Wanderer 50

Chapter 50: The hunt resumes

‘I’ll be there in 10 minutes.’

Percy was running along a bridge, Circulation active, with a wasp corpse the size of a fox slung over his shoulder. The stinger pointed forward, ensuring he wouldn’t accidentally stab himself.

‘CAW!’

The crow was flying at half its usual speed with another worker hot on its trail.

Ten minutes later, they met up. Percy tossed the carapace in front of his familiar, before gathering both types of mana in his right hand, forming a cyan glove and a transparent sickle. He dashed towards the bird, who circled around him. Micky dug into the corpse’s sternum for its snack, as Percy engaged his pursuer.

The fight was short.

Percy dodged the first few stabs before a well-executed parry with his backhand doubled as a lethal counterattack, swiping the Parting Gift across the bug’s torso.

As soon as the second wasp died, he ignored it, letting Micky deal with the corpse once he finished his current meal. Instead, Percy moved toward the third target, conveniently located on the same mushroom.

A minute later, it met the same fate. Just in time too, as Micky arrived at Percy’s location, gently holding two glands in his talons.

‘How far to the next batch?’ Percy asked while squeezing the nectar into a vial.

CAW! CAW!

The bird showed him the locations of three more workers, the nearest over half an hour away, eliciting a groan from the young man.

‘Ok. I’ll go there. You bait that one. We’ll meet up here.’ he said, getting a nod back.

Their current hunting strategy was a lot different from what Percy had originally envisioned. Based on what others had told him soon after he joined the Guild, he’d thought he and Micky should ideally grow proficient enough to split up and hunt separately. After all, they could cover more ground like that – on paper. And indeed, both of them had improved a lot after a month, to the point Micky could even kill a few wasps on his own by now.

However, their strengths and weaknesses had developed rather disproportionally to one another. On one hand, Percy was quite adept at killing the bugs with his glove and sickle, often dispatching them within seconds. As much as his familiar had improved in this department, he doubted it would get as good as him anytime soon.

On the other hand, Percy was held up by his slower travelling speed. Even if he knew where the bugs were, he still needed several minutes to reach each one – let alone when he had to blindly search for them. Yet, scouting was precisely where Micky excelled.

Consequently, he had concluded that the most efficient strategy should make use of both their talents, while covering their shortcomings. Micky would locate the bugs and bait the more distant ones over, while Percy was in charge of putting them down. Like that, they had reached an average of 29 daily kills by the end of the month!

‘Still not enough though.’ Percy smiled bitterly as he crossed the bridge.

Strictly speaking, he could now earn over 400 contribution points per hunt, which was just barely enough to cover for one of his cores. However, that was under the assumption that he’d hunt every single day without fail. Unfortunately, some downtime was unavoidable. His third clone had needed three full days for the round trip, forcing Percy to remain idle in that time.

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At first, he had intended to keep hunting while his clone was away. Due to his soul's injuries, he knew it would be harder to accumulate soul mana by himself, but he could still form the sickle with Micky's help. Sadly, he couldn't have accounted for the unexpected issue with his soul's integrity, caused by having two ethereal cords simultaneously. Hunting in that state was ill-advised as a single moment of weakness could cost them dearly.

'I guess we just need to raise the bar a bit more to cover for the idle days.'

There was a little room for improvement, but not a lot. Percy estimated they'd cap out at 32 kills after some more experience, but that was it. He couldn't get much quicker at killing the bugs, and neither could Micky fly any faster. The only thing he could help was getting Circulation to work for the rest of the afternoon.

SIGH

'I wanted to siphon the excess profits into alchemy, not to cover for my clones' adventures…'

Of course, he could just stop creating clones.

He shook his head. As annoyed as he was when his first clone in over a year came back empty-handed, Percy had no intention of giving up on his ability entirely.

He'd always known this would happen. Not every dying body in the universe held some profound magical secret, but he'd never find the few diamonds in the rough if he stopped looking altogether. Perhaps, somebody else in his shoes might have grown content with a second core and a familiar, but Percy understood his current kit wasn't sufficient to reach the pinnacle.

'Sending clones is the one thing I can't compromise on. Even if it slows down my advancement.'

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Percy entered the settlement, after another exhausting hunt. In the end, they'd only harvested 29 glands again. The same as yesterday. And the day before. His efficiency had only dropped slightly a couple hours before sunset, when Circulation failed him.

Still, it was hard to extend its duration any further and he couldn't figure out a better way to use his mana than his current glove-sickle combo. It didn't help that he woke up tired every morning, as five hours of sleep didn't seem to cut it.

'Maybe I should look into recovery potions.'

They weren't very good, but he only needed the tiniest boost. It would all depend on their price though. He was about to head to one of the official buildings to exchange his nectar, when his gaze landed on the drowsy girl's stand.

'Huh. She's still growing.' he chuckled.

Contrary to his expectations, her information trade had not only survived over the past month, but even boomed somewhat. Percy had been shocked to see her jar steadily filling over time, until she had amassed enough money to expand her business.

Her sign now read:

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

Much to Percy's annoyance, she hadn't even bothered to nail a new plank with the changes, instead sticking a couple pieces of paper to patch in the new words. Yet, the five jars on the counter, all filled with red and orange coins were proof enough that she knew what she was doing.

'Maybe I should try something like this too.' Percy's eyelid twitched as he listened to the girl snoring without a care in the world.

At the beginning he'd felt happy for her, but it was starting to irritate him. She was making nearly as many points as he was, while sitting around all day. In fact, he wouldn't be surprised if she surpassed him before long.

SIGH

'Forget it. I have no idea how to broker information. There's clearly some secret behind her success, otherwise everyone would be doing it.'

Ignoring her, he walked to Freddy's for his daily Honey Roll. Eating the delicious snacks after each hunt had grown into a bit of a ritual by now. Also, Freddy was currently his only friend in the Guild, and it was nice having somebody to talk to. Only ten minutes later did Percy leave, trying to catch the official buildings before they closed for the night.

'I wish I didn't have to go through so many hoops though.'

The most annoying part was that he had to visit two different shops, in opposite corners of the settlement. He only sold half his loot at each location, and alternated which one he bought his elixirs from, to avoid unnecessary questions.

He knew he was probably just being paranoid, as nobody had ever asked him where he got his nectar. Even if somebody figured out that an Orange core was somehow making over 400 points per day, they wouldn't care too much. Still, he did prefer to take any precautions he could.

"Anything else I can help you with?" the clerk at the second shop – a brunette clad in green – asked after handing him a vial of elixir.

Percy was about to shake his head absentmindedly, when he thought of something.

'Since I'm here, I might as well.'

"Do you sell potions?"