Wanderer 68

Chapter 68: Alchemist

Percy stirred the concoction at a modest, yet steady pace. A few bubbles began to form, but not too many. Instead of panicking, he continued going as he had, only carefully adjusting the temperature slightly with his free hand.

A few seconds later, the foam died down, the mixture settling into a transparent gel at the bottom of the cauldron. Carefully pouring the substance onto a membrane over a vial's mouth, he watched it distilled into a clear liquid. The droplets made crisp sounds, splashing inside the sapphire bottle one after another.

"65 drops! Congratulations Percy! That's over 16%! You've improved again!" Orin said.

Letting out a breath he'd been holding, Percy also felt a sense of triumph rising over his achievement. It had already been two weeks since his clone returned, and he'd been able to brew some elixir every day since. His yield had started off at a modest 15%, but it was already slightly higher than that. There was still some way to go before he could be considered a fully-fledged alchemist, but at least the losses were small enough he could stomach them on his own now. A good thing too, as today was his final session sponsored by his mentor.

"Thank you, sir! I owe everything to your kindness." he said.

"How many times do I need to tell you to just call me Orin? And no, given how hard you've been working, I'm sure you would have reached this point sooner or later. I only helped you get started."

Percy chuckled.

"That's still massive. It would have taken me years to gather enough points by myself."

Orin patted his shoulder before speaking.

“In any case, I’m sure you can reach 25% if you keep at it for a few more months. Just promise me you won’t pull off another reckless stunt.”

The young man gazed down at his feet, unable to look the alchemist in the eye.

“Percy… promise me.”

Orin had bought his lie about getting injured by the Starry Soldiers. That much was unavoidable, as the alternative was confessing to murder. However, what exacerbated Percy’s guilt was that he planned to start hunting the Yellow bugs for real. Now that he’d settled his previous concerns, he intended to put his new strength to work.

“The most I can promise is to be more careful in the future.” he replied after a few seconds.

Orin didn’t say anything, instead just patting his shoulder again. The two bid each other farewell as Percy left his mentor’s place for the night. Moving forward, he was still allowed to use the old alchemist’s lab, but he wouldn’t be provided with any more free materials or supervision.

Thinking back to his gains over the past month, he couldn’t help but grin. During his clone’s absence he’d lost a lot of time from hunting, which meant he’d collected much less elixir the normal way. However, adding in the amount he’d looted from his unfortunate victim, as well as the ones he’d brewed himself, he still had over forty vials left.

Each brewing session started with 400 drops of nectar and currently took him around an hour from beginning to the end. Over the last two weeks he’d reliably earned over 60 drops per session, for four sessions per day, meaning that Orin had allowed him to keep over a month’s worth of elixir. However, his income would take a massive drop now that he had to pay for his own materials. After all, he was still brewing at a loss. He sure hoped his new targets would be profitable enough to cover the difference.

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Percy was breathing heavily as he reached the Starry Worker. At least, dispatching it wasn't that hard – it only took a single swipe of his sickle. He owed his exhaustion to something else. Over the past few days, the young man had practiced activating both types of Circulation at the same time and keeping them going for longer.

At first, it had been somewhat tricky to recall how he'd managed to get his soul mana flowing that night. The circumstances at the time had been rather unique. Still, he was able to replicate his success after some trial and error. In fact, by now he could even do it without injuring his soul too much in the process. Unlike the cyan lines of pure mana forming static patterns on his skin, their silver counterparts constantly moved around in a chaotic vortex, resembling a maelstrom centred around his sternum.

In any case, the new version of the art further enhanced his physical capabilities, letting him run even faster atop the giant mushrooms. That alone would have increased the number of glands he harvested, but he figured he'd get the most benefit by taking down the stronger variants. Sadly, the Starry Soldiers were located on the other side of the Spire, so he'd have to spend a few hours running back and forth every day. At least, he and Micky could minimize the wasted time by killing the Orange variants en route to their cousins.

'I should start learning the Crystallization technique too.' Percy groaned.

Killing the workers wasn't very difficult, so there was no better time to practice new spells than while travelling. The only issue was this particular technique required him to compress his mana over longer sessions. The frequent interruptions every time he had to kill a bug would be annoying. Still, even if it wasn't very efficient, he could work on it over time.

Overall, Percy doubted he'd have enough nectar for over two hours of alchemy per day, which meant he would have about 16 hours to hunt on the second level. Of those, one was needed for the round trip from the settlement, while six more would be spent traveling to and from the location Nesha had told him about. He estimated he and Micky could get around 12 workers in that time. That left him about nine hours to hunt the Yellow cored bugs, and he'd need to kill at least seven of those per day to make as much nectar as he normally would.

'And I should try teaching Micky Circulation too.'

The crow still couldn't speak, but Percy guessed it was likely because it didn't need to. The bird was already more intelligent than a human child by now – not something a two-year old beast should be capable of. Even more importantly, due to beasts constantly fighting with their bodies, Micky didn't

need any physical training. He only needed to clear his remaining pathways, to temper them and then find the correct pattern for the mana to flow in. Given how smart he was and with Percy guiding him, he should be able to get it down within a few months. In fact, he harboured some hope the process would jog his friend's memories, making him learn faster, or helping him remember who he was.

'If all else fails, it's still worth it for the powerup.'

So once again, Percy had ended up with quite a few projects to work on in parallel. The increased profits from his lucrative prey would hopefully offset the losses from his subpar brewing, allowing him to continue funding one of his cores. He'd keep at it until he surpassed a 25% yield, at which point he'd switch to full-time alchemy. That should eventually get him enough points to cover for both of his cores.

In the meantime, he'd keep feeding his familiar wasps, working on both Micky's advancement and his own recovery, so that he could resume sending out clones once a month. The bird would also focus on learning Circulation, which would allow it to hunt the workers on its own when mastered. That would let them split up, focusing on different tasks. At the same time, Percy would work on Crystallization, eventually incorporating the cyan powder into his alchemy. He still wasn't sure what the exact result would be, but he had a hunch he could use it to improve the elixirs in some way.

'No time to waste. There are only four-and-a-half years left until the lotus blooms.'

Percy understood he still had a long way to go until he was strong enough to have a real voice in his family. Well, if he wanted to accomplish that without spilling his secrets or hugging baldy's thighs, at least.

CAW! CAW!

Micky suddenly pecked his shoulder, breaking him out of his thoughts.

'You're right. I'm thinking too far into the future. For now, let's focus on what's right in front of us.'

They were there. They had finally reached the location of the Starry Soldiers.

Percy grinned.

He was about to have his first proper fight against a Yellow cored beast. And with his own body at that.