Wanderer 63

Chapter 63: Emergency

This was going to be the one.

Percy had already preserved enough of the nectar through both pacification and redirection. In fact, deattunement was going great too. Just a couple more minutes and he'd finish brewing his first drops of elixir!

Suddenly, he felt the ethereal cord tense, his consciousness nearly sinking into his familiar's. He resisted. Percy had grown somewhat better at handling the episodes after nearly a year in the Guild.

Still…

The mixture boiled over, as the few remaining drops of elixir began to dwindle. Even a couple moments of inattention were more than enough to ruin his efforts. Percy tried his best to salvage some of it, but only slop remained in the cauldron.

"Are you sure you're ok?" Orin asked in concern. "Your… illness has lasted a lot longer this time."

The old alchemist had stopped supervising his attempts for the past few months, letting him experiment and learn by himself. However, he'd resumed observing him recently, as his sponsorship was nearing its end and he wanted to evaluate his student's progress as well as offer some final advice.

"Yeah, it's going to pass sooner or later." Percy said.

"If you want, I've got a friend with a Blue core and a life affinity in the Guild. I can ask him to give you a check-up." Orin didn't relent.

"Thank you sir, but it won't be necessary. We have plenty of those in my House and none of them could do anything about my situation." he replied vaguely.

Orin creased his brow but didn't insist. They bid each other farewell before parting for the night.

‘What is that clone doing?!’ Percy wondered on the way to his place.

It had been gone for over a week!

Of course, he knew this was technically a good thing. It meant he’d finally stumbled upon something interesting enough to warrant looking into. Percy had been over the moon when he first realized his latest venture was a success. That said, the delay was really screwing with both his alchemy and hunting in the meantime.

Entering his house, Percy was about to take a shower when the connection pulled him again. Instinctively he fought back, but a wave of powerful thoughts and emotions also seeped through the bond.

‘CAW! CAW!!’

Micky was distraught. Afraid. In pain.

Panicking, Percy was tempted to peer through the crow’s eyes, to see what was happening. Still, he didn’t want to interfere with his familiar in case he was fleeing from something.

Without wasting a moment, he grabbed all the healing potions in his room, clumsily splitting them into his pockets, hoping the cheap vials wouldn’t break. Next, he bolted out of his house, sprinting towards the Spire, ignoring the soreness and exhaustion.

‘Micky, what’s going on?!’

‘CAW!’

The bird couldn’t spare him much attention, but it still managed to relay some fragmented images. A figure in a yellow robe. Stones flying. An injured wing. Micky hadn’t given him much, but it was enough. Percy already knew where the familiar tended to nest for the night.

‘Hold on! I’m on my way! Try to escape towards me!’

Despite his reassuring words, he was a lot more conflicted internally, however.

‘Shit! What do I even do in this situation?!’

Percy had no idea what madness had driven the Yellow core to roam the first level so late at night. Nor what stroke of misfortune had caused him to attack his familiar. Still, technically that person hadn’t done anything wrong. Sometimes, other beasts besides the Starry Wasps wandered into the Fungal Spire and there weren’t any rules against killing them.

But if Percy harmed him, he’d be the one in trouble.

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Even if he came clean with his secrets and explained the situation to the Guild’s management, he doubted it would solve much. Micky might not be a regular beast, but the truth was in many ways worse. He was a member of a foreign race that Percy had smuggled into Remior! Some might even consider it an act of treason. They wouldn’t take kindly to him attacking a member of the Guild – a native – over such a creature.

Percy shook his head.

‘What am I even thinking?! It doesn’t matter what the consequences are!’

Micky wasn’t just a beast. Or an alien. Or a creature… He was his friend! His family!

By the time he’d resolved himself to doing whatever it took, Percy was outside the settlement. Ignoring the bridge leading up to the second level, he ran towards Micky while activating Circulation.

‘Are you still there? What’s the situation?’

‘CAW…’

Micky’s thoughts were sluggish. He was desperately fleeing from his pursuer, but he couldn’t fly very high nor very fast. Every beat of his wings hurt, and he felt cold –having lost a lot of blood. At least, the Yellow guy didn’t seem to be in a hurry, only leisurely chasing the bird, knowing it wouldn’t get very far.

Percy gritted his teeth, picking up the pace. He might have decided to do whatever he could to save his friend, but he had yet to settle on his best course of action.

‘I can’t handle a Yellow core in a direct fight...’

As things stood, he only had two viable options.

He could try reasoning with that person, getting him to back off peacefully. This was the most civilized approach, but also a rather shitty one. There were many details he’d have to gloss over while negotiating, and he had no idea what the other party’s personality was like. If the talks failed, he’d be giving up the element of surprise.

The other option was a sneak attack. It had worked in the past, but there was no guarantee it would again. Especially given the circumstances. Having freshly sent out a clone, Percy still had some trouble regenerating soul mana by himself. Micky was in no condition to help either. Perhaps he could gather enough for a Parting Gift in the next few minutes, but that would limit him to a single shot. If he missed, he’d be screwed, and it would be too late for negotiations.

‘I can give Circulation another try.’

He’d already failed to find the correct pattern for his soul affinity countless times, but there was still some distance from Micky, so he could afford another attempt.

Intensifying his breaths, he began filling his first core. His injuries pulled the mana, trying to pry it from his control. And he let them. As the mana flowed into his channels, the newly formed vacuum enhanced his ability to draw more from the air, as the colourful motes swirled into his body even more forcefully.

Soon, an equilibrium was reached, with mana flowing both into and out of his sternum at equal measures, as the hole in his soul began to fill up. This lasted until the injury was saturated. It needed some time to absorb the mana, which caused the drain on his core to weaken temporarily.

Still, Percy didn't allow it, continuing to push the mana into his channels, this time intentionally directing it along the latest pattern he had devised. Locating the correct pathways inside the mess was tricky, but he managed to get a grip on them eventually.

At first, things were going alright, as the soul mana flowed through his soul unobstructed, his body and mind strengthening. However, the channels soon drifted again, making him almost mess up, nearly sending the mana down the wrong pathway. Gritting his teeth, he adjusted his control, focusing on maintaining the correct pattern as the channels continued to shift around.

'I won't be able to fight like this.'

Percy would have to constantly pay attention inwards to keep the technique up. It wasn't practical, but he didn't want to give up just yet.

Sadly, he made a mistake a few moments later. Having missed a connection, he sent the mana down the wrong turn, causing the entire flow to collide against itself. An entire section of his soul swelled near his right shoulder, causing some tears to form, as an excruciating wave of agony washed over him.

"AAAAAARGGGHH!!!" Percy stumbled, falling on the ground before rolling a dozen meters in the dirt.

Still, he didn't let go of his control just yet, trying to restore the correct pattern. However, another complication emerged. The soul mana now wanted to flood the newly formed cracks, creating a third flow to compete against the other two.

And it all went downhill from there. More clashes occurred, causing more injuries and just as many rogue flows of mana, soon forcing him to relinquish the technique before it led to irreparable damage.

'It was worth a shot…' he smiled wryly.

Pushing himself up, he resumed running towards Micky, allowing part of the mana to flood the new injuries as he gathered the rest in his core. At least, he had enough for the Parting Gift now.

A few minutes later, he finally caught a glimpse of his familiar, flying in an irregular path towards him. In fact, it might be more accurate to say it was leaping from tree to tree, inadvertently banking to his injured wing with each beat.

‘I’m here. Bait him over.’

Percy ignored Micky for now, hiding behind the nearest tree, pulling a trickle of soul mana into his eyes, sending the rest to his hand. He felt the sickle form, as the pursuer’s silver silhouette casually approached the bird.

‘Just a little closer…’

Percy didn’t bother circling around the tree, instead launching the sickle through it. He held his breath as the blade spun soundlessly through the air. It was about to hit its mark!

At the last second, the pursuer was startled, clumsily leaping out of the way. He only had enough time to move slightly, the sickle still carving a nasty groove on his upper arm.

“AAAAAAAAAAGHH!!!” the man fell down, clutching his injury.

However, before Percy had the chance to celebrate, his enemy was back on his feet. This time, he was looking his way. Through Mana Sense, Percy spotted three Yellow masses gathering in the air next to the man, taking the form of spears, pointing towards the tree.

The sneak attack had failed.