Wanderer 45

Chapter 45: Introduction to alchemy

Percy struggled to find a seat. The lecture theatre was packed to the brim with people. Naturally, the Orange cores like him were meant to sit at the very back, but even those rows were full. Shrugging, he picked the least crowded corner to stand. It wasn't the most comfortable solution, but he wouldn't have trouble hearing the lecturer.

Soon, a man in blue robes walked in. He was actually the same guy who'd given him the leaflet. It was weird for one at that level to waste time advertising his own lecture. Couldn't he have paid somebody to do it?

'Then again, he did seem passionate about teaching.'

"Good morning everyone!" the guy said.

Percy paid more attention to his lecturer's appearance today. He looked middle-aged which meant he was probably an Orange-born who'd lived for several centuries already.

'I should have been more respectful last night.' he realized.

"Judging by your presence here, it's safe to assume you're all beginners, so I'll start with the basics. First of all, the field of alchemy contains more than just the elixirs we know and love. It essentially spans any potions, poisons or medicine brewed with natural ingredients."

Percy nodded, having heard that before.

"However, most of those things are secondary products of alchemy. Even the best healing potions can't hold a handle to a Yellow core's life mana. Similarly, the most potent venoms and poisons we can concoct won't do much to one of the strongest mages. If you want to assassinate a Blue, you're better off just using a Starry Commander's venom." he chuckled before continuing. "And if you're above Orange you're unlikely to get sick, meaning even medicine isn't particularly useful."

The room broke into some chatter.

“I know what you’re all thinking – if these things are so ineffective, then why would anybody bother? And you’re not wrong. While there is a place for these products in any noble family’s warehouse, they are but secondary pursuits for bored alchemists with too much money and time in their hands. I would advise you to not bother with them for now. Consequently, we aren’t interested in anything but elixirs during this lecture.”

The young man shrugged. Hearing that alchemy was so underdeveloped on Remior was a little sad, but this arrangement suited him just fine. After all, the Avalon House was full of people with the life affinity, so they had even less need for these auxiliary resources than others.

‘Although, I suppose they’d still be somewhat useful for me due to my lower grade…’

“In any case, the first thing you need to understand about elixirs, is how they work. Does anyone know?”

A brave girl in a yellow robe raised her hand.

“They break down the impurities in our cores over time, allowing them to reform at a higher grade.”

The lecturer smiled. This was indeed common knowledge.

“Yes. The elixirs owe this miraculous property to their main ingredient – the nectar you’ve all probably come across by now. But can somebody tell me what that is?”

This time, nobody answered.

Everyone in the room had likely hunted the wasps before, yet nobody seemed to understand what exactly made them so special.

‘Wait… the wasps… don’t tell me…’

“Simply put, the nectar is the only known example of beast mana capable of existing for an extended period of time outside a beast’s body. People have tried to make elixirs out of beast cores, but nobody has ever succeeded. At least, not on Remior.”

Sharp breaths were drawn across the room.

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It was well understood that beasts refined their cores naturally by eating, without needing any external resources. Evidently, this was because they already possessed the main ingredient of the elixirs within their very cores. As it turned out, alchemists did nothing more than imitate them, harnessing their ability for humanity’s sake.

“Sir, if that’s true then how do other races advance their grades? Are there Starry Wasps on every world?” somebody asked.

“That’s an excellent question. I’m not a member of the Divine Order, so what I can say with certainty on the topic is rather limited. Still, as far as I know, Starry Wasps are native to Remior.” the lecturer replied.

“Then how?” another person asked.

“Well, every world has different resources and natural treasures. Some are unlucky enough they lack the means of advancing, while others have their own methods. I’d wager most of those methods involve an alternative source of beast mana, however.”

This explanation made another thing click in Percy’s mind.

‘So that’s why the Fungal Spire is considered so important. It’s our only practical means of advancement and there are races who don’t even have something similar!’

The young man developed some newfound appreciation for the colossal mushrooms above their heads.

“Ok, so now that we’ve established that, the question is how do we process the nectar into elixir?” the lecturer asked.

“I’ve heard there are multiple recipes.” somebody said.

The alchemist nodded.

“Indeed, while the nectar is irreplaceable, all the other ingredients have several alternatives – with similar functions. It all comes down to transforming the nectar from raw beast mana – which would only run berserk inside your cores and injure you – into something stable, which will harmlessly cleanse away the impurities alone. Strictly speaking, you only really need to focus on a single recipe and strive to get good at it, although it can be useful to come in contact with a couple more, for when you have limited access to the ingredients you need. Still, most approaches are rather similar, so it’s not that hard to switch to a different recipe once you understand the process.”

Percy felt the urge to laugh. All this time, alchemy had sounded like a mystical and profound profession… but... according to everything they had been taught today, didn’t it all seem rather inane?

The potions, poisons and medicines were borderline useless, and even the elixirs merely involved harvesting a single raw ingredient they were lucky enough to find on Remior, transforming it into a slightly different form. If the Fungal Spire was destroyed, wouldn’t that leave all the alchemists without a job overnight?

But he shook his head.

‘Obviously, the actual brewing process must be complicated, or it wouldn’t be so hard to do it.’

The lecturer’s next words confirmed that.

“There is one reliable metric that can be used to define an alchemist’s skill: Their brewing yield. Simply put, this is just a percentage indicating how many drops of elixir they can produce out of a hundred drops of nectar.”

Percy ran the calculation in his head. As far as he could tell, the finished product was four times as expensive.

“Some of you seem to have mathed it out already. Indeed, the turning point that qualifies somebody into a full-fledged alchemist is a 25% yield. That’s the cutoff where you stop losing money as you brew. The most talented and experienced alchemists in the Guild can boast of yields as high as 56%. For anyone wondering, my personal best is only at 44%.”

The young man had to swallow his saliva, to avoid drooling. Didn’t that mean their lecturer nearly doubled his money every time he brewed a batch?

“It’s still a time-consuming process, so there’s a limit to how much elixir we can brew per day. Our output is still lower than the input and also lower than Remior’s needs, which is why we need more alchemists in the Guild. If we could convert all the available nectar with a 45% yield, we might have enough for everyone on Remior – including the Red-borns.”

Now, this bit of information was even more shocking to Percy. His whole life, he’d suffered from his low grade, preventing him from advancing as fast as others. If it hadn’t been for this shortage, he would have reached Orange five years sooner! And the lecturer claimed it could all be solved if they’d just bothered to train a few more alchemists?

‘Then, why the fuck don’t you?!’ the young man struggled to keep his thoughts to himself.

SIGH

“Despite what my idealistic words might suggest, this is easier said than done. It will take you a few months and a lot of wasted nectar before your first successful batch of elixir. Even then, you’re unlikely to start with a yield higher than 15%. It won’t be until the end of the year you get to 25% and it only keeps getting harder. You’ll get to about 30% if you keep at it for another year or two. Reaching 40% is usually a matter of decades and 50% centuries. Perhaps, the White cores leading the Great Houses, or the gods of the Divine Order could surpass that, having lived for tens of millennia, but their time is much more valuable spent elsewhere than brewing elixirs.”

The new influx of information did calm Percy down. Evidently, they'd need to train an army of Blue cored alchemists for centuries to provide for everyone. And for what? Just so that Red-borns like him would get elixirs? They still wouldn't live past Yellow!

It wasn't worth the time.

But he'd heard another thing of interest. A 30% yield was a realistic goal after a couple of years. That was already enough to make a profit.

'As soon as I can sustain one core, I'll start siphoning the excess time and points into alchemy.'