Wanderer 60

Chapter 60: Docile

Beasts didn't just ignore tasty meals.

Not all of them were cannibals, but if they encountered prey of a different species and a lower grade, their reaction was essentially set in stone. So, Percy had no clue why the flying lizard decided to spare him all of a sudden.

'Come to think of it, there was something off with its mana.'

He hadn't cared at the time, but the creature's core burned less intensely than it should for its size. The flow in its channels also appeared stilted and the colour muted.

'Is it sick? Blind even?'

If it hadn't seen him nor used Mana Sense, it would explain how he got lucky. Then again, that didn't sound right. Percy was pretty sure the creature had gone out of its way to avoid him. Not attacking had been a conscious choice.

'Maybe everything here is docile. Could be something in the fog.'

His own species were the least aggressive beasts he'd ever seen, and they seemed to thrive off the substance. Either way, there wasn't enough data to tell for sure. In any case, Percy wasn't one to look a gift horse in the mouth. Since he got a second chance, he resumed his journey, this time flying higher to more easily escape to the clouds in a pinch.

A while later, he found something else worth noting. Splitting the plain in half, a river gushed through the stone. It was wider than the Guild's settlement, and he couldn't tell what lied at either end as it trailed off in the mist. He wasn't even sure if it was water flowing through it. The liquid was a light brown colour. If it was water, it was polluted by the same substance permeating the air.

'Great! Progress!'

Percy's feline heart skipped a beat, as he began tracing the river upstream. If this was drinkable, it should lead him to something alive sooner or later.

And it turned out to be sooner. He didn't need to fly higher either, as the new creatures he ran into were land-dwellers this time. One was a mix between a praying mantis and a beetle. The other resembled a scaled leopard. Both were larger than him, glaring at each other with their three eyes, apparently getting ready to tear each other to shreds.

'Definitely not docile.'

Approaching them cautiously, he stopped just near enough to check out their cores. They were both at Green, afflicted by the same ailment as the last beast. In fact, they had it even worse.

A third of the leopard's channels were completely inactive. On closer inspection, Percy saw the corresponding hindleg was half-rotten. The beast avoided leaning on it too, the paw being suspended an inch off the ground. The bug didn't look much better, its pathways also a patchwork of holes and dim links.

'Are my species the only ones immune to the fog?'

Thinking of something, he ascended to the clouds, looking for another of his kin. He flew above the first furball he saw before blowing air the other way, accelerating towards it. Slamming against his much smaller relative, he sent it flying downward. The creature didn't even resist, just passively letting him push it around.

It took them a few more bumps and a couple of minutes to return to his previous location. The Green cored beasts were still trying to intimidate each other, but they had yet to make a move. Apparently, they judged they weren't in a good enough condition to fight.

'I'm sorry pal. This is for science.'

Percy flashed the smaller furball an apologetic grin, before shoving it one last time towards the leopard. The much larger beast tilted its head, giving them both a curious look, but didn't do much else. It just

allowed the cat to bounce off the ground right next to it – within striking distance even – without touching it.

If you spot this tale on Amazon, know that it has been stolen. Report the violation.

‘Ok. So not only are we immune to the fog, it seems we’re the only ones the other beasts won’t attack. Are we poisonous or something?’

Then again, the leopard’s reaction wasn’t what he’d expect if a highly toxic creature brushed right next to it. It had merely eyed it in amusement before looking away.

‘Maybe we just taste REALLY bad.’

Shrugging, Percy continued following the river. He had yet to fully solve the mystery, but at the end of the day he didn’t even know if it mattered. They didn’t have the brown substance back on Remior and even if they did, he couldn’t exactly bring this body back with him.

It took several more hours until he saw something new. However, this discovery truly made his breath quicken. For the first time in over two years, one of his clones stumbled upon sentient life!

The village was small, the humble huts made of stone. Not the polished, enchanted sort he was used to. Just rough chunks, stacked against each other to form the most rudimentary shelter. Whoever lived here was clearly primitive.

And he did get a closer look at them, soon enough. These people were mostly humanoid, although their skin was a richer pink. They also had four pointy ears and three eyes, one in the middle of their forehead, much like everything else in this world.

‘At least they aren’t naked.’

Not that the patches of beast skin they draped on themselves were particularly fashionable, but it was something. Percy internally debated how close he wanted to get to the natives. He wasn’t sure if they’d be as indifferent towards him as the wild beasts.

Not that it would be the end of the world if they killed him, but it had taken him nearly a dozen clones to find some semblance of civilization. He didn't want to miss learning something useful by being careless. Who knew how long it would be until he had another chance?

'Then again, do they even know anything? They can hardly build a house…'

In the end, he chose to err on the side of caution. He ascended to the clouds once more, before returning with another sacrificial furball to test the waters with. Approaching the village, he shoved the creature in there, this time prompting some exclamations and amused reactions from the crowd. Some pointed at him while a few chuckled or talked to one another. Percy figured they just weren't used to his species being so… animated. All the ones he'd seen had been a lot more sluggish.

'Well, as long as they're not hostile, I don't care.'

Nobody moved to attack him, or the one he'd tossed their way. A kid – a girl maybe – ran up to the furball as it bounced a few times on the ground. She watched it curiously before extending her hand to pet it, when an adult hurriedly grabbed her arm, shaking his head. He spoke a few words Percy didn't understand, before the girl nodded, continuing to stare at the creature from a distance.

'Touching us must be taboo.'

In any case he'd confirmed it was safe, so he moved closer, inspecting the locals with Mana Sense. He spotted Red, Orange and Yellow cores, in approximately a 40-40-20 ratio. That made them a lot luckier than the people of Remior, as they got Yellow cores twice as frequently. However, Percy didn't feel any envy towards them. Many of the older-looking folk were still at Red.

'They don't have any means of advancement! They're stuck at whatever they were born with!'

And that wasn't even where the bad news ended. The villagers seemed to suffer from the same condition as the beasts, all their cores appearing somewhat dysfunctional. The kids had it a bit better than the adults, reinforcing Percy's guess that the ailment was brought on by their chronic exposure to the fog.

‘I guess the reason we’re held at such a high esteem is because we purify the air, making things easier for all the other creatures.’

Well, this was all fascinating and everything, but that still didn’t answer the question of what he should do. One option was to accept that this clone was another dud and leave early. He’d already spent several hours travelling here, and it didn’t look like these people had much to give him.

But he was disinclined to pick this.

While wasting time was something he generally preferred to avoid, this was his first time finding sentient life since Huehue. Even though this particular village didn’t seem to contain anything valuable, it did raise the worth of the clone in his eyes. At least, his last ten or so clones hadn’t lived half as long or found anything remotely as interesting. Even if he spent a few days longer than expected, it wouldn’t hurt the main body much.

‘Ok. I’ll keep going. But do I stay in this village or try looking for a bigger one?’

Percy doubted the 40 or so people here were the entirety of their species. There were bound to be more out there. That said, he had no idea where to find them, or if they’d have anything more useful.

‘Hmm… Let’s observe them for one full day. If I can’t find anything worth my time, I’ll head out.’