Wanderer 46

Chapter 46: An idea

It was early afternoon by the time the alchemist's lecture ended. Advertised as a mere introduction, it didn't really delve into the topic too deeply. After explaining the basic concepts, the guy talked about a few of the most popular recipes, giving them an overview of how the secondary ingredients worked and what tools they needed to use.

Percy did feel some anticipation.

Not only due to the stacks of contribution points waiting at the other end of his alchemical journey, but also because the whole thing seemed fun. The idea of playing around with magic juices and challenging himself to increase his yield sounded like something he would enjoy. Still, he had to reign in his excitement until he raised the funds to actually dip his toes into the field.

'Better get back to hunting then.'

Half the day was gone, but that was no excuse to slack for the rest of it.

'CAW!'

Apparently, Micky agreed, as he'd been urging him for some time.

'I know, I know… I'm on the way already!'

Nearing the gate, he saw the drowsy girl's stand was still there, over a week after he first spotted it. The owner was too, sleeping on the counter as usual.

'Has she not given up yet? I can't tell if she's the laziest or the most persistent person I know. Probably both.'

For many days, nobody had paid her any attention, although Percy did notice her coins were gone last night. And since then, she'd nailed a new smaller sign, adding more words to the advertisement.

'BUYING [AND SELLING] INFORMATION ON THE THIRD LEVEL'

So that was her brilliant plan? Purchasing information from experienced hunters to sell to newcomers? Something like where the best spots for hunting were? Or how to find and kill the Starry Soldiers more efficiently? Percy didn't know if anyone would take her up on that. It sounded a bit iffy to spend money on.

'She should have at least bothered to make a new sign instead of patching it.' he shook his head.

Half an hour later, he met up with Micky somewhere on the second level. Not the same place as yesterday. They liked to switch things up every day to let the bugs repopulate.

Percy wasn't sure it mattered, as the interior of the Spire was supposedly filled with them. More were constantly deployed outside to harvest the dense mana from the mushrooms and to bring back nectar to the nest. Suffice to say, he doubted they would run out anytime soon. Still, he could use any advantage he could get. However, they didn't begin hunting just yet, as Percy wanted to test an idea he came up with during the lecture.

'Micky, can you try passing me some of your mana through our link?'

The crow tilted its head in confusion.

CAW?

Micky hadn't eaten anything all morning, so he lacked the soul mana to send.

'Not the one you get when you eat. The one from your core.' Percy explained.

While beast mana couldn't normally leave one's body or form regular spells, it could still freely circulate through its owner's channels, passively nourishing their flesh. This was the source of the beasts' strength after all.

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After learning that nectar was essentially just beast mana that could be transferred outside, Percy had considered the possibility of taking advantage of the ethereal cord to achieve something similar.

Of course, even if it worked, he wasn't sure how to benefit from it. The alchemist had already told them they couldn't purify their cores with raw beast mana. He'd have to find a way to process it into an elixir inside his body. Still, he was curious enough to give it a shot.

It took some guidance from him, but Micky eventually understood the task. Through Mana Sense, the young man observed the Orange glow leave the crow's sternum, moving towards the connection. However, nothing happened. It just accumulated there with nowhere to go.

Unsure whether Micky had done something wrong or if this was just a peculiarity of the beast mana, Percy next tested whether he could send his own mana to the familiar. Transferring a trickle of soul mana worked, confirming the ethereal cord was a two-way connection, but it didn't accept any of his pure mana either.

'I suppose it makes sense. It's linking our souls together, so why would it allow any other type to pass?'

He shrugged, not too disheartened.

CAW! CAW!

Micky was getting more impatient, sending him an image of a Starry Worker he'd just spotted.

SIGH

Percy activated Circulation, before gathering the cyan mana into his right hand, resuming work on his new project. Today, he'd focus on forming the glove with an open hand, increasing its surface area. As soon as everything was in order, he engaged the worker, testing his spell's durability as he looked for an opening to finish the creature.

A few minutes later, it was lying motionless on the surface of the mushroom, both its core and nectar gland already harvested. Micky had flown ahead to scout for their next target, as Percy sat next to the carcass, eyeing it in contemplation.

'You're some really special things, aren't you?'

His world's survival hinged entirely on these bugs. If they went extinct, everyone on Remior would be stuck at the grade they were born with. Perhaps, they could try other means of cleansing their cores, but they'd be lucky if they even advanced once in their lives that way.

But more than his world's situation, Percy couldn't help but consider what this meant for him. Would he have to stay in the Alchemists' Guild his whole life? Even if he managed to provide for his two cores eventually, what would happen when he left? He couldn't exactly take the wasps with him…

Then, he creased his brow.

'Or can I?'

His thoughts lingered on the ethereal cord linking him to Micky for a moment.

He hadn't created the familiar with the intention of raising his own strength. It had all been an accident, brought upon by his desperate attempt to save his friend. However, the advantages the crow brought him were undeniable.

Percy would be lying if he said he hadn't considered creating more of them in the past year. After all, how powerful would he be if he could cultivate an army of Green or even Blue beasts, all loyal to him? It would take even less time than reaching those grades himself!

The only reason he hadn't tried it yet was that his soul hadn't been in a good enough state before now. But that was swiftly changing with every soul Micky devoured.

'And, what if my next familiar is a Starry Wasp?'

Not only would he have another companion to fight alongside him, but he'd also have his personal nectar factory! Its production wouldn't be much at Red or Orange, but what about Green or Blue? Maybe he could sustain his cores indefinitely one day!

The more he thought about it, the more he liked the idea.

That said, there were many details he needed to figure out to make this work, as his first success had been a bit of a fluke. For example, could he injure a wasp and shove a part of his soul inside it to create a familiar? It didn't seem to be that simple, because that tended to produce regular clones in his experience.

From what he'd learned, newborn souls were more malleable than developed ones, making them easier to meld with. That's why the Moirai baby had not given him as much trouble as Micky had, and why the crow chick had proven a suitable host for his familiar.

That only raised more questions, however.

Where would he even get a Starry Wasp egg? Would he need to venture into the depths of the Fungal Spire? That was a place filled with beasts at Blue or even higher! Not just that, but entering it was a serious crime!

And even then, it wasn't guaranteed to work. The crow egg had produced a familiar, but the Moirai baby had simply died as a short-lived clone. Was it because the latter had been in a worse condition to begin with? Or was it because he brought another passenger along – Micky – in the case of the bird?

He'd need to come up with answers to all those questions if he was to succeed… which led to another problem.

‘Baldy and Elaine aren’t here to take care of me if I mess up. I should probably stick to regular clones for a while until I’m sure I know what I’m doing.’

Having already lost a ton of time due to his reckless experiments with his soul, Percy was going to take this slow.

‘Besides, I won’t need the new familiar until it’s time to leave the Guild.’