down at a hastily made sign she had nailed on the stand.

'BUYING INFORMATION ON THE THIRD LEVEL'

The handwriting was sloppy too.

Percy's jaw dropped at the sight. She wanted to buy information with her measly five points? What for? If she had no intention of venturing out, then how would it help her? Also, what if people lied to her? She'd just be wasting her money!

'It's none of my business anyway. I'm sure she'll wise up in a couple of days. Besides, losing a handful of points isn't a big deal.'

Ignoring her, he continued to Freddy's stall.

"Hey Percy! Any luck out there?" the plump guy asked with a smile.

"Not really. I only managed to kill seven workers today." he replied, halving the number to hide Micky's involvement.

"That's quite good for your first proper hunt. A bit better than average too." Freddy nodded.

"Really? I thought it was on the lower side." Percy raised an eyebrow.

“Most people find the best level to hunt at is the one matching their grade. Locating and killing the wasps can be tricky, so newcomers usually average about five glands per day. If you have a suitable affinity and with some experience, you can get to twenty.”

Percy frowned. This arrangement would work well for people at Yellow. After all, twenty kills on the third level would get them 900 contribution points which was more than double what they needed. However, this wouldn’t cut it for him. Even if he and Micky improved enough to hunt twenty workers each, they’d only get 600 points, still short of his second dose.

‘Let’s not get ahead of myself. For now, I should focus on earning the first dose before I run out of elixirs. After that, I can look into alchemy to make the difference.’

He thanked Freddy for the information and the food before leaving. Just two blocks from his house, however, he was rudely shoved aside by a passerby.

“The hell?!”

The guy didn’t bother apologizing or even glancing back. He kept walking next to another person, the two seemingly locked in a heated conversation.

“Nobody mentioned these fucking things would be so hard to find!” the first guy yelled.

“At least your fire magic is among the best for the job!” the other replied. “Do you have any idea how annoying it is to toss stones at them until they hit?!”

Both wore yellow robes and Percy recognized the second guy – the one who hadn’t pushed him. He’d also been in his orientation.

‘I guess I’m not the only one having trouble with this.’ Percy smiled wryly.

Of course, these people were much closer to their own targets. They were earning more and needed less. Still, knowing he wasn’t alone struggling was a little reassuring.

Reaching his house, he took a shower before sitting on his bed. Next, he drank another dose of the elixir, noting he only had sixteen vials left. Adding in the ones he could buy with his current income, he calculated they'd last him a month.

'We need to kill 27 workers per day so that I can sustain one core. That should be my current goal. I have to get there in a month.'

Having made his mind up, he activated Soul Vision, examining the state of his soul.

'It's not all bad.' the corner of his lips curled up.

Despite their subpar performance, the soul mana Micky had gathered from the wasps had done wonders for Percy's recovery. The crater in his chest had visibly shrunk some more. There was still some distance to cover, but his healing speed would increase too as they raised their hunting efficiency.

'I can probably generate enough mana to feed my first core diluted elixirs already. At this rate, I'll be able to resume sending clones soon!'

Not only that, but honing his combat skills was a noteworthy benefit in and of itself. Percy would have sought out an environment like the Fungal Spire to train in, even if his advancement wasn't dependent on it. At the end of the day, adapting his fighting style to his nimble opponents was a welcome challenge.

'Let's see if I can come up with a couple new spells for this.'