Wanderer 64

Chapter 64: Maelstrom

The spears pierced through the tree like it was made of cotton, barely giving Percy a chance to dodge.

But his trouble had just begun, as more Yellow mana gathered under his feet. Tilting his body at the last second, he narrowly escaped impalement, though not without a gnarly gash on his upper thigh.

If this had been higher up on the Spire, his opponent wouldn't be able to manifest his earth constructs through the surface of the giant fungi. Sadly for Percy, the ground on the first floor was made of dirt and rock.

At least, Mana Sense gave him the chance to react a fraction of a second early, but even with Circulation, keeping up with a Yellow core was a tall order.

"What the fuck gave you the confidence to attack me?! And what's up with the weird mana flow around your abdomen?!" the man asked without pausing.

Percy was too preoccupied trying to survive the barrage of javelins to reply. Another two landed next to his feet, almost pinning him in place. Luckily, he'd managed to step out of their path just in time.

'I can't keep this up forever.'

Squarely at a disadvantage, he tried dodging backwards whenever possible in a desperate attempt to put some distance between them. It would give him more time to react, not to mention giving his familiar an opening to escape. However, even the physical capabilities of his opponent eclipsed his own, letting him casually keep up with him while continuing his relentless onslaught.

'Shit. Micky can't help. The quarterstaff will snap like a twig. The glove might as well be made of paper. I can't close the distance for a physical blow either…'

A javelin brushed over his head. It would have stabbed through his skull if he hadn't ducked. The earth mage made the next one pop up from the ground at an angle, leaving another deep cut right under Percy's ribs.

"AAAAAAGH!!"

Returning to the Guild wasn't an option either. It was too far to outrun him. Percy gritted his teeth. Soul mana was the only thing that could save him, but it took too long to recover normally.

Still, realizing it was only a matter of time until he made a fatal mistake, he took a deep breath, not giving the mana a chance to settle in his core before pushing it into his channels.

He didn't even bother trying to control where it went this time. He couldn't. Most of his attention was glued to his opponent. His only option was to let it rampage freely until he had enough for another sickle.

A javelin headed for his eye. This one Percy saw too late. He tried parrying with his backhand.

The glove shattered on impact, blood splattering from his left hand as the bones inside cracked, sending a visceral wave of pain through his body.

Percy suppressed a groan, as he continued to evade whatever he could, trying to minimize the damage.

Several seconds later, enough mana had gathered in his channels to begin clashing with itself. Tears formed on his soul, the new surge of agony utterly dwarfing that of his physical wounds.

But he didn't stop it. He didn't have the luxury to grab a hold of the flow or to delay the accumulation. If he failed to craft his weapon, he was done for regardless. The flow shifted towards the new cracks, putting more strain on his soul.

'Just a little more.'

Wherever the mana clashed, more tears opened. Each fresh wound created its own flow, in a vicious cycle that could only end in a horrific death.

Percy was too absorbed to care.

He dodged spear after spear, the cuts continuing to accumulate on his flesh every time he made a mistake. Some were shallow, others deeper, as both his body and soul were on the verge of collapse.

At this point, he couldn't even keep track of how much mana he had gathered. Maybe it was enough for the sickle, maybe not. He lacked the mental capacity to form the spell anyway. He could only keep evading.

Soon, his vision became a blur. He couldn't make out his surroundings and his heartbeats dominated his hearing. The only thing he had left was Mana Sense, barely providing him enough information to keep dodging by the skin of his teeth.

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The mana still raged in his channels. By now he couldn't stop the flow even if he wanted. It rampaged ceaselessly through his soul, tearing and repairing it with each violent gale.

Percy wasn't sure he was even alive anymore. He hoped his muscles still responded to his input, but he couldn't feel them. By now he struggled to even remember the shape of his body.

For a second, he even forgot where he was, almost thinking he was another clone, trying to possess somebody else.

The ethereal cord tightened, his consciousness nearly stripped out of his head. Luckily, he was still lucid enough to resist. If he let this happen now, his death would be guaranteed.

'No… I must stay in my own body…'

He succeeded, his opponent's Yellow core coming into focus once again, as he sidestepped another construct.

'Huh, it was a little slower. Is he finally tired?'

Something new appeared in his vision. Surrounding the Yellow glow in the man's body, a silver silhouette gradually formed.

'Soul Vision? I don't remember activating it.'

More spears. Some flew directly towards him. Others tried to block his escape. A few stabbed from the ground up, in all sorts of insidious angles, trying to catch him unprepared.

Percy dodged one after another. Fewer scraped him than before.

Soon, he noticed something interesting. Right before each attack, the silhouette changed.

Silver flicker.

Yellow glow.

Dodge.

Javelin.

Another flicker.

Another glow.

Dodge again.

Spear.

‘I can begin dodging before the glow!’

Silver flicker.

Dodge!

A Yellow glow.

The spear changed trajectory at the last second, but evading it was still easier than before. This time the silver silhouette wavered! He was surprised!

Percy didn’t care, he just continued dodging as best as he could. The man’s intent betrayed his actions before they were complete. The spells grew slower too. At some point, dodging them was effortless.

Another new sensation took root in Percy’s mind. His hearing. But it wasn’t regular sound.

Howls of pain.

It was his own soul, screaming at him in agony.

Only then did he remember what he was doing. He tossed a fleeting glance at his body. The sight shocked him.

His soul thrummed in a bright silver, raging torrents rampant through his channels. New tears kept forming. His pathways kept shifting. The flow randomly changed, never remaining constant for longer than a moment.

Like a maelstrom.

Percy's eyes widened in horror.

'How am I still alive?!'

He dodged another couple of spears before checking his soul again. More tears formed each second, but they were tiny. Every time the potent mana washed over them, they disappeared! At some point, he'd began to outheal the damage, to the point the injuries only managed to change the flow before fading!

He grinned, shifting his attention to his opponent.

Another spear stabbed through the ground. Percy tilted his head slightly to avoid it.

A torrent of mana gushed to his hand, forming the Parting Gift. It was twice as large as it normally was.

The silver silhouette trembled.

One more spear pierced underneath Percy… but he was ready for it. Falling forward, he let it stab the air behind him, before kicking it with his right foot.

Propelling himself, he dashed towards his opponent, with two types of mana empowering his body.

More javelins formed. Some stabbed at him directly, others tried to cut him off.

They all missed.

Percy stepped around them, weaving and pivoting and… dancing!

"Please, don't!" a shaky voice begged.

However, the sickle sliced soundlessly through the air without stopping. And just like that, a soul was cleaved in half.

As soon as the lifeless body hit the ground, Percy wanted to plop down himself. But there were things he needed to do first.

‘Micky?!’

No reply.

They had put some distance from the familiar during the fight, and he should have passed out from his injuries. Percy felt the crow’s location through the cord, before tossing the corpse on his shoulder and running towards it.

While moving, he threw his body another glance. Both his flesh and soul were covered in nasty wounds from head to toe. Fortunately, the adrenaline combined with two instances of Circulation gave him enough energy to stand. For now at least.

He reached for the healing potions in his pockets.

“Ouch!”

He tried again after covering his hands with cyan gloves, grabbing a pile of wet shards. Only one of the vials had survived, the rest having shattered during the fight. In hindsight, it wasn’t that surprising considering even his robes were in tatters.

Reaching the crow, he pushed a crapload of soul mana through the connection, waking it up. He drank half the potion, before feeding the rest to the bird. It wasn’t that potent, but they’d have to share given the circumstances.

‘Eat him.’ he said, carelessly tossing the body on the ground.

Even ignoring how valuable a Yellow core was, they had to get rid of all the evidence of what happened. Percy hadn't forgotten he'd just committed a serious crime.

As the bird feasted on the corpse, Percy searched the man's possessions for anything of value. He found a pouch containing about a dozen elixirs and a couple thousand contribution points. Next, he buried everything else a few meters deep by the time Micky was done. Only a third of the corpse had been consumed, the bird not being large enough to devour the whole thing in one sitting. He'd have to finish the rest tomorrow.

The two found the nearest tree, before plopping down at its base. Their situation was still precarious given the partially eaten body and the hundreds of stone spears littering their surroundings. If somebody stumbled upon them, they'd get in a world of trouble.

However, neither of them could summon enough strength to clean up right now. They'd have to do so in the morning, assuming the potion did its job.