Wanderer 53

Chapter 53: Three pillars

One of the Guild's largest buildings stood before Percy. It was made out of the same polished stones as all the houses and shops, covered from top to bottom in intricate glyphs, shimmering faintly whenever the colourful motes landed on them.

He'd walked past the library many times since joining, although he'd never entered. And he wasn't alone in that. Apparently very few people ever bothered, as it wasn't the easiest way to learn alchemy.

'Let's do this then. My time here is limited after all.'

At least the place was always open, so he wouldn't have to tailor his schedule to any inconvenient opening hours. He only needed to press his badge against a rune to be allowed inside. As soon as he gazed upon the countless towering bookcases, his heart began racing.

'Gods, I've missed reading!'

It used to be his main pastime growing up, but he'd been too busy over the last couple of years. Glancing around the room, he saw two middle-aged men dressed in blue, sitting on different tables. Each had a pile of books by their side. However, both had stopped what they were doing, giving him strange looks.

'What? Did I do something wrong?'

On closer inspection, one of them was the guy who'd given him the introductory lecture a month earlier. Percy never caught his name, but he did feel grateful for the freebie. He walked up to him, with a smile on his face. In his experience, the man was approachable, and he could use some help finding what he needed.

"Good evening, sir!" he whispered to avoid bothering the other guy who'd returned to reading by now.

"Did something happen outside?" the alchemist asked in concern, skipping the pleasantries.

Percy furrowed his brow.

“No? Why do you ask?”

The man stared at him in confusion for a few moments.

“I see… It’s just that I can’t remember the last time I saw anybody under a century old in here.”

Percy smiled wryly.

‘Yeah, no shit.’

“Well, I’m currently broke, so this is my only means of getting into alchemy.” he said. “Actually, I wanted to thank you for that lesson you gave recently. I was hoping you could point me to some suitable books for beginners. If it’s not too much trouble of course!”

The man’s expression brightened like the morning sun as soon as alchemy was brought up.

“Don’t mention it! As I said back then, the Guild can use as many alchemists as we can get. It brings me great joy whenever I see young people willing to delve into the field.”

Standing up, the man hurriedly walked to a certain corner of the room, motioning him to follow.

“Sadly, these are all the books we have on the subject.” he gestured to an old, dusty bookcase.

“Seriously?”

These were less than 5% of the books in the building. Pretty neglected too – compared to everything else.

“What about the rest?”

The alchemist chuckled.

“History, geography, politics, novels… Those are a lot more popular. Only old people frequent this place, and most of them are already experienced alchemists after all.”

Percy nodded. The thing about a world as old as Remior was that there was never a lack of material for people to read and write about. Countless wars took place every year between the various noble Houses. Alliances, betrayals, epic battles… If there was one thing authors and bards alike never had to worry about, it was sources of inspiration to draw from.

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“I suggest you start with these for now.” the man said, breaking him out of his thoughts.

Next, he handed him four leather-bound tomes, one after another. The stack might have felt heavy if he was still at Red.

“Feel free to ask me if you have any questions. I spend most of my nights in here.”

The implication made Percy’s heart skip a beat. It would be rude to keep bothering the alchemist if he never offered, but now things were different. Between the books, the potion and the elder’s help, wasn’t this like getting another free lesson?

“Thank you, sir! I really appreciate it.”

“Just call me Orin.” the man replied, already returning to his table.

Following suit, Percy picked another vacant spot, before setting down the books.

THUD

Next, he removed them from the pile, laying them side by side, before blowing at them, raising a cloud of dust in the process.

COUGH, COUGH

‘When was the last time anybody read these?’

In any case, he could finally make out their titles.

‘Common reagents: flowers, herbs and minerals’

‘Known recipes for elixirs’

‘A guide to brewing’

‘The three pillars of nectar purification’

Percy decided to start with the last one, assuming it was the most fundamental. With less than half an hour left, he doubted he’d get far tonight, so he didn’t waste the enlightenment potion. Opening the tome, he quickly skimmed through the fluff in the first few pages before his eyes settled on something interesting.

‘…and thus, the central idea is to process the nectar into a form more suitable for core purification. In its raw state, the beast mana would run amok, causing great damage over a few seconds. What we want instead, is to alter some of its properties, so that it can be used safely and effectively. These transformations are separated into distinct categories, which are formally called the three pillars…’

Percy was glad to have started with this one. He still didn't fully understand what the brewing process involved, so learning about specific ingredients and recipes should come later. Reading on, he soon found the definitions he was interested in.

'The first pillar is the pacification of the nectar. Simply put, it involves a class of materials that cause the beast mana to act in a delayed manner, allowing the elixirs to be slowly used over several minutes instead of rampaging in one's core within a handful of seconds.'

'Huh, I bet it's the same thing they use to make the rejuvenation potions work overnight, contrary to the healing potions.' Percy realised.

But there was more there, so he continued.

'The second pillar is the redirection of the nectar. This step involves adding materials which make the beast mana react more strongly to the impurities found in a core, rather than the core itself. As for the third pillar, it is called deattunement. If it wasn't for this, the beast mana would counteract the user's mana, wasting the effect of the elixir before it even reached one's core. Deattunement allows the nectar to blend peacefully with another affinity, so that it can be safely guided from one's stomach to their sternum.'

Percy reread the text a few more times to make sure he understood everything.

'Pacification, redirection and deattunement. I guess all the various recipes just substitute a different ingredient for each of the three pillars.'

Almost out of time, he quickly dove back into the book to make as much progress as possible.

'Naturally, each of the three pillars is essential to the brewing process, but they do not come without a cost. Every time the nectar is mixed with a different ingredient, some of the beast mana is lost. And this exchange has to occur thrice in each session. Beginners often struggle to get past even one of the steps without wasting the nectar. An alchemist's skill is quantified based on how much elixir they manage to retain by the end of the third one.'

The book went on to divulge some general information about the three pillars and what types of plants tended to fall into each category. As expected, dozens of known ingredients were suitable for each step, giving rise to thousands of recipes.

That said, about 80% of the process was transferable from one recipe to another. Some plants required special handling, introducing some additional variable, but for the most part there was no clear 'winner' among the recipes. It was just a question of what materials were available and what the alchemist was most familiar with.

SIGH

'I wish I could stay longer.'

Even though he had yet to delve into alchemy proper, Percy had still enjoyed reading up on the theory. Sadly, he couldn't extend today's session without affecting tomorrow's hunt. Returning the books to the shelf, he gave Orin an apologetic smile before leaving. The man frowned upon seeing him go so early.

A few minutes later he made it home. After showering, he drank the rejuvenation potion and went to bed. Staring up at his ceiling, he thought back to Orin's disappointed expression as he bade him farewell.

'Huh, he probably thinks I got bored after half an hour.' Percy smiled bitterly.

But there was nothing he could do about it. Actions spoke louder than words and besides…

'I'll be back.'