Wanderer 80

Chapter 80: Preparations

“Evaluating request…”

‘Are you sure there is no other way?’ Gabe asked.

‘Hey, don’t complain! Tattoos might hide the core from Mana Sense, but people would still be able to see it through your skin. And you obviously can’t wear a shirt either due to your wings.’ Percy replied.

Before they could begin filling up Gabe’s second core, they needed to ensure it was concealed. Based on what Percy had come to learn about the Vault of Magic, the last thing they needed were the gods in charge finding out such a juicy specimen had fallen in their grasp.

Of course, Percy had inadvertently left plenty of evidence of his presence already – whether it was Gabe’s miraculous survival or the extraordinary amount of life mana they had used up. Adding all the things they were planning to do over the next few weeks, the cat was already halfway out of the bag. Though most of it couldn’t be avoided, they could at least take care of the rest.

“Evaluation complete. Custom item is valued at 37 credits. Current balance: 26130. Proceed with purchase?” the soulless voice asked.

Percy felt Gabe’s heartache through the connection.

‘I get it! But does it have to be so expensive?!’ he groaned.

‘It doesn’t seem like a lot. It will barely put a dent in your balance.’ Percy said.

‘That’s because it hasn’t been too long since I reached Green. I still have most of my rewards from the fresh batch of challenges.’ Gabe explained. ‘But I have to be mindful when spending them. Getting more won’t be easy.’

Percy nodded in understanding. It should indeed be the case that a resident of the Vault earned the majority of their resources shortly after advancing. The first few waves in each grade shouldn't be too difficult. Though Gabe was already struggling to climb much further. His current credits would have to last him all the way to Blue, which was presumably several decades away.

'Just do it. Or would you rather some god cut you open on an operating table?'

Gabe grumbled some more, but he ultimately acquiesced.

"Yes." he spoke.

"Confirmed. Deducting credits. New balance: 26093. Delivery in 900 rits."

Percy raised an eyebrow. That should be over fifteen minutes. A lot longer than that piece of meat had needed. Then again, the latter was probably an off-the-shelf product they had plenty of in stock. As for the object they'd just requested, it would have to be manufactured on the spot. All things considered, it was already quite impressive the Vault's system could accomplish the task at all – let alone in such short notice. A testament to their advanced technology.

Soon enough, a circular hole opened on the ceiling once more, before the requested object landed on the bed. It was a rolled-up strip of cloth, cut out of an exquisite midnight blue fabric, densely covered in embroidered symbols a few shades lighter. Percy picked it up, noting it was still quite warm – probably because it was fresh out the oven. It was soft to the touch, made of the finest silk he'd ever come across.

Next, he unravelled it, marvelling at the intricate script decorating it. This bandage was both thinner and much shorter than his own, which only served to drive home the insurmountable gap between the Vault's enchanters and Remior's. A quick tug revealed it was also somewhat flexible, yet still strong. It wouldn't be an issue if it had to stretch a little, and it was unlikely to tear easily.

In any case, Percy couldn't help but study the runes a little longer. Due to all his secrets, it would serve him well to learn how to craft this type of enchantment by himself. Gabe didn't bother him either, letting him concentrate for a few minutes – probably a gesture of goodwill, considering how much Percy had done for him already.

Still, the latter didn't get very far. He had to begrudgingly give up after failing to understand anything. His host clearly hadn't lied when he said magiscript was a demanding field.

Not letting this get to him too much, Percy wrapped the bandage around their abdomen a couple of times, before tying the loose ends behind their back.

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'There, all done… I think.'

Between the cube being stingy with the fabric and his host's transparent skin, the core was barely concealed, but it would have to do.

'How do I explain it?' Gabe asked. 'For the first couple of months, I could wrap a regular bandage on top and claim I was injured, but people will eventually start wondering why it's taking so long to heal.'

'Sorry, but I'll be gone by then. You'll have to figure that part out by yourself. For the time being, I suggest you focus on actually surviving until then.' Percy replied.

'Fair enough. So, what's the plan?'

Percy thought about it for a while before speaking.

'Let me handle your second core for now. It took me about a week to get mine filled up, but I'm sure I can do it even faster this time around.'

Without wasting a moment, he activated Mana Sense, looking inward for the new organ. His host's physiology was different to his own, but Percy was a bit of an expert in locating cores and mana channels in all sorts of alien bodies by now.

'What should I do in the meantime?' Gabe asked.

‘Hmmm… Can you dig up any information the Vault has on the Moirai?’

Ever since he obtained his second core, Percy had been winging it, mostly using his two affinities independently of one another. However, he couldn’t shake the feeling he was missing out on something important. An entire culture of people with two cores should have developed some more esoteric arts to fully exploit them – yet Percy had never had the opportunity to learn them before now.

“Cube. What do you have on the Moirai? Also, while you’re at it, check if you have any soul mana stored. User ID: 004527945512.” Gabe said.

“Authorization granted. Evaluating request…”

“Evaluation complete. There are 452 books, 1121 research logs, 9 encyclopaedias and 32653 news reports that mention “Moirai”. Part of the selection is restricted for your grade. Only 321 books, 354 research logs, 6 encyclopaedias and 7564 news reports are available for purchase. Total cost: 35431 credits. Current balance: 26093.”

The response elicited different reactions from Percy and Gabe. The former couldn’t help but rub his hands. He wanted to purchase everything and make his host binge read it, but he knew that wasn’t realistic. As for the latter, the shocking price nearly gave him a heart attack. But the cube wasn’t done quite yet.

“Evaluation complete. Soul mana is listed on the restricted section for Green grade. It is only available through a bonus reward.”

As expected, they still had to work through the challenge, though it was nice to have confirmation the mana actually existed.

‘Try filtering out the fluff?’ Percy suggested, returning to the previous item.

Gabe hesitated for a moment, probably thinking it would still be more than he’d be willing to pay, but ultimately heeded Percy’s request.

“Get rid of anything on the Moirais’ world, politics, history and geography. Only leave behind things related directly to their magic.”

“Evaluating request…”

“Evaluation complete. There are 78 books, 185 research logs, 2 encyclopaedias and 67 news reports available for purchase. Total cost: 6597 credits. Current balance: 26093.”

That did seem to cut out a lot of encyclopaedias and news reports, but not as many research logs – which frankly made sense. Still, it was way too pricey.

“Ignore everything relevant only to gods or specific affinities and bloodlines. Focus on general information about how the average Moirai mortal uses their two cores.”

“Evaluating request…”

“Evaluation complete. There are 24 books, 93 research logs, 0 encyclopaedias and 67 news reports available for purchase. Total cost: 2597 credits. Current balance: 26093.”

‘It’s still way too much. Besides, we don’t have enough time to read all that.’ Gabe said.

Percy creased their brow.

‘Why do I feel you’re leaving out something?’

‘Look, it’s possible to request the system to summarize the information, compiling it into a much shorter document while getting rid of redundancies. It will add a charge for the service, though it should also give us a discount due to the eliminated information. That said, I doubt it’s going to end up below 2000 credits…’ Gabe explained.

Hearing that, Percy wanted nothing more than to slap his host. He only held himself back because he knew it would hurt him too.

‘No, YOU look, you stingy piece of shit!!!’ he fired back. ‘I’m doing my best to save your ass here, and you’re skimping on me over a bunch of credits!’

‘Hey, I have to think about my life after you’re gone too!’ Gabe replied.

‘What’s there to think about?! I gave you a second core! You’ll live twice as long and clear plenty more waves with it! A couple thousand credits are the least you can invest! You’ll make them back in no time!’ Percy didn’t let up.

But his host shook his head.

‘I’ll also need twice as much sizian meat as before. It’s not as simple as you make it sound!’

Well, that was true…

Also, Percy would be lying if he said he wasn’t thinking about himself too. Still, he firmly believed this was in Gabe’s best interest. The credits wouldn’t matter if they failed to fix his soul, plus Percy genuinely thought the insight contained in those books would pay for itself.

‘Gabe… the system has already confirmed it contains the soul mana you need. And you’ve admitted you can’t get to the next bonus reward as you are. We need to get you a lot stronger in a short amount of time. At the end of the day, it’s your money and your life, but if you ask me, you’ll have to take a gamble.’

Gabe remained silent for a few seconds, considering his options.

‘Fine.’