Wanderer 611

Chapter 611: Heart

The cord yanked Percy's clone towards Remior as his thoughts lingered on the giant eel and the exotic ecosystem of its home planet. After years of fruitless adventures, it had been easy to write lesser springs and barren worlds off as mostly worthless, but it appeared that the universe still contained many unique and interesting places for him to visit.

If the strange material proved as useful as Percy hoped, this trip wouldn't be a one-off. He was planning to turn the uninhabited world into a resource farm for Remior. As far as he could tell, the Divine Order didn't have any of those, though such places were relatively common among greater springs.

While there were several past destinations that Percy wouldn't mind revisiting, most were just places where he might be able to study magic from the natives: like the Proudheart Academy, the Vault, Thess'kala, Gallimus, or Atlantis.

The closest thing to a resource farm that he had ever come across was Melodia, though Sol's world didn't exactly qualify. Her people didn't seem to have any precious resources to export: they only had their Elemental Source. Percy couldn't bring the Mirror Lake back, and he would rather avoid revealing its existence to the gods.

Even though he had grown to trust Phoebe a little after her help, he knew that the existence of the Elemental Source wasn't his secret to share, which was why he'd been careful not to touch any of his memories of Melodia while creating his mindset under Phoebe's guidance.

The titaness did know about everything listed in his Status, as well as any object that he had handled with his main body on Remior, so there was no hiding Zoris's existence, nor Percy's ties to some unknown alien civilization where he had obviously left the Ring of Sacrilege. Even so, it would be a stretch for Phoebe to guess that Percy had discovered an Elemental Source.

Either way, the planet of the giant eels presented Percy with a unique opportunity, and Ludwick's Compass would allow him to return to the magical ocean whenever he wanted.

Tuning everything else out, he concentrated on the journey itself, helping the mindset memorize the location of the marks. After having done this several times, it wasn't very difficult, but it still required some effort.

Over the past few years, he and Micky had found many opportunities to explore the limits of the mindset that they had acquired on Robari, so they understood a lot more about the way it interacted with Percy's bloodline and the plane of souls.

While Percy easily lost track of any marks that he left in the Vault of Magic, he now knew that this wasn't an issue with Ludwick's Compass or regular planets, but the artificial world itself.

The range of Percy's senses when searching for a host in his disembodied state was even larger than he'd initially expected, to the point that it could easily bridge a couple of neighbouring solar systems. In hindsight, this wasn't that strange, since it was how he had ended up on Felmara while aiming for Huehue. Planets and stars weren't static, but it would normally take a very long time for his marks to drift so far away from their original location that they were no longer useful.

Percy's guess was that the artificial world was moving not only several times faster than a regular planet, but also much more erratically. Metatron was constantly on the run from major factions, and his creation had only survived this long due to how elusive it was. It was probably equipped with all sorts of powerful enchantments that compressed space or allowed the massive cube to tunnel through it.

As for how long Percy's marks on other planets would remain useful?

Well, it was impossible to be certain, since he hadn't possessed the mindset nearly long enough to test that, and not every planet moved through the universe at the same speed. Based on how little the offset between his experimental marks and the souls on the marked worlds had grown over the past few years, he expected them to remain useful for anywhere between several centuries to a few millennia.

Regardless, even that wasn't a huge problem, because he could easily send additional clones to refresh the marks every few decades, just to be safe. The only problem with that was Robari, since Percy didn't dare step foot on a world infected with a Cardinal Devil after everything that Metatron had told him, no matter how brief the trip would be.

The irony of Marnok's world being one of the hardest to return to: despite being where Percy had acquired Ludwick's Compass from – wasn't lost on him. Sadly, he would have to somehow grow powerful enough to at least protect himself from the insidious entity in the next thousand years or so, and hope that Marnok would survive that long.

As much as Percy hated leaving a friend behind in such a dire situation, he kept reminding himself that he had offered to bring the stubborn sailor out of his dying planet multiple times during his stay, only to be rejected repeatedly.

Perhaps Percy should have just kidnapped the guy, but the Vault wasn't exactly a paradise either, so there was no point in forcing his opinion onto his friend just to stuff him into a different prison.

'It is what it is. All the more reason to focus on getting stronger,' he thought, shifting his attention back to his current task.

'By the way, don't you think we got out a little too easily?' Micky suddenly asked in a thinly veiled attempt to cheer Percy up after sensing his foul mood. At the same time, the Huehuan assisted Percy in memorizing the location of the mark to lessen his mental load so that they could chat.

'What do you mean?'

'I know that we were quite far from the eel and ultimately nothing more than a tiny snack to it, but a demigod's senses aren't a joke. Wouldn't it have noticed our soul slipping out of its domain?'

Percy mentally shrugged. 'Maybe it has, but it doesn't really matter. A quasi-divine beast might be as intelligent as a person, yet the ones on this planet are still as ignorant as children. The poor thing probably has no idea how dangerous it was to let us go.'

In a world without sapients, a Clear beast couldn't possibly imagine that creatures as small as humans could be as intelligent as it was. It most certainly hadn't encountered any affinities other than beast mana, nor was it familiar with souls or the existence of deities and other worlds.

Even if the eel had registered something fleeing from its willpower, the thought that it had just allowed someone to potentially report its existence to beings powerful enough to crush the eel with a flick of their palms wouldn't have occurred to it.

'That settles that, then…' Micky said after hearing Percy's explanation. 'I still think we should stay farther away next time though.'

'Agreed,' Percy conceded.

Now that they had gone through this once, Percy was confident that he could fill his spatial seal up with the exotic material from as far as four kilometres away. There was no way the eel would be able to do anything from that distance, so their future trips would be fast and risk-free. The only reason he'd even stayed this long this time had been his curiosity, but he'd rather not give the quasi-divine beasts another chance to notice or hurt him.

'How long do you think the eels will be around anyway?' the Huehuan asked. 'Demigods or not, they're still mortals.'

'Hmmm… had it been just one, I might have been worried, but that's clearly not the case,' Percy replied.

They hadn't seen the other two creatures, but they had seen evidence of other red regions, suggesting that the three demigods were of the same species: or, at least, had a similar relationship with their environment. The monstrosity they had encountered wasn't just a one-off freak of nature, but a regular existence on this planet. Percy didn't know how the creatures reproduced or got replaced, but he was willing to bet that he wouldn't lose access to the red substance the moment the last of the current generation of demigods died.

'That settles it then. What are we going to call it?' Micky asked again, this time even more cheerfully.

'Huh? What do you mean?' Percy asked.

'The planet! There are no sapients, and I doubt that the eels have bothered to develop a language of their own. In other words, we get to pick a name for this place!'

Percy would have blinked if he had eyes. His friend was right, though he'd never thought that he would find himself in a position to decide the name of an entire planet. Thinking about the characteristic red substance that had defined their whole adventure, it wasn't hard to come up with something.

'How about… Ruby Heart?' he tentatively offered.

'I like it.' Micky chuckled. 'Let's just hope that the material proves genuinely useful… otherwise it'll be embarrassing.'

Chapter 612: Alloy

"Ebony… you know how much I value your advice, but what you're asking me to do is extremely risky. If we get involved in this mess, we could easily draw the ire of the Lord of the Fungal Spire," Semjana said, sounding conflicted.

The Veiled Lady of the 45th district was sitting across from Nesha, dressed in black from head to toe. The only other colours present in her attire were a little bit of white on her insignia and the midnight-blue nail polish on full display as the woman tapped her fingers against her desk in contemplation.

Despite having worked closely with Semjana for many years, Nesha had never gotten a good look at the woman's face. From what little she had seen, the Veiled Lady appeared middle-aged, a few faint wrinkles barely marring the corners of her eyes.

'It would have been so convenient if I was allowed to wear the same clothes,' Nesha thought with a sigh.

While her superior's garments didn't look very comfortable, they would have made it much easier for Nesha to hide her identity. Luckily, there wasn't any need for that anymore: she was more than powerful enough to defend herself on the off chance that somebody recognized her, but she doubted that it would come to that, as the world appeared to have largely forgotten her existence.

Her first few years in Twilight City had been more precarious, however. Had it not been for the poorly sketched wanted posters from her time in the Guild, somebody could have easily ruined her plans.

Nowadays, there weren't many who insisted on treating even Percy or Micky as criminals, let alone caring about a minor character like her. The Divine Root had yet to officially declare their stance on her boyfriend, but Nesha herself had likely been presumed dead by the Great Houses.

"Lady Semjana, we're not asking you to directly pick a side in the conflict. Now that the Alchemists' Guild refuses to trade with Lord Machaon, he has no choice but to strike new deals with the Syndicate. If we don't do this, one of your colleagues definitely will," Goh said. "Regardless of who wins in the end, nobody is going to blame every group who sold the loser a few herbs, otherwise they'd have to punish half the noble Houses on Remior."

'Goh' was sitting on a wooden chair next to Nesha, also facing their boss. The three were currently in the Veiled Lady's personal office: a space densely warded with various enchantments for privacy.

The young Green had joined Semjana's employment a few years after Nesha, though he'd climbed the ranks even faster than her. Of course, Nesha didn't mind the competition. After all, she was the one who'd recommended the man to her superior, as having a second voice to support her made it easier for Nesha to manipulate the Blue.

"Fine," Semjana conceded with a sigh. "If you're both adamant on this, I'll try to reach out to them discreetly. But we're only going to sell a few secondary reagents: nothing more valuable than that. Understood?"

"Of course, Lady Semjana," Nesha replied politely.

With the woman's permission, she and 'Goh' got up and hurriedly left the office, before the Veiled Lady changed her mind.

"I wish I could have qualified for my own district instead of having to convince the Lords and Ladies to do my bidding…" Nesha muttered as she and her colleague exited the grandiose mansion.

With both cores at Green, a rare and a composite affinity, as well as four flavours of the Dance, Nesha was more than powerful enough to handle a couple of Blues by herself. Maybe as many as three: if she had the time to set up a proper trap.

Sadly, revealing her true strength would blow her cover, and there was no way the Syndicate would promote a Green to a Veiled Lady, despite all the influence that Nesha had amassed within the organization over the past decade. This was why she'd had no choice but to get close to as many as two Veiled Ladies and one Radiant Lord, whispering in their ears to enable her plans.

"Are you sure that selling herbs to our enemy is a good idea?" Goh asked as soon as they were alone, whispering his doubts about the plan that he had so confidently supported mere minutes ago.

It was late, so the city's laws prohibited them from talking loudly as they traversed the quiet streets of the white district.

"We've gone over this." Nesha rolled her eyes. "Like you just told our boss, Machaon is going to get his herbs from somewhere: whether we help him or not. It's better to actively hop onto his boat so that we can learn more about his movements."

Officially, the White-cored mage had managed to rein in dissent among his subordinates over the past few years, once again solidifying his control over House Asclepius and getting his family to officially accuse Percy of slander.

On the opposite side, House Etna had openly formed an alliance with House Avalon, the Alchemists' Guild, and many smaller Houses to defend the Fungal Spire and the man who had saved the whole planet from the one who had nearly brought it to ruin.

As for the other five Great Houses, they had done their best to remain neutral, though everyone understood that at least some of them had secretly picked a side.

This was why Nesha had chosen to remain in Twilight City. As much as she wanted to return to her boyfriend's side, she knew that leveraging her position in the Syndicate to gather intel was the best use of her talents, at least until they brought the monster who had ordered the destruction of her family to justice.

Twilight City was Remior's largest trading hub, so getting involved with the Syndicate was the easiest way to learn what Machaon and his goons were up to. After all, nobody could avoid trading with both the Syndicate and the Alchemists' Guild.

Through her connections, she already had good reason to believe that the Divine Root and House Ypnos were planning to join House Asclepius. Her current goal was to figure out what exactly they were waiting for and what their objectives were.

"Alright. If you and Percy both think that this is the best way forward, I don't care," Goh replied a few blocks later, when they reached Nesha's residence. She had long graduated from the ratty inns that stank of piss and unwashed drunkards, her salary as the advisor of a Veiled Lady being more than generous enough for her to significantly improve her quality of life.

Goh had rented a small house near hers, though he opted to follow her into her own first. As soon as they were inside, the man's body squirmed, his flesh and clothes blending and shifting into a different appearance.

He grew a little taller and more muscular, his fake robes changing from the expensive red fabric into a cheaper and simpler blue, his long, brown hair turning short, dark, and curly. He'd have to change again before he left, but Nesha knew that her friend didn't enjoy posing as Goh.

Once he was done transforming, Micky still looked like a human. He'd previously explained that his current form was the closest he could get to his original body without sprouting a beak or a second pair of arms, so he preferred assuming this shape whenever they were alone.

Having completed his mission of delivering the affinity-changing treasure years ago, Micky could have returned to Percy's side. However, he'd chosen to remain here to protect Nesha and help with her mission. Since he could easily communicate and even share resources with Percy, it didn't really matter where he was.

While he still spent most of his time practicing that "Internal Magiscript" spell of his at home, he had gained a lot more experience in his shapeshifting and acting skills while putting them to good use. Finally, Nesha and Micky had spent a lot of time studying magiscript together.

"Here's the latest batch," the reincarnated Huehuan said, pulling several large crates out of thin air and gently dropping them in Nesha's living room. Their contents made clinking sounds as the densely packed gemstone vials got rattled.

"I told you there's no need for that. I can afford Aurora Dew on my own," Nesha said.

The Guild still struggled to produce enough of the exotic cleansing resource for more than a fifth of Remior's population, but it wasn't that hard to procure some with enough money. Even so, Percy had insisted on sending her large shipments every other week.

"He just wants to make sure that you have enough stashed for a rainy day," Micky explained. "We don't know how our supply chains might be affected when Machaon decides to make his move."

She nodded, opening a couple of spatial amulets that still had room left, moving the boxes into the artifacts with Micky's help.

"Are we still practicing magiscript tomorrow?" she asked as her friend transformed back into Goh, clearly getting ready to leave.

"Sorry, not this time. Something semi-urgent came up," Micky replied. Noticing her creased forehead, he added, "Don't worry. It's a good thing. Percy just wants us to finish registering our new spell before our most recent clone is back."

"What difference will that make?" Nesha asked.

"None. You know how competitive Percy gets sometimes. The clone registered a different upgrade of the same spell, so he doesn't want to get outdone," Micky explained with a smirk.

Nesha chuckled. "I'm guessing that you found something interesting in that trip?"

"We think so," Micky confirmed. "If it works like we hope, this one might benefit a lot of people. I'll let you know more details once we're done experimenting with it," he said, closing the door behind him.

Shrugging, Nesha walked to her bedroom, opening her cabinet to retrieve a pitch-black piece of clothing: or well… perhaps it would be more accurate to describe it as a piece of chainmail. It was made of countless interlocked metallic rings.

Sadly, the enchantments that she had begun drawing on the full-body undergarment prevented it from being stored inside spatial devices, leaving Nesha no choice but to hide it at home and hope that nobody came snooping through her stuff while she was away.

Over the past few years, Nesha had spent a lot of time perfecting her boosting art and mastering affinity fusion. Using the Dance while in the city could get tricky, since the flow of ambient mana was visible from afar, but it wasn't difficult for a Veiled Lady's most trusted advisor to rent a private training room.

Combining metal and space mana had resulted in an even stronger and more malleable material than her dimensional onyx. She had named it dimensional alloy, and she'd been planning to use that to craft her own version of Percy's Regalia for a while now. It was still a work in progress, but after studying magiscript for years with Micky's help, she felt confident that she could do it.

'Hopefully the darn thing will be ready before I actually need it,' she thought, getting back to work.

Chapter 613: Milestone

'I'm ready,' Micky said.

Nodding, Percy willed the constellations in their shared mindscape to blend into a single figure, their minds melding as two separate accounts of the past couple of weeks came sharply into focus.

Pushing all thoughts of Lady Semjana or brewing Gloomy Dawn aside, the Lone Wanderer concentrated on Percy and Micky's most recent attempts at elevating Internal Magiscript to the next level.

Leaving the elemental body in a meditative position inside his bedroom, he focused on the human body's first core: where he hoped to achieve one of his most ambitious milestones to date.

Taking control of the organ's contents, he promptly shaped the phantom mana into a relatively basic enchantment that consisted of only a handful of runes. The simplest seals were essentially a combination of self-repair enchantments and structural integrity enchantments: things that Percy had incorporated into his equipment years ago: held together with sealing runes.

The sealing runes were there to give the unit cell substance and connect everything, the structural integrity enchantments were there to strengthen the material, and the self-repairs were there to maintain it.

Percy had considered using Reinforcement or his Phantomspun Silk instead, but he knew that producing the intricate materials inside his core would be a tall order, and shrinking the runes to the desired size would only make it even harder. Even if he could somehow succeed, Percy wanted the new spell to work with every affinity: not just his own: otherwise his familiars and aspects wouldn't be able to use it.

Willing the unruly substance into shape, he soon created an enchantment that spanned the entire vertical cross-section of his core. It was attached to the organ only through a single spot at the top of the unit cell, preventing the structure from spinning around in more than a single axis.

Percy forced the remaining mana away from the delicate symbols to avoid ruining his efforts. Condensing them into multiple rings that tightly hugged the walls of his core, he used these unavoidable flows of mana to keep the rotation of the enchantment stable as he visualized the spinning symbols in his head.

In mere seconds, the enchantment was complete.

Willing the unit cell to activate, he felt a solid object settle inside his core. With the seal in place, he no longer had to spend any effort to maintain the runes. Letting go of both the anchor at the top of the unit cell and the ring-shaped flows around it, he watched the structure spin on its own for several minutes before coming to a halt.

Creating a single solid seal wasn't that difficult. Percy and Micky had managed this very shortly after their return from the Vault, nearly seven years ago. Since then, they had spent most of their time tackling three other problems that had to be overcome before they could complete their project.

The first two had been easy enough to solve.

One was the complexity of the unit cells. Obviously, Percy and Micky wanted to include dozens of different runes into the spell, so they had to be able to draw a much more complex enchantment inside their core. This was what they had spent most of the past decade working on, but it was luckily something that could be solved through sheer time and effort.

The second problem was designing the enchantment itself. A single unit cell floating in the middle of their cores wouldn't cut it. It would take up too much space, while also inhibiting the flow of their mana. While a seal like that was technically solid, it would easily crumble once they started exerting themselves, and there was no way it would allow the organ to endure the necessary pressure to contain mana of the next grade.

Thanks to his experience as an alchemist, Percy had decided to treat his core like a spherical cauldron, using the compression principle to elevate his mana to Green. To accomplish that, he would need to coat the entire interior of the organ with a thin, enchanted layer of sealed mana: almost like a second core, slightly smaller than the first, hugging the crystalline walls of the organ tightly.

This way, the outer layer would support the inner one and vice versa, making the structure more resilient without reducing his core's capacity much, nor inhibiting its mana flow.

Luckily, Percy and Micky didn't have to experiment with the exact structure of the enchantment inside their cores: they could easily create a model of the sphere outside, test and fine-tune it extensively, and then finally implement the perfected version inside their body once they were happy with its effect.

That was all well and good, but the third and final problem had proven much more difficult to solve.

In order to fit hundreds of unit cells inside their cores, they needed each to be no larger than a grain of sand. Furthermore, each of those grains had to contain dozens of runes, meaning that Percy and Micky needed to greatly shrink down the symbols.

This was obviously a serious issue, because their only means of drawing the enchantments required them to use the organ's entire cross-section, which had a fixed size. If they tried to create anything smaller than that, they would lose all the contact points with their core that supported the delicate structure: not to mention how much harder it would be to control their mana with such finesse.

Percy had spent countless hours agonizing over this problem before eventually coming up with an idea that he thought might work. This was what he had devoted the past couple of years working on, while Micky had focused on expanding the complexity of their unit cells. Today, they felt confident enough to put everything they had learned into practice.

Shattering the solid seal inside his sternum, he started over, quickly moulding his mana into an identical copy of the previous unit cell. However, he didn't rush to activate the runes this time, not wanting the substance to solidify before it reached the desired size.

Once the symbols were stable, he carefully pulled a thin tendril of mana from one of the spinning rings, steering its flow by a perfect ninety degrees and allowing it to coil around the unit cell to thicken its boundary.

Tracing the elaborate circumference of the enchantment, he forged what could only be described as a three-dimensional frame, pulling it away from the unit cell and towards one of the walls opposite the group of runes.

The strange shell retained the same general shape as the enchantment, but it shrank along with the cross-section of the organ. Had Percy used a single rune, the new structure would have resembled a conoid. As things stood, it looked more like a collection of hollow conoids fused together.

The intricate object wasn't static: it was still spinning inside Percy's core with the same rate as before. The unit cell in the middle was held together by his Scribing trait and countless hours of practice, as the outer shell was preserved by its thickness and relative simplicity.

Eventually, the second face of the structure reached a surface area smaller than a square millimetre, causing Percy to pause. The next step was the most crucial one, and had to be completed in an instant, lest he gave the enchantment a chance to collapse.

After making sure that the smaller face of the structure was perfectly parallel to the first and had the exact same outline, he willed the runes to pass through the narrowing tunnel.

Loosening his hold over his mana slightly, Percy allowed the shrinking runes to shed their excess mana while maintaining enough control to preserve their shape. Thankfully, his spectral trait helped greatly with that.

The moment the unit cell touched the opposite wall of his core, Percy willed all the runes to activate, forcing the enchantment to solidify.

This wasn't the first time he'd reached this step. Sadly, the minuscule object had rolled down the spherical surface during his previous attempt, as there had been nothing to keep it attached to the wall of his core.

This was why Percy had included an adhesive rune into the unit cell this time, ensuring that the enchantment remained attached to the organ. The tiny seal could still be peeled off or destroyed easily so long as there was only one copy inside Percy's core.

For the enchantment to truly come into effect, Percy would need to construct hundreds of these grain-sized unit cells, link them side by side, and completely coat the interior of his core.

Even worse, the seal that he had just created was nothing more than a vastly simplified version of the one he eventually wanted to use. Creating even one of the more intricate copies would take practice, and carefully filling his core up with them without destroying the previous ones would be a challenge.

Despite that, his lips couldn't help but part into a grin as his Status notified him of his success.

[Congratulations! Your spell has evolved: Spectral Art: Internal Magiscript: Masterful -> Spectral Art: Internal Seal-Crafting: Masterful!]

Chapter 614: Experiments

'We've done it…' Percy exhaled as he allowed the constellations in his mindscape to separate again.

He and Micky had created all the tools necessary for their artificial advancement. They had already learned how to draw unit cells of sufficient complexity inside their cores, settled on a design that they were happy with for the final enchantment, and figured out how to shrink and solidify the runes into the correct size.

It would still take a while to piece together the inner shell for each of their four cores, but there weren't any more impossible challenges for them to overcome. After that, the only thing left would be to activate the enchantments and hope that they worked as intended.

'We have,' Micky echoed. 'I suppose it's time to send another clone to the Vault.'

Percy nodded. It would easily be another year or two before he raised his grade, but he could work on that while the clone was away. He had to meet up with Metatron and Kassorith while he was still a Yellow, otherwise the titan would realize that he had advanced centuries before he was supposed to.

Of course, before returning to the artificial world, he and Micky had to make sure that they were ready for the grand competition. If they failed to climb high enough to earn the Void Decree, they might never get another chance to acquire an extra mana core.

'Let's wait for the clone to return from Ruby Heart first,' Percy said. 'If the strange substance proves compatible with human and Thess'kalan biology, we'll have another ace up our sleeve.'

He felt that the odds of that happening were decent, since every living creature in the alien ocean had been able to absorb the material into their scales. Then again, Percy didn't have scales, nor did he know what the red material might do to beings from other planets.

Luckily, his clone was about to deliver him a large sample. Unlike the ritual ingredients that he had brought back from Thess'kala, Percy wouldn't be limited to just a couple of doses. That would allow him to experiment freely, without having to take any unnecessary risks with his main body.

If he confirmed that the material was safe to ingest, he hoped to gift a portion to all of his friends… and non-friends. Permanently enhancing Kassorith's physique wasn't ideal, since Percy still hated the Thess'kalan's guts, but if this was the price that he had to pay to obtain a third mana core, he wasn't going to complain.

The clone didn't keep Percy and Micky waiting too long, arriving a few hours later. Burrowing into one of Percy's spectral scars, it injected several months' worth of memories into both his and Micky's minds. Most of that time had been spent in the space between worlds, with only the past few weeks having been on an actual planet.

As eager as Percy was to begin experimenting with his prize, there was something that took precedence. It had been a while since he'd last checked his Status, and he had just registered a pair of brand-new Masterful spells.

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The Lone Wanderer

Aspects:

[Percival][Mictlantecuhtli]Mana cores:

[Mana core 1P: Yellow: Soul][Mana core 2P: Yellow: Pure][Mana core 1M: Green: Beast][Mana core 2M: Yellow: Ice]Domain:

[Dead Winter: Empowered]Bloodline:

[Clone]: Create a copy of yourself. Effect varies by affinity.Blessing:

[Blessing of Permanence] – Enhance the durability of your soul.Mutations:

[Sovereign's Eye] – Draws from the cumulative knowledge listed in the Status to enhance one's vision, allowing them to discern details previously unseen.[Greater Thess'kalan Physique] – Greatly enhances one's physical strength and the toughness of their body. Greatly enhances one's resistance to high or low temperatures and sharpens their thermal sense. Greatly enhances one's resistance to toxins.[Dead Winter Elemental] – Uses ice mana to regenerate, shapeshift and sustain one's body. Allows every part of one's body to interact with souls.Spectral traits:

[Weaving]: Boosts one's proclivity in manipulating one-dimensional structures.[Insomnia] – Eliminates the need for sleep.[Scribing]: Boosts one's proclivity in expressing meaning onto any written medium.[Mimicry]: Boosts one's awareness of their physical appearance, as well as their ability to maintain or modify it.Mindsets:

[Ludwick's Compass]: Set mental checkpoints anywhere in the world. Instinctively track their location as you move away.[Shimmering Constellations] – Group your senses and memories into separate identities. This artificial segregation can be freely bypassed.Spells:

[Spectral Art: Parasitic Connection: Refined][Hybrid Art: Chameleon's Skin: Refined][Spectral Art: Internal Seal-Crafting: Masterful][Spectral Art: Intimidation: Masterful][Spectral Art: Cauldron of a Myriad Screams: Masterful][Spectral Art: Instantaneous Formation: Masterful][Wild Art: Sovereign's Encroachment: Masterful][Hybrid Art: Core Bestowal: Masterful][Ultimate Art: Symphony of a Dead Winter: Extreme]Alchemic principles:

[Extraction]: Separate and condense an ingredient's essence.[Pacification] – Delay an ingredient's activation rate.[Redirection] – Adjust an ingredient's effect.[Deattunement] – Prevent multiple conflicting ingredients from reacting with one another.[Bonding] – Enrich an ingredient with crystallized pure mana.[Restructuring]: Alter an ingredient's phase.[Scaling]: Brew a greater volume of ingredients at once.[Compression] – Elevate an ingredient to the next grade.[Consolidation]: Infuse multiple similar ingredients into a concoction while eliminating the redundant alchemic steps.Decrees:

[Phoebe's Decree]: Grants access to your Status.[Iapetus's Decree]: Grants a bloodline.[Moirais' Decree] – Grants a second mana core.[Metatron's Decree]: Open a one-way portal to the Vault of Magic at will.[Ea's Decree (Modified)] – Augments and enhances your Status. Grants the Sovereign's Eye.[Obatala's Decree (Modified)]: Augments and enhances your Status. Allows you to effortlessly deploy your domain in its strongest state.___

'I guess we'll call it a tie,' he thought with a chuckle as his gaze brushed over Intimidation and Internal Seal-Crafting.

His little competition with the clone felt even sillier now that they had merged, but didn't people say that a person should only ever compete with themselves? Percy just took that to a whole new level.

Both Spectral Arts had the same root, though Percy was pretty sure that he would have still registered Internal Seal-Crafting as a standalone spell even if the clone had arrived before he and Micky had completed it. After all, it was distinct enough from Intimidation. Either way, he expected both entries to eventually merge into the final version of the spell that he was going to raise his grade with.

With that out of the way, he turned his attention to the newly retrieved spatial seal, examining its contents. Leaving only the Zelesian bead inside, he emptied everything else into a tall pile of needle-grained powder that shimmered in a red light.

Since the seal he had brought to Ruby Heart had a capacity of a thousand cubic metres and the clone had filled most of it with the substance, the pile was about six times as tall as Percy, nearly burying him

alive. He was forced to use his domain to hold the wave of powder at bay, stabilizing it into a pyramid-shaped mound.

A pool of seawater spilled out of its base, soaking Percy's feet, as he had failed to completely filter it out of the material. Had he been in his house in the settlement, he wouldn't have dared to empty his seal into his living room, but he was currently in his cavern in the hive. There was plenty of space, and he wasn't overly concerned with keeping it clean.

'Time to see whether all that trouble was worth it,' he thought, eagerly scooping up a handful of the material.

The needle-like particles pricked his skin, though they didn't stab deep enough to draw blood thanks to his two Yellow cores and Greater Thess'kalan Physique. Even so, he knew that consuming the substance would be dangerous without the body of a beast. His throat and stomach weren't nearly as tough as his flesh.

After pondering over the problem for a couple of minutes, he used his reinforced mana to create two large, cylindrical constructs. Dropping some of the red substance between them and spinning them against one another tightly, he used them as a mill to grind the particles into fine powder.

His hastily put-together constructs weren't great for the job, so he passed the material back and forth multiple times before he was satisfied. That was fine. Once he confirmed that the substance did what he wanted it to do, he could spend some time perfecting and scaling up his tools.

'Nephthys, can you please send me a Starry Worker?' he asked his familiar through the cord, promptly receiving a mental nod back. 'Preferably one that's close to evolving,' he added after some consideration.

Percy would have to test the powder on a mammal before daring to consume it himself, but the goddess had countless disposable subordinates readily available, so starting with them wasn't a bad idea.

Soon, a fox-sized wasp flew into Percy's cavern, landing obediently by his feet. Its glossy carapace sported the familiar black colour of its species, spotted with countless glowing dots.

Percy briefly considered handing it the ground powder but ultimately decided against it. No need to waste it. The bug should be more than capable of digesting the unprocessed version of the substance. Passing the creature a second handful taken straight from the pile, he watched it happily ingest it, waiting patiently for the results.

A few seconds later, the wasp shuddered and paused mid-meal, seemingly in pain. Percy was initially worried that he'd poisoned the poor thing, but his concerns were put to rest once the Worker's exoskeleton brightened slightly to a dark red colour.

'That's a good sign if I've seen one!' Percy thought, the corners of his lips curling up.

Emboldened by the seemingly beneficial changes in his test subject, he gave the wasp an even larger helping, observing its carapace as it continued to light up with every other bite, slowly assuming a ruby-like texture and colour that reminded Percy of the aquatic animals that had permeated the alien ocean.

Thankfully, the Starry Worker didn't grow any scales. Percy had been worried about mutating himself into a scaled monster, but it appeared that his concerns had been unfounded.

The beasts on Ruby Heart had probably already possessed scales. It looked like the exotic material simply latched on to any chitinous body part it could find, reinforcing and improving it without altering its shape.

After the bug had devoured about as much pure powder as its body weight, its shell stopped improving. At that point, its exoskeleton looked almost identical to the material itself, indicating that it wasn't possible to absorb more than that.

'Great. At the very least, it should be useful for Nephthys and her mother. It should also enhance Kassorith's scales, though I'm not sure if it'll do anything to his bones,' Percy concluded. 'Even if it proves useless for everyone else, the trip won't have been a complete waste.'

Percy wasn't going to feed the material to every single Starry Wasp in the hive, but he was more than happy to give some to the royal bugs for added protection. The Starry Queen was large enough that it would probably take Percy and Micky multiple trips to Ruby Heart to fully upgrade her shell, but that was okay. The Violet beast had already done a lot for them, so he didn't mind repaying the favour.

He just hoped that beasts wouldn't need to eat more powder every time they evolved to the next size. Thankfully, that was something that he could easily check once the Starry Worker advanced.

Storing the rest of the powder in his seal again, Percy made his way towards his familiar's chamber, eager to see how it would change her body. At the same time, he made a mental note to request a few critters from Freddy the next time the Honey Roll vendor entered the hive.

Chapter 615: Eight

Percy soon found himself looking up at the towering Starry Princess. She wasn't nearly as large as her mother but, standing over twice as tall as him: and being even longer than that: she was still a little bigger than the Starry Knight that had nearly claimed Percy's life in the past.

Nephthys had reached Green years ago with her first core, fully catching up to Micky only months after his arrival in Twilight City. Percy hadn't been surprised by that. While the Huehuan had started cleansing his cores decades before the reincarnated goddess, he was still a Red-born while the Starry Princess was an Orange-born.

The distinction wasn't as defining for beasts as it was for sapients, since they advanced very fast and climbed very high regardless of their birth grade, so long as they had access to enough food. Even so, an Orange-born beast still progressed markedly faster than a Red-born when neither had to suffer through a shortage of resources.

Percy estimated that Nephthys was currently only a few months away from reaching Green with her second core as well, at which point she would effectively surpass Micky. That said, Percy genuinely had no idea which of his friends would reach Blue with their original core first.

Shaking the pointless thoughts away, he spoke through the cord. 'I've determined that the material I found is safe and beneficial for Starry Wasps. Wanna try it?'

'As always, I'll trust your judgement,' the goddess replied. 'You're the one who got me this far, after all.'

Percy couldn't help but flash his familiar an awkward smile. This was honestly high praise from a being who had lived for hundreds of thousands of years and pioneered the way to the Concept realm without any prior knowledge of it, but he understood where she was coming from.

Despite her divine power, Nephthys had slowly watched her people succumb to eternal slumber one after the other, unable to prevent the extinction of her species. Percy had given her hope where there had been none, so the reborn deity had happily agreed to all of his suggestions since.

'I should make an effort to get to know her better,' he decided. He'd been playing with that thought for years, but his work on Internal Magiscript and his interstellar adventures had always taken precedence.

He and Micky still had to push for their artificial advancement, but Percy doubted that his clones had enough time to find anything valuable before they completed it, so it might not be a bad idea to reconsider where he deployed them until then. Once he reached Green with both cores, he should also get a new pair of cords, so keeping a clone in the wasp's body wouldn't be an issue.

However, he only had three at the moment, so he had to be deliberate about the way he used them.

One was going to be working with Kassorith and Metatron in the foreseeable future, and a second would have to make several trips to Ruby Heart to stock up on the new material. Percy could place the last one in Nephthys's body so that they could study her affinities together. That way, he would have a permanent connection to all three of his clones, since Soul Harmony: unlike Soul Resonance: was effortless to maintain.

Putting his plans aside for now, he reached into his spatial seal and pulled out another hill of red powder, this time carefully controlling the quantity so that it wouldn't exceed the elephant-sized creature's body weight.

Not wasting any time, Nephthys dug into her magical meal, rapidly ingesting one mouthful after another. Percy hadn't bothered to grind it into fine dust, feeling that the Starry Princess should be able to handle it in its unprocessed state. Even her weaker relative had managed, and Nephthys's body was objectively tougher than anything on Ruby Heart: besides the three demigods, of course.

Before the substance took effect, Percy scanned his familiar's body one final time, memorizing her current appearance so that he would have an easier time pinpointing the changes later. He also pulled up her Status, studying it carefully.

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Nephthys (The Lone Wanderer's familiar)

Mana cores:

[Mana core 1: Green: Beast][Mana core 2: Yellow: Acid]Mutations:

[Soul Predator] – Allows one to more easily interact with the souls of others.[Royal Lineage] – Grants a royal wasp additional abilities befitting of their role.[Divine Spark] – Grants endless inspiration when developing one's magic.[Spectral Ark] – Allows one to carry and preserve the souls of others.[Thin Haemolymph]: Allows one to survive on fewer nutrients.[Charged Antennae]: Improves the power and flexibility of one's mental signals.[Acidic Gland]: Consume acid mana to enhance the potency of one's venom. Allows acid mana to be freely converted to and from one's venom.Spectral traits:

[Weaving]: Boosts one's proclivity in manipulating one-dimensional structures.[Insomnia] – Eliminates the need for sleep.[Scribing]: Boosts one's proclivity in expressing meaning onto any written medium.Mindsets:

[Structured Amnesia]: Selectively suppress or curate memories to minimize their mental load.Spells:

[Dance of the Savage Gods: Masterful][Advanced Water Control: Masterful][Advanced Lightning Control: Masterful][Advanced Acid Control: Masterful][Wild Art: Heir of the Hive: Masterful][Wild Art: Consumption: Masterful]Decrees:

[Moirais' Decree] – Grants a second mana core.___

Suffice to say, Nephthys hadn't slacked at all over the past decade.

As expected, her evolution to Green had finally given her body a chance to adapt to her composite affinity and develop three new mutations, bringing the total to a whopping seven.

'Soon to be eight, most likely,' Percy reminded himself with a chuckle.

Perhaps it was a little strange that her mutations hadn't started merging yet, despite her having nearly twice as many as Micky had had, but it was understandable. Their effects didn't overlap much, nor had Nephthys experienced the right catalyst.

The first four mutations hadn't changed much after her evolution.

Soul Predator had expanded past her stinger, eyes, and mandibles, now giving about half of her carapace a faint grey hue. Percy was sure that the colour would reach the rest of her body once she advanced to Blue, but it didn't seem to affect anything important.

Sadly, the goddess had yet to find any use for her Spectral Ark mutation: and not for a lack of trying: meaning that the preserved souls of her Amenthei subjects were still stuck inside the triangular gem embedded on her forehead, with no way out. Thankfully, Nephthys hadn't allowed her failures to get to her: she and Percy were certain that she would figure out how the mutation worked sooner or later.

Her Divine Spark mutation hadn't changed visually either, still manifesting as a series of silver watermark patterns rippling across the surface of her soul, mirroring the golden marks that her royal lineage had drawn on her physical body. However, the effect that the mutation had had on her growth was undeniable.

Nephthys probably owed her success as much to her millennia of experience and Percy's guidance as she did to the endless inspiration granted to her by the mutation, but registering six Masterful spells in under a decade without ever getting into a serious fight was nothing to scoff at.

Consumption and the Dance weren't very surprising, since Percy had prioritized teaching her some of Micky's spells to improve her jelly output. The other four spells were still quite impressive, however.

Curiously, Nephthys had taken a unique approach to her magic. Instead of working on specialized spells like most people did, she had chosen a much broader and more ambitious path of mastering every facet of her affinities: from the speed with which she deployed her mana, to the level of control she could exert on every single mote.

As a result, her Advanced Water, Lightning, and Acid Control spells had proven much harder to register and upgrade at every single step. They weren't designed specifically for combat either, meaning that she

could have probably grown significantly stronger with the same amount of effort if she'd done things differently.

When asked about this, she'd told Percy that this was the best way to deepen one's understanding of their affinity. Her spells might seem less practical in the short-term, but she expected to have an easier time comprehending the new concepts and forging her internal world anew after returning to the Clear grade.

Naturally, Percy had found the deity's advice interesting, filing it in as a future project to work on with his own affinities once he had more time.

Finally, Nephthys's Heir of the Hive spell was the result of her experiments with her authority over her subjects. The combination of the Masterful Wild Art, her lightning-based Charged Antennae mutation, and her higher grade had allowed her to rival her mother's control over the lesser wasps.

Neither of the royal bugs could command anywhere close to the whole hive at once just yet, but Nephthys's explosive growth in this area was quite promising, considering that she was still a Green. After evolving a few more times, she might be able to direct and coordinate millions of bugs as easily as she did her limbs.

Her Thin Haemolymph mutation was essentially just the bug version of Micky's Thin Blood: something that she had clearly developed due to her water affinity. It reduced Nephthys's stamina drain and worked alongside her other spells to vastly increase her royal jelly output.

Since she was only two grades below her mother now, Nephthys should have been able to produce about a ninth of the Queen's daily output: an amount that was no longer negligible to Percy.

In practice, her mutations and faster-growing spells had allowed her to do even better than that. Nephthys had reached about a quarter of the Starry Queen's output: which was even more impressive considering that the Violet bug hadn't stopped improving either.

By now, Percy had enough royal jelly to brew twice as much Gloomy Dawn as he, Micky, and the royal wasps needed, though he hadn't offered any to his friends and family yet, opting to build up a healthy stash first.

Nephthys's Charged Antennae mutation manifested as a faint indigo sheen on… well… her antennae, obviously. Other than improving her control over her subjects, it also allowed her to modify her signals to generate sounds that were audible to human ears.

The Starry Princess had yet to master this ability, but Percy hoped that she would eventually be able to produce and understand speech. It didn't really matter much to him, because he had his cords, but Nephthys would definitely need a way to directly communicate with other people if she wanted to rebuild her long-destroyed civilization on Remior.

Finally, Nephthys's Acidic Gland mutation was one that Percy had found quite interesting. It was no secret that the Starry Wasps wielded a type of acidic venom: in fact, he was convinced that this was exactly why the creatures seemed to have a natural inclination towards developing an acid affinity in their second cores.

The mutation allowed Nephthys's elemental core to interface directly with her venom gland. By circulating composite mana through the organ, she could slowly refine the substance into a more potent version.

Considering that a Starry Wasp's venom already grew more corrosive with each evolution, this was quite a feat. Percy and his familiar hadn't tested the substance on living creatures yet, but he wouldn't be surprised if it was already potent enough to damage a Blue's constructs.

Even more impressive was the fact that Nephthys could consume some of her stored venom to refill her core even faster than she could with just Consumption and the Dance. The synergy between her acid core and venom gland was very similar to the relationship between her beast core and jelly gland, which probably explained why her body had evolved in this direction.

Regardless, Percy was surer than ever that placing the goddess's soul inside the royal egg had been the right choice, and not just due to the hive's importance to his planet or his own need for cleansing resources. Put simply, his familiar was swiftly developing into quite a powerhouse.

'I guess it's time to get her involved in my war against House Asclepius,' he decided.

He'd previously been hesitant to place Nephthys in harm's way, but it would be foolish not to take advantage of the Princess's overwhelming talents. After all, Nephthys would die anyway if Percy were to perish, so asking her to help him was ultimately safer for them both.

At the very least, he should have the clone play with fusing their affinities and maybe clearing some lightning and acid channels in Percy's main body.

Both lightning and acid would be riskier elements to circulate through his flesh and soul than Micky's ice mana had been, but Percy's improved resistance to toxins and extreme temperatures should help. If Nephthys ever turned into another aspect, the process would grow even easier.

Other than that, Percy was curious to see whether Micky and Nephthys could clear each other's channels or even fuse air and lightning mana into sound. In theory, it should be possible, since Micky shared a soul with him: and even a mind, whenever necessary.

However, Percy's familiars and aspects both had to go through him to access one another, so he figured that he should start with the low-hanging fruit before branching out into more ambitious projects.

Happy with his assessment, Percy was broken out of his thoughts when the red substance began affecting Nephthys. He watched with bated breath, waiting to see whether the Starry Princess would acquire yet another mutation.

Chapter 616: Ruby

Having already seen how the red substance had affected the Starry Worker, Percy focused primarily on how it might interact with Nephthys's other mutations.

In the spots where the dull grey colour of the wasp's Soul Predator mutation had yet to spread, her exoskeleton slowly assumed a deep red colour that wasn't too dissimilar from the pyramid-shaped gem on her forehead.

'It's probably a coincidence. The colour of her internal world came from her original affinity. I don't think that the material from Ruby Heart has anything to do with mind mana,' he thought.

Nephthys's golden watermark patterns converged at her forehead, forming a frame of the same colour around the triangular object and cleanly delineating it from the rest of her reddening carapace. Several patches of star-specked chitin that included the familiar's head retained a greyish hue from the Soul Predator mutation that overlapped with the new colour, differentiating it further.

At this point, Nephthys's appearance was so different from the rest of her species that Percy was starting to question whether it was apt to keep referring to her as a Starry Wasp.

'Perhaps "Ruby Wasp" is more fitting. If we ever manage to rescue the Queen's other daughter, there will be two branches of the royal lineage anyway…'

Oblivious to his thoughts, Nephthys continued devouring the magical substance until there was nothing left. Her body stopped changing close to the end, though she kept going for good measure. Percy even got a notification this time: which hadn't happened with the Orange bug.

[Congratulations! Your familiar has acquired a new mutation: Ruby Carapace!]

Having seen that coming from a kilometre away, he quickly pulled up the extended section of his Status that contained Nephthys's information, to confirm the mutation's effects.

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[Ruby Carapace]: Reinforces one's carapace.___

It was simple and straightforward: perhaps one of the shortest entries in his Status. Percy hoped that he would also obtain something similar after eating the material.

For the next few days, Percy had two of his clones travel repeatedly to Ruby Heart to bring back enough powder for the Starry Queen. It would have arguably been more efficient to combine two seals into one with four times the volume, but Percy ultimately decided against that.

Filling such a massive container up would take several times longer than the smaller seals, meaning that his clones would risk getting dragged closer to the quasi-divine beasts by the enormous whirlpools. He'd rather make a few more trips and stay safe than get his clones eaten by the eels.

Once Freddy visited him, Percy found an opportunity to commission a few live test subjects from the plump vendor, eventually getting his hands on a couple of rats and a squirrel.

Unlike the Starry Worker he had previously experimented on, the new critters were all at Red, so Percy ground the substance into fine powder before feeding it to them. Thankfully, all three animals survived the transformation without exception, proving once and for all that the material worked on mammals as well.

Unfortunately for the poor beasts, they didn't get to enjoy their new mutation for long. Percy carved them open to study their skeletons, noting that they had experienced similar changes to Nephthys's chitinous exterior.

Feeling more confident in his own survival, Percy spent several hours upgrading his cylindrical constructs and crushing a large volume of the material into fine dust. He didn't dare to ingest any of it until he was certain that he hadn't missed any stray needle-like particles that would end up lodged into his throat or rupture his stomach.

Once he was ready, he mixed the powder with water to create a soft, crimson paste that he would hopefully have an easier time swallowing: much like he had done with his crystallized pure mana before inventing the Aurora Dew.

Lacking the beast affinity, he knew that he wouldn't be able to consume or digest enough of the substance to match his body weight in a single sitting, so he took things slowly. Over the next few days, he ate a portion whenever he stopped feeling stuffed, letting it work its magic on his body.

As early as during his first meal, the material started latching onto his bones, seemingly breaking and rebuilding his skeleton from inside out. The process was more painful for him than it had been for his reptilian host inside the alien ocean, but Percy wasn't fazed in the slightest, having experienced far worse things.

Interestingly, the substance didn't stop with his bones, trying to reforge his teeth and nails as well. This was something that he had expected due to his experiments on the smaller mammals, but he was luckily able to keep the transformation at bay using his Mimicry trait.

Objectively speaking, getting a free upgrade to his teeth and nails wouldn't be a bad thing, but Percy wasn't very keen to end up with Remior's creepiest grin, nor an unwanted manicure.

About a week later, his bones stopped absorbing powder as his Status finally notified him of his success.

[Congratulations! You have acquired a new mutation: Ruby Bones!]

Quickly skimming through his page, he confirmed that the description of the new mutation was more or less identical to Nephthys's version: aside from having affected a different body part of course.

Percy was admittedly tempted to cut himself open to check whether his bones looked like rubies. In the end, he decided against it, not wanting to inflict such a serious injury to himself just to sate his curiosity, even though he had more than enough Green healing potions to mend it afterwards. The fact that his Status had registered the mutation was more than proof enough.

'That's good. I can dangle this like a carrot to sway more noble families,' he thought with a smirk.

In theory, Percy had already done more than enough to win over every House on Remior. Sadly, people were oftentimes more greedy and shortsighted than he would have liked.

In their eyes, the Fungal Spire belonged to everyone: not just Percy: which was actually a sentiment that he agreed with. Just because he had happened to save the Starry Wasps from the brink of extinction and ended up managing the entire planet's supply of nectar, it didn't mean that the resource would automatically belong to him until the end of time, nor had he behaved as if it did.

Percy had insisted on not providing House Asclepius with any elixirs to pressure them into turning their patriarch over, and nobody had said much about that considering the man's crimes. Even so, the Alchemists' Guild had to continue providing all the other families with elixirs whether Percy liked them or not, otherwise the whole planet might revolt.

Percy had also contributed to Remior in several ways that had nothing to do with the Starry Wasps. Sadly, there wasn't enough Aurora Dew to please everyone yet, and the cyan paste was something that every noble family could easily produce by themselves now: meaning that they no longer needed him.

Percy's contributions in the field of runecrafting would also benefit the planet greatly in the long-term: and they had won him some powerful allies in the form of House Etna: but other families had never dabbled in the art much to begin with, so not everyone appreciated its importance.

Was it unfair that so many Houses were this quick to forget about Percy's contributions after just a few short years?

Sure. And not everyone had done that. Many families were still immensely grateful to him and had pledged their loyalty and willingness to support House Avalon in the coming war. However, Percy wasn't naïve enough to rely exclusively on something as flimsy as gratitude.

The red powder was somewhat different. Unlike the elixirs, nobody could accuse him of hoarding a public resource and using it for personal profit, since this was something that he had discovered and procured entirely with his own means.

Furthermore, unlike the knowledge and techniques that he had openly shared with the noble Houses, acquiring more of the crimson substance required Percy's continuous cooperation.

Everyone who wanted to enhance their bones would have no choice but to humbly request his assistance. If they wanted their children and grandchildren to use it too in the future, they would have to ensure that they remained in his good graces.

Of course, Percy's latest find wasn't exactly a panacea for his political troubles either. Most mages didn't even care about their physical strength, as they couldn't compete with beasts on that front. The value of the new mutation would be limited to those with bloodlines that gave them an edge in close combat.

Such families did exist, and Percy even knew of some personally, so he hoped that the red powder would buy him some additional support. However, negotiating with nobles wasn't his strongest suit, so he was going to leave such things to others that he trusted, like Orin and his Grandpa.

‘Speaking of whom, Baldy should also find the mutation useful,’ Percy realized.

Archibald didn’t exactly fight with his physical body either, but he did command an army of life clones that couldn’t use a shred of magic and had to rely solely on their fists. A single Violet human couldn’t compete with a beast or a spell of the same grade with brute strength, but what about a hundred of them?

Since Archibald’s clones were built using his own body as a template, they would hopefully inherit his reinforced bones without having to be fed the red powder individually, otherwise passing each of them the mutation would be extremely impractical.

Fortunately, the Starry Worker that Percy had experimented on had already evolved into a Starry Soldier. Despite its body growing by several times, its carapace had retained its ruby-like lustre. This would suggest that the material had altered the creature’s body at a deeper level, causing a permanent transformation.

At the very least, this was a sign that Percy wouldn’t have to make another trip to Ruby Heart whenever Nephthys evolved, and he hoped that something similar would apply to Archibald and his life clones.

If it worked, Percy might consider giving his spare set of Thess’kalan ingredients to his grandfather as well, since boosting the power of his strongest supporter might be the difference between surviving the war or losing everything he cared about.

Still, things weren’t that desperate yet, so Percy would rather hold on to the vials for now, having not given up on studying the latent potential that might lie within his human ancestry.

After passing Freddy a few samples for himself, the Guild’s six elders, and to send to his family in the Camelot province, Percy moved on to a different project. The new mutation would definitely help in the void tournament, but it wasn’t enough by itself. If he wanted Kassorith to climb high enough to qualify for the Void Decree, Percy had to do more.

Luckily, he had come up with an idea years ago, as early as during Micky’s fight against Acton’s father, though he had shoved it to the back of his mind until now.

‘Time to see whether I can pass some of my mutations to Micky…’

Chapter 617: Reverse

Percy’s idea was simple enough, on paper at least. After studying Micky’s attempts at shapeshifting and expanding his senses, Percy wanted to see whether he could use that knowledge to push his own Sovereign’s Eye further: and possibly grant a similar power to his hosts and familiars.

He would have loved to work on this sooner, but he’d instead chosen to single-mindedly pursue his artificial advancement. For the past few years, he’d hoped that his clones would find other ways to boost Kassorith’s chances in the tournament so that he wouldn’t have to waste precious time worrying about that.

Unfortunately, the only thing that Percy had to show for his patience was a pile of red powder. The substance was admittedly quite useful: doubly so for a Thess’kalan who might be able to absorb it into both his scales and bones: but it wouldn’t be enough by itself.

Kassorith would have to compete against people capable of fighting two grades above their own. Since Percy had to deploy a clone to the Vault soon, he had no choice but to revisit the project that he’d previously placed on hold.

The first thing he did was merge his constellation with Micky’s after receiving his friend’s permission. They generally tried not to resort to that more often than necessary, but succeeding in this endeavour would benefit both of them, and cooperating would hopefully save a lot of time.

Of the five techniques that Micky had developed while fighting against Lord Parnassus, Percy was most interested in the fourth: Fuzzy World. It had allowed the Huehuan to use an omnidirectional form of Soul Vision that Percy wanted to replicate.

Closing his eyes, he fell into silent meditation for several days, taking only the absolute necessary breaks to eat, relieve himself, and send out clones to Ruby Heart. Over time, he learned to tap into his friend’s experiences in an attempt to access a form of Soul Vision that didn’t require his eyes.

In theory, Percy had spent more time than Micky as a disembodied soul or inhabiting all sorts of exotic bodies, but the Huehuan’s experience in that department was arguably of a higher quality. After all, the

former crow knew what it was like to interact with souls at a physical level thanks to his Soul Predator mutation, and even rebuild his destroyed body out of ice.

Thankfully, Percy and Micky shared a single soul and mind: albeit an intentionally partitioned one: so they had full access to each other's abilities. About ten days later, Percy managed to register the presence of nearby souls even with his eyes closed.

Technically, this omnidirectional Soul Vision was no different than his clones' ability to sense souls while navigating the space between worlds. However, tapping into this spectral sight from within a physical vessel appeared to massively weaken it. Where Percy's clones could spot souls entire solar systems away, he and Micky were limited to just a few hundred: maybe a couple thousand: metres.

'It doesn't matter. It's good enough as a starting point,' Percy consoled himself.

Allowing Mana Sense and his domain to fuse into his new vision, Percy watched his surroundings twist into a chaotic blur of colours, essentially recreating Micky's Fourth Toast. Much like he and his friend had previously concluded, it was vastly inferior to his own mutated sight in many important ways: which was precisely one of the things that he was hoping to address soon: but it did offer some advantages of its own.

Opening his eyes, Percy paid close attention to both flavours of his integrated senses. One spanned the entire room but contained very few accurate details. The other was extremely clear but was limited to his line of sight. At the corners of his vision, the well-defined images blurred rapidly as they transitioned to madness.

Percy was immediately assaulted by a throbbing headache that would have certainly brought him to his knees if he hadn't been sitting already, his brain clearly not equipped to handle so much conflicting information at once.

'Ugh… I hope the strain is just an artifact of how imperfectly I'm wielding my senses, and not something that will remain a problem even after I fix them…'

He wasn't sure which one it was, but he didn't linger on that. For now, his priority was to merge and resolve the two streams of information. As for how he was going to do that?

Well, Percy had learned a lot about the way in which his eyes were wired to his brain when he first acquired his Mimicry trait. He knew that his clones and familiars didn't possess the same mutated eyeballs as him, and he doubted that he could recover a lost facet of a modified Decree, but he might not have to do that.

If he was right, his eyes were the least important part of Ea's Gift. The way in which the Decree had integrated itself into his Status and had connected his senses to his mind were hopefully at the core of the mutation, and those things might prove to be more transferable than the eyes themselves.

Closing his eyes to get rid of the headache, Percy concentrated on the tiny flows of blood, mana, and willpower feeding into his mutation. Over the years, he'd asked his clones to use their own copies of the Mimicry trait to study how their hosts' sensory organs were wired, so he was intimately familiar with the peculiarities of his own body.

He pushed a trickle of mana out of the primary pathways that he used with his boosting art and into a secondary set of tiny channels that branched outwards. The larger pathways that he had cleared and tempered as a teenager permeated his entire body, but they didn't pass through every cubic millimetre of flesh.

All living creatures possessed a set of smaller channels that were responsible for delivering mana to less important body parts: like for example a random patch of skin on Percy's elbow. These secondary channels were several times narrower, so they didn't need to be cleared or tempered. One could access them automatically by merely willing mana to flow through them.

On the flipside, these pathways were too small to affect a mage's mana capacity or regeneration like what was possible through the Dance. Thankfully, Percy wasn't trying to improve his boosting art today: he just wanted to copy the same connections that passively linked his brain and eyes to other sensory organs.

Starting with his skin, he pushed faint trickles of phantom mana, willpower and blood: where applicable: to the surface of his body and soul. Little by little, he covered every square millimetre with the same cycling flows that his Mimicry trait had allowed him to identify and study.

At first, he was worried that it would take a lot of effort to actively maintain all of these minuscule connections. To his great shock, he quickly discovered that every new set of wires automatically snapped into place, almost as if his Decree had been waiting for him to do this all along.

As soon as the skin on his rear and legs was done, the patch of ground beneath him came into focus, the chaotic swirl of colours in that spot settling into a well-defined image that he could somehow see clearly, even with his eyes closed.

Emboldened by his success, Percy methodically linked more regions of his skin, before moving to his ears, nose, and tongue. Every time a new set of connections fell into place, his surroundings grew clearer.

Not all of his senses behaved in the same manner, however. His sense of touch appeared to grant him more information about his immediate surroundings, but the details declined in quality as they moved away from his body.

His ears didn't seem to do anything at first. It was only a few seconds later that something happened when a droplet of water landed on a piece of protruding crystal a few dozen metres away with a crisp ting. The whole area around it bloomed into a clear but short-lived image that rippled outwards like a gentle wave.

When Percy linked his nose and tongue, he gained an instinctive understanding of various faint chemicals lingering in his cavern. For example, he could practically taste the spot where the Starry Worker had stood while absorbing the red powder over a week earlier, or the patch of minerals where he had sat while brewing the most recent batch of Gloomy Dawn about a month before that.

Different body parts appeared to interface with his magical senses in unique ways, though they all had something in common. Whenever a pair of clear images touched, they instantly reinforced one another, doubling or even tripling in size and lasting longer before decaying.

As a consequence of Percy's sense of touch constantly surrounding his body, a thin bubble formed around him that never shrank beneath a certain minimum thickness: about fifty centimetres away from his skin.

Instead, it kept expanding like an amorphous pile of goo as additional bubbles caused by sounds and scents came into contact with it, slowly increasing Percy's reach. Sadly, it never managed to grow past a couple of metres away from his body before shrinking again.

At least not until he finally opened his eyes.

The moment his enhanced sight joined his other four senses, everything changed. A vast, conical area directly in front of him instantly came into focus, but that was just the start.

The defined images within his line of sight came into contact with other patches of well-understood information captured by his other senses. This caused all the associated bubbles to bloom like vibrant flowers.

Percy's headache returned, but it was more bearable than before, suggesting that it might not be much of a problem once he found a way to resolve the chaotic images and truly consolidate his senses.

In a flash of inspiration, Percy sharply jerked his head to his left, letting his gaze brush over a large section of the cavern. To his great joy, the spot that he had previously looked at didn't immediately collapse. Instead, the clear images persisted for several seconds even without him glancing at them directly as his other senses picked up the slack and helped him keep the information into focus for a little longer.

'This is promising, but it's still too messy to be useful. I'll need another source of information if I want to make some real progress…'

Percy did have something in mind that he could use, but he had no idea how exactly he was meant to accomplish that. In theory, his domain should be more than enough to fix the problem, since he could scan the whole cavern with it: almost like an expansive, three-dimensional sense of touch.

The problem was that he had no idea how to add flows of mana or blood to his willpower to connect it to his Status like his sensory organs. Percy closed his eyes again to put an end to the annoying headache as he pondered over the issue.

'I might not need to connect my domain to my Status completely. I just need to somehow take the tactile information it provides me into consideration: sort of like what I do with my Sovereign's Encroachment spell while brewing.'

Whenever Percy used his Wild Art, he typically started by peering through the exterior of his cauldron with his eyes, generating a colourful spherical shell in the boundary of his concoction where he had a pretty good idea of what alchemical reactions were taking place.

He then allowed his domain to seep deeper into the cauldron, producing a monochrome inner region at its core, where information was scarcer but no less useful. Finally, he methodically pushed the colourful layer inwards through inference, taking advantage of his understanding of various affinities and alchemical reagents to fill in the gaps in his senses.

'So, what if I do the same thing in reverse?'

Chapter 618: Pond

Percy's heart skipped a beat as he felt that he was onto something. The problem with applying his Sovereign's Encroachment in this situation was that his cauldron was a relatively small and finite object, whereas the cavern he was currently sitting in was many times larger, and the universe beyond its crystalline walls was infinite.

However, he wasn't one to give up without a fight.

Opening his eyes again, he ignored the rush of pain pounding his skull to focus on the task at hand. Slowly sweeping his gaze from left to right and back again, he crammed as much information into his mind as it could handle at once.

Whenever one of his other senses picked up something new, he tried to shift his eyes towards it to artificially cause many of the clear regions to merge and reinforce one another, gradually causing the chaotic colours in the cavern to sharpen. At the same time, he spread his domain evenly throughout the room, using his Wild Art to push the bubbles of information outwards.

Initially, his efforts seemed to do something, but the results left much to be desired. He couldn't focus on all the colourful regions at once, and it took a lot of effort to grow each of them by a meagre ten percent. Even worse, the bubbles instantly shrank again the moment he stopped paying attention.

Gritting his teeth, he approached the problem more strategically. Instead of picking the bubbles at random, he selected those which were already close to their neighbours and carefully directed their expansion towards one another.

The moment a pair connected, their natural growth relieved some of the pressure on Percy's mind, allowing him to concentrate on a different region. The bubbles still decayed over time, but they did so more slowly right after a collision, giving him a chance to make progress.

Starting with the sweeping cone in front of him, Percy connected as many bubbles as he could into his vision, gradually covering about two thirds of the cavern. Knowing that his efforts would go to waste if he stopped, and feeling that he was on the verge of some kind of breakthrough, he kept going.

Connecting to the patches of space behind his back proved significantly harder, however. Percy wasn't planning to stand up and start spinning around like a lunatic. Besides, he already had his hands full trying to keep the region in front of him from falling apart.

Consequently, it took him a couple of hours to increase his field of view to cover about three quarters of the cavern, and several more to reach eighty percent. Alas, going any further than that wasn't going to be easy.

After the clear region had grown past a certain size, it had started to collapse faster than Percy could maintain it. Random patches of space broke into chaotic blobs of swirling colours again, leaving him no choice but to stop trying to expand and start repairing the damage.

After going back and forth a few times without much success, he realized that he had reached his current limit.

No matter how diligently he maintained and cultivated the bubbles, he couldn't cover more than eighty percent of the cavern at once. It was a pity, because Percy was certain that something interesting was going to happen if he reached the end. He could feel some kind of obstruction at the edge of his consciousness.

'Should I ask Nephthys to find me a slightly smaller cavern?' he wondered.

The amount of information his brain could process at once was strongly correlated with the size of the room he was in, but there was no reason to stick with the cavern that he had happened to start in.

Percy estimated that a room that was about twenty percent smaller would allow him to practically skip all the effort and cheat his way to the end with his current capabilities.

'No. That feels wrong, somehow…' he thought, shaking his head.

He wasn't sure how to explain it, but he could tell that the size of his current cavern was more or less perfect for what he was trying to do: even though he had no idea what exactly that was.

If he had to compare this feeling to something, it was like he was blowing his nose and was on the verge of clearing it. He just needed to exert a certain amount of pressure to accomplish that.

If he switched to a smaller room, he would be able to cover it with his senses fairly easily, but that wasn't the point. It wasn't so much about the cavern as it was about pushing himself past a certain threshold, so lowering the difficulty wouldn't help him in any way.

Left with no other option, he went back to work, fighting through his headache to push the bubbles outwards and into one another again. After a few minutes, he reclaimed about eighty percent of the cavern, before commencing the arduous grind to further expand his limit.

He kept at it for several hours without making any noticeable progress before eventually having to stop when his head was about to burst. After resting for a couple of hours and cleansing his cores, he began his training anew.

Percy: and Micky, who had remained fused with him throughout his madness: continued to work for days, and then weeks. They took several breaks, both for their own sanity and to tend to their responsibilities. Micky still had to help Nesha with her intel-gathering work every now and then, and Percy had to restock their supply of Gloomy Dawn.

Still, most of their time was spent on this new project.

By the second day, they felt like they had improved slightly, covering eighty-one percent of the cavern. By the fourth, they increased that to eighty-two. About two weeks after embarking on this impossible mission, Percy was sure that they had covered eighty-five percent of the room.

Another month after that they reached ninety percent, and two months later they barely touched ninety-five. That was when Percy was interrupted by an interesting notification.

[Congratulations! Your familiar's mana core has advanced: Yellow -> Green!]

Percy's head still hurt like nobody's business, but that didn't stop him from cracking a smile. He had forgotten how close Nephthys had been to her promotion, yet the Ruby Princess clearly hadn't stopped diligently cleansing her second core thrice a day.

Since this was her acid affinity, the advancement wasn't going to change her size or bring about any new mutations, but it would definitely have a major impact on her stamina consumption, further increasing her jelly output.

Not wanting to be outdone by the goddess, Percy resumed working on his project.

His progress had slowed down to a crawl after crossing the ninety-five percent mark, which caused him to seriously consider whether this was worth it. There was no doubt in his mind that something interesting would happen once he touched the finish line, but that was beside the point.

He was in a race against time to send a clone to the Vault and go back to completing his artificial advancement, so was it really a good idea to waste several months on a questionable project with unknown benefits?

Even so, he didn't stop. Percy had already invested so many weeks in this, and he was so damn close to the end. Perhaps this was nothing more than the sunken cost fallacy, but he didn't want to toss his previous efforts in the bin.

It was about half a year since he first started playing with his mutation when he managed to force the final unruly swirl of colours under control. The moment it all fell into place, something clicked inside Percy's head.

For a second, he was afraid that the well-defined images in his surroundings would start falling apart again, but that didn't happen. For the first time ever, the colours obediently remained as they were supposed to be, seemingly not daring to fall out of line.

Percy felt something warm and wet on his upper lip.

Even before wiping it, he could tell that he was bleeding quite extensively, since he could see, taste and hear the sticky trickle with his omnidirectional vision. It wasn't just his nose either. There was a lot of blood pouring down his eyes and ears as well, making him fear that he had injured himself somehow.

However, there wasn't the slightest hint of pain or irritation. That was when he realized that even the constant headache that had plagued him for months had subsided at some point.

Something shifted inside Percy's head. It felt like somebody had stabbed their hand into his brain, stirring the contents of his skull around frivolously. Still, it didn't hurt. If anything, it felt somewhat pleasant: almost as if his mind was finally stretching after having been stuck in an uncomfortable position his whole life.

The tiny flows of mana, willpower and blood that Percy had previously linked to his sensory organs came into focus. Some of the connections snapped by themselves, though that didn't lessen his awareness of his surroundings at all, indicating that those links had been redundant.

A few connections grew stronger while others weakened, some even changing to new ratios of mana, willpower and blood. There were even a couple of flows that formed by themselves as Percy's body was seemingly discovering new channels that he had missed before.

His domain changed too.

He wasn't sure how. It didn't feel any stronger, nor did he think that he could control it better. His willpower just appeared to develop some new quality that Percy didn't fully understand, delivering information into his brain in all sorts of novel ways.

The three-dimensional image of the cavern inside his head shuddered, before exploding outwards all at once. The walls and ceiling blocked the information in most directions, though Percy keenly felt his awareness seep into the magical crystals and minerals, digging several metres into them.

Most notably, his senses were able to travel much farther through the tunnel leading out of his cavern. Percy practically saw, heard and tasted every square centimetre of the winding corridor that stretched for hundreds of metres, even though he wasn't looking directly at its entrance.

When he did turn his head that way, he found himself seeing three times as deep into the tunnel. Closing his eyes, his vision started to decay like before, but it didn't do so nearly as fast. Even if he blocked all of his senses, he felt like the image of the cavern would persist for several seconds before fading entirely.

Whenever he opened his eyes, or when a new sound or scent reached his ears and nose, his field of view expanded outwards again. His surroundings were no longer a patchwork of colours, however.

Everything within his range appeared well-defined. No matter which senses were feeding into the giant bubble, it seemed to advance in a rapid but uniform manner. Percy felt like he was submerged in a massive lake that was slowly evaporating away. Using his eyes and ears was like pouring buckets of water into the lake, trying to expand it.

Eventually, it settled into an equilibrium.

Percy would have to use his new ability in an open space to check how far it could actually unfold, and he would have to perform several additional tests to determine whether it could be used by his clones. Even so, he was already impressed by its potency: as was his Status.

[Congratulations! Your mutation has evolved: Sovereign's Eye -> Sage's Eye!]

[Congratulations! Your spell has evolved: Wild Art: Sovereign's Encroachment: Masterful -> Wild Art: Sage's Pond: Masterful!]

Chapter 619: Sage

Percy's eyebrows shot up upon reading the notifications. Plural. He was by no means a stranger to spell upgrades, but it wasn't every day that he registered them in pairs: especially when one was an upgrade to his mutation. The best explanation that he was able to come up with was that his meddling had affected both the mutation itself, and the way he used it.

He was tempted to send a clone to the Vault immediately, as he'd already wasted too much time on this project. Time that he didn't have. However, he ultimately held himself back.

Everything that he'd done over the past six months had been to grant Kassorith as many advantages as possible in the void tournament. Percy ought to at least check that his clones could now use the mutation before possessing the Thess'kalan again. If they didn't, he would have no choice but to come up with something else.

Willing his constellation to separate from Micky's, he waited for his fellow aspect's consciousness to return to his own body before reaching out to the Huehuan through the cord. 'Well? Can you still use it?'

Micky responded with a mental nod. 'My eyes changed by themselves into something closer to yours, as have the connections of mana and willpower across my body. I'm currently enveloped by my own bubble of information.'

Percy exhaled in relief. This was great news, though it wasn't a guarantee that his clones would also acquire a version of the mutation. Unlike Micky, they didn't share a mind or soul with him: or well… at least not in the same way: nor could they shapeshift.

Eager to explore his new ability, Percy made his way back to Nephthys's chamber and asked her to help with a few tests. Placing a clone into her body, he quickly read its Status.

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Nephthys (The Lone Wanderer's clone)

Mana cores:

[Mana core 1: Green: Beast][Mana core 2: Green: Acid]Domain:

[Pulse: Dormant]Mutations:

[Soul Predator] – Allows one to more easily interact with the souls of others.[Royal Lineage] – Grants a royal wasp additional abilities befitting of their role.[Divine Spark] – Grants endless inspiration when developing one's magic.[Spectral Ark] – Allows one to carry and preserve the souls of others.[Thin Haemolymph]: Allows one to survive on fewer nutrients.[Charged Antennae]: Improves the power and flexibility of one's mental signals.[Acidic Gland]: Consume acid mana to enhance the potency of one's venom. Allows acid mana to be freely converted to and from one's venom.[Ruby Carapace]: Reinforces one's carapace.[Sage's Eye] – Draws from the cumulative knowledge listed in the Status to enhance one's senses, allowing them to discern details previously unseen.Spectral traits:

[Weaving]: Boosts one's proclivity in manipulating one-dimensional structures.[Insomnia] – Eliminates the need for sleep.[Scribing]: Boosts one's proclivity in expressing meaning onto any written medium.[Mimicry]: Boosts one's awareness of their physical appearance, as well as their ability to maintain or modify it.Mindsets:

[Ludwick's Compass]: Set mental checkpoints anywhere in the world. Instinctively track their location as you move away.[Shimmering Constellations] – Group your senses and memories into separate identities. This artificial segregation can be freely bypassed.Spells:

[Dance of the Savage Gods: Masterful][Spectral Art: Parasitic Connection: Refined][Spectral Art: Internal Seal-Crafting: Masterful][Spectral Art: Intimidation: Masterful][Spectral Art: Cauldron of a Myriad Screams: Masterful][Spectral Art: Instantaneous Formation: Masterful][Wild Art: Sage's Pond: Masterful][Wild Art: Consumption: Masterful]Alchemic principles:

[Extraction]: Separate and condense an ingredient's essence.[Pacification] – Delay an ingredient's activation rate.[Redirection] – Adjust an ingredient's effect.[Deattunement] – Prevent multiple conflicting ingredients from reacting with one another.[Bonding] – Enrich an ingredient with crystallized pure mana.[Restructuring]: Alter an ingredient's phase.[Scaling]: Brew a greater volume of ingredients at once.[Compression]: Elevate an ingredient to the next grade.[Consolidation]: Infuse multiple similar ingredients into a concoction while eliminating the redundant alchemic steps.Decrees:

[Phoebe's Decree]: Grants access to your Status.[Moirais' Decree] – Grants a second mana core.[Metatron's Decree]: Open a one-way portal to the Vault of Magic at will.[Ea's Decree (Modified)] – Augments and enhances your Status. Grants the Sage's Eye.[Obatala's Decree (Modified)]: Augments and enhances your Status. Allows you to effortlessly deploy your domain in its strongest state.___

There were several differences from the last time Percy had read his familiar's information, but he understood where most of them had come from.

Firstly, he was currently reading the clone's version of the page, not the familiar's, which was why it only included spells that he was capable of using while inhabiting the bug's body.

Consequently, it listed Consumption and the Dance: which he had personally taught Nephthys: but not the rest of her spells. It also listed a bunch of his own that didn't require any mutations that the clone didn't currently have access to.

Similarly, his mindsets consisted of Ludwick's Compass and Shimmering Constellations, but not the goddess's Structured Amnesia. After all, those were naturally stored in a person's mind, just like alchemic principles and some of Percy's Decrees. This was also why the clone could open portals to the Vault and lock his domain in its strongest state, while Nephthys couldn't do either of those things by herself.

On that note, his domain was currently in a dormant state. With a pair of Green cores and twice as many flavours of the Dance at his disposal, he knew that he could easily change that, but he didn't see any reason to bother. The Ruby Princess wouldn't be able to wield that domain, and even the clone would basically lose it the moment he stopped possessing her.

Other notable differences from Percy's previous inspection included Nephthys's recently promoted acid core, and the presence of his Mimicry trait. The wisp that he had shoved into the royal egg had only possessed Weaving, Insomnia, and Scribing, so Nephthys only had those three by default. Percy could temporarily grant her Mimicry through his clones, yet that was another thing that she would lose access to as soon as he was gone.

In any case, he hadn't possessed his familiar just to muse over her Status. Putting everything else aside, he focused on the details that he was interested in: namely, the changes to Ea's Decree.

'Hmmm… I'm pretty sure that my previous clones didn't have the second sentence about granting the mutation,' he concluded after careful examination. 'This is new.'

Retrieving his clone from Nephthys, Percy confirmed that a large, three-dimensional bubble of awareness had appeared around her body, much like what had happened to him and Micky. The fact that the mutation itself had also been listed in her Status was further confirmation that he had succeeded.

As with his own version of the ability, it had covered the wasp's entire cavern, though it hadn't stretched nearly as far into the tunnels leading out of the room as it had for him. Percy was confident that the discrepancy had been partially caused by his familiar not having a domain of her own: thus missing one important source of sensory information: though that might not be the only issue.

When his clone had entered her body, he hadn't felt anything happen to her eyes, so her copy of the mutation was probably weaker. Prompting physical changes to one's eyes was likely a trait of Ea's Decree that it had lost a long time ago, during its integration into Phoebe's Decree.

As much as Percy would have liked to recover its missing functions, he had to accept that he wasn't a titan. He couldn't just add or restore features to a Decree as he pleased. At most, he was able to slightly alter the way he interacted with it. His modified Status already accompanied all of his clones, and the way it was connected to their senses was clearly something that he could study and influence, but there were limits.

Micky was obviously an exception, because his shapeshifting abilities had given him a different way of directly transforming his eyeballs.

'Do you still have it?' he asked the Ruby Princess with bated breath.

'I'm afraid I don't. My new vision vanished the moment you left,' Nephthys replied, sounding a little disappointed.

Percy nodded, reading his familiar's Status this time. The mutation was no longer there and neither was the Decree, confirming that both were temporary. The good news was that his hosts could also apparently access the mutation while being possessed: it wasn't limited to just the clones doing the possessing.

Perhaps, it might even be a good thing that they wouldn't keep it. As much as Percy would have loved the option of permanently granting the Sage's Eye to his friends and family, he would rather not pass it to Kassorith and every random person he possessed from now until the end of time. Giving everyone the Moirais' Decree was already troublesome enough.

Pulling up his own Status and reading the updated entry one final time, he noticed another minor change that he hadn't spotted earlier.

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[Sage's Eye] – Draws from the cumulative knowledge listed in the Status to enhance one's senses, allowing them to discern details previously unseen.___

All previous versions of the mutation: be they the Alchemist's, Sorcerer's, or Sovereign's Eye: had retained the exact same description. The name had changed each time, as had the colour of Percy's irises, but the effect hadn't.

Not directly.

It was simply Percy's Status that had adapted to every new Decree that it had assimilated, indirectly granting his eyes the ability to perceive additional things with every new iteration.

This time, even the wording was slightly different, however. The phrase "enhance one's vision" had become "enhance one's senses", which wasn't that strange given the manner in which Percy had upgraded it, though he still found that detail quite interesting.

Wishing to learn more about his new ability, Percy placed another clone in Nephthys's body and asked her to accompany him to the surface where they could both experiment in an open space.

Chapter 620: Preparing for the tournament

As expected, the range of Percy's enhanced senses proved downright massive when not constrained by the narrow caverns and tunnels of the underground hive.

He was easily able to scan everything within two kilometres of his body, though the bubble of information around him still wasn't perfectly spherical, nor was it uniform. After all, each of his senses worked somewhat differently from the rest.

While his upgraded mutation was a lot better at merging and consolidating the information, Percy could still ultimately see things much farther than he could hear them. He naturally had no trouble observing the colossal figure of the Fungal Spire looming overhead, yet it was impossible to listen to the countless wasps buzzing atop the giant mushrooms that were located dozens of kilometres away.

Combining his senses had merely smoothened and reinforced them. His enhanced sight now had a wider field of view than before, and gradually tapered off into regular vision as objects moved farther away from him.

The good news was that he no longer had to deal with blurry images or headaches. His brain: or his Status… or probably both – could now eliminate redundant information, overlay the inputs of multiple sensory organs, and interpolate additional details between them, ensuring that Percy's new vision was always better than the sum of its parts.

'It almost feels like a second domain,' he realized.

It stretched farther than his willpower, and Percy could concentrate on a direction or object of his choosing to slightly reshape the three-dimensional bubble as necessary. However, he understood that this fake domain didn't exist in the real world, nor did it contain any willpower. It was all happening inside his head, which was probably why his Status hadn't recognized or registered it as a proper domain.

Most notably, after the connections to his brain had reshuffled themselves, Percy no longer needed to use his actual domain to activate his new ability. That said, suppressing his willpower or asking Micky to pull all of it to Twilight City limited the space he could observe to a single kilometre: about the same as Nephthys. While the Ruby Princess lacked Percy's specialized eyeballs, her higher grade somewhat made up for that.

All things considered, being able to scan everything within a kilometre wasn't bad, but it was still a notable reduction. Halving the radius of the three-dimensional model translated to an eightfold decrease in volume.

'At least this isn't going to be a problem in the tournament,' he consoled himself.

Kassorith didn't have Percy's unique eyes either, but he was a Blue with a domain of his own: albeit a weaker one than the Lone Wanderer's. If Percy and the Thess'kalan both deployed their willpower at the same time, the combined range of their senses should provide them with a huge advantage in the competition.

'It'll have to do.' He shrugged.

Between the Sage's Eye, the Ruby Bones, and Percy's improvements in magiscript, his host would be notably stronger than he had been in the previous tournament. Assuming that Metatron hadn't allowed the Thess'kalan to laze around over the past decade, they should be more than powerful enough to make the top sixteen… or eight… or whatever the titan had said they would need to qualify for the Void Decree.

Happy as he was with his preparations, Percy was tempted to spend a few more days to test some additional facets of his mutation.

He wanted to see whether it would have any impact on his brewing yield. Even if it didn't, it would at least allow Micky to perform alchemy at the same level as him. The Huehuan already had access to all of Percy's knowledge about the subject, but he had previously been held back by his subpar vision: which was no longer a problem.

Additionally, Percy wanted to check whether he could pass his fellow aspect some of his other mutations. Micky could practically shapeshift into anything he wanted: including beasts with unique bodies: so there was no reason why he wouldn't be able to replicate Percy's Greater Thess'kalan Physique or Ruby Bones, even without consuming the necessary resources.

In fact, doing so should be even easier than it had been to reproduce the Sage's Eye, since there was no Decree involved.

With access to unlimited red powder, Percy and Micky would be able to experiment to their heart's content, studying how mutations tended to manifest in a person's body. Doing so might provide Percy with valuable clues on how he could tap into the dormant potential of his human lineage.

He sighed. 'Sadly, this isn't the time for any of that.'

Neither alchemy nor Micky's mutations would help Kassorith, so there was no point holding the clone back any longer. Leaving the tournament aside, Percy's artificial advancement would play a much bigger role in his fight against Machaon, meaning that he should still prioritize that above everything else.

Having made his mind up, Percy decided to leave one clone in Nephthys's body to train with her like he had previously planned, and to send a second clone to the Vault. He kept the third slot available for now, knowing that he would need it to possess the Thess'kalan.

Fortunately, Percy had already completed dozens of round trips to Ruby Heart over the past six months, so he didn't need to return there in the near future. Once he was done setting Kassorith up, he could have the third clone resume searching for greater springs.

With that out of the way, Percy sought out Freddy to inquire about House Avalon's situation. He soon learned that Archibald had already received the previous shipment of red powder and written back to Percy with his findings.

Apparently, the material synergized with the Clone bloodline as well as Percy had hoped, allowing life affinity users to freely pass their reinforced skeleton to any new minions they created, without having to consume additional resources.

That got Percy quite excited, as it might allow his relatives to essentially generate the material by themselves. In theory, they would merely have to absorb enough for a single person and then sacrifice a couple of clones to make up for it.

Sadly, his grandfather had already considered that, though his experiments had revealed how impractical Percy's idea was. Extracting and absorbing powder that had already bonded into another's skeleton had turned out to be extremely inefficient.

Percy hadn't managed to quantify the process while eating beasts on Ruby Heart, but Archibald had learned that he would have to sacrifice hundreds of clones to generate as much of the material as he had consumed to acquire the mutation. Even for a Violet, it would take several months of constant work to produce and replace enough clones. Percy's weaker relatives would need even longer than that, meaning that it wasn't worth it.

Another possibility would be to feed a handful of powder to a Starry Drone and wait for the creature to evolve a couple of times before grinding its much-larger carapace, but the process was similarly inefficient. Archibald had estimated that it would take at least a Green wasp to break even.

Waiting for several years and feeding the bug a tremendous amount of mana to extract a mere handful of red powder just wasn't worth it. Not when Percy could bring over a thousand tons of the darn thing in a single day from Ruby Heart.

'I suppose that the giant eels weren't nearly as good at recycling the material as I thought,' he concluded, amending his understanding of the quasi-divine beasts' biology slightly.

In hindsight, this was probably one of the reasons why eating other animals had seemed so ineffective compared to simply diving deeper into the red regions. This was likely an intended property of the material, in fact.

After all, the eels didn't want the powder to spread too widely, nor for their prey to have a second reliable path to reinforcing their scales, lest they stopped falling into their trap.

In any case, it was arguably a good thing that the resource couldn't propagate across Remior without Percy's direct involvement. As annoying as it was to have to personally import every single grain, it gave him leverage.

With that in mind, Percy filled dozens of spatial amulets up with the material, asking Freddy to get it delivered to his family. He wanted every life affinity user in his House to acquire the mutation as soon as possible, in addition to a few of the stronger mages with other affinities: like Galahad and Elaine.

Percy also added a lot of extra powder and wrote a letter to his grandfather, asking him to handle negotiations with other families that might want it.

Admittedly, buying the nobles' loyalty wasn't his preferred way of forging new alliances. In his view, anyone with integrity would have already joined forces with House Avalon of their own volition after everything that Percy had done for their world.

At the same time, he understood how his poor reputation from before Nephthys's creation might have caused some people to hesitate, and he urgently needed as many allies as he could get, so he couldn't afford to be too picky.

Once the plump vendor assured him that he would take care of everything, Percy and Micky retreated to their respective abodes: be they magical caverns located several kilometres below the surface, or mundane buildings in a quiet district: to resume working on Internal Seal-Crafting.

By the time the clone granted them the Void Decree and their new cores, they would hopefully have the means to instantly promote them to the next grade.