Wanderer 82

Chapter 82: Fifth wave

‘Any progress with that book?’ Percy asked.

Another week had passed since their narrow victory against the fourth wave, though they had yet to challenge the fifth one. Acknowledging their inadequacy, they hadn’t been in a hurry to move on, taking their time to get stronger, as they fought against the same opponent again and again. Challenging a previously beaten wave didn’t reward any credits, but it was still good practice, letting them hone both their magic and their teamwork. Though Gabe was currently back in his room, as the two of them had plenty of work to do even during their downtime.

‘A little.’ he replied, before elaborating. ‘The gist is we can supposedly fuse the two elements, much like a composite affinity. In fact, since both of my cores have elemental mana, the result will be exactly like a composite affinity. However, there are a few complications.’

‘Such as?’ Percy asked.

‘Well, if you have a composite core, the two types of mana merge automatically inside it, without requiring any effort from its user. In my case, I’ll have to expend a lot of willpower to replicate that feat.’ Gabe explained.

‘But there’s two of us! Shouldn’t that make it easier?’ Percy asked.

However, his host shook his head.

‘That’s actually a bad thing. It makes it harder to blend the mana if there are two separate minds in charge. Also, the mismatch between my cores’ grades and the fact that only my fire mana is enhanced by a blessing will create an imbalance of power.’

Percy frowned. If this was true, they’d struggle to get the trick down in time. A possible solution was for Gabe to learn how to use his air magic by himself, but that would put too much pressure on him during the fight. Percy knew first-hand how difficult it was to keep track of two cores at once. It could easily take his host a couple months to get there. Especially since Gabe was in charge of the wings too…

‘The wings!’ Percy exclaimed.

‘What about them?’ Gabe raised an eyebrow.

Percy grinned.

‘Perhaps we don’t have enough time to master the Moirais’ art, but I have another idea to give us an edge in the fifth wave.’

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The golem stood motionless at the other end of the room, its cold gaze locked on Gabe. It looked exactly like the previous one, though its shield had been replaced by a second sword. On paper, that should mean it had sacrificed some defence for the sake of offense, but Percy doubted that was the case.

‘I bet it’s even better at parrying.’ he noted, getting a nod back from his host.

That said, the two of them weren’t the same as a week ago either. Percy had improved the most, having cleared plenty more channels and grown far more proficient with air mana. He’d even briefly considered working towards Circulation, though he’d quickly shot the idea down. Meeting the requirements of the Refined spell would take him way longer than they had.

Oblivious to his guest’s thoughts, Gabe summoned his wings, before readying his stance. Ironically, he was the one who’d improved the least, despite being the actual owner of the second core. Still, he’d grown more accustomed to fighting alongside Percy against the elite golems.

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‘Give it a try.’ he suggested.

Percy acquiesced, focusing his senses on the flow of ambient mana. He'd already experienced Gabe's bloodline ability before, having briefly taken command of the wings back during his first day in the Vault.

However, his plan was to do something slightly different today. The idea was fairly simple – the only reason Gabe's wings manifested out of flames was because of his original affinity. Now that they possessed another core, there was no reason why they couldn't dig even more value out of the bloodline. Indeed, Percy identified a portion of the ambient mana being ignited at Gabe's back. He tugged at the flow to pry it from his host's control, as the latter fought to remain in charge.

One of them focused on the blazing heat burning in their sternum, as the other imagined the softer air mana dancing in their abdomen. Responding to their thoughts, the river of ambient mana split into two components, one continuing to fuel the wings right below Gabe's shoulder blades, as a smaller stream was pulled a few inches lower, forming a second pair below the first.

'Success!' Percy was ecstatic, feeling the new ethereal limbs respond to his command.

'Wow, I can't believe this actually worked!' Gabe said.

Percy sensed some mixed feelings from his host. The latter was happy he could use his bloodline with both cores at the same time, though he wasn't looking forward to juggling all these tasks by himself in the future. But this wasn't Percy's problem. Focusing back on the new wings, he quickly noticed they were both smaller and weaker than the other pair.

It made sense. While the ability was fuelled by ambient mana, its strength was correlated with the corresponding cores' grades. Percy's control was a little clumsy too, but it would have to do for now. After spending a few minutes to adjust to the new appendages, the two looked back at the construct. It was still patiently waiting for them to make the first move.

'I'm going in.' Gabe said, flapping his wings once, soaring halfway to the ceiling.

Meanwhile, the second set remained folded behind their waist. Percy didn't want to interfere with his host's movements, so he'd reserve the new limbs for a time when they actually needed them. For now, he simply augmented Gabe's speed the good old way. That said, their cooperation had grown a lot more refined over the past week. The air mana flowed underneath Gabe's wings, giving him an even greater boost than if Percy had tried to propel their body directly like before.

And just like that, they dove upon the golem, finally beginning the battle.

Surprising no one, the construct raised its swords to parry the white-hot axes, before trying to land a blow of its own.

Gabe ducked and weaved to dodge the colossal blade by a hair's breadth, as he tiptoed around the golem, looking for an opening.

The construct was even faster than the previous one, but Percy expertly unleashed small bursts of air around their body, elegantly augmenting his host's every move, using the minimum amount of mana each time.

Two figures – one man-sized, the other colossal – danced amidst the flurry of slashes, the black ones parting the viscous tar in their passing, as the white-hot ones raised the temperature to a dangerous level.

The axes were even hotter than before, with Percy's air mana adding more fuel to the flames, while sharpening them and accelerating them further than Gabe could manage on his own. By now, their skin was blistering and peeling, as a red sheen coated the obsidian golem.

Every now and then, the weapons collided, sending loud shockwaves bouncing around the walls of the cube, throwing the previously calm surface of the swamp into turmoil. No side seemed to gain an advantage, as neither combatant managed to land a single blow. At least, that was the case until Gabe and Percy's mana was exhausted a minute later, leaving them at the golem's mercy.

A massive sword descended, its edge sinking halfway through the floor, though Gabe was already a few meters back, Percy having saved their asses with the first flap of their new wings.

The golem returned to its default state, giving them a chance to recover. Percy had yet to fully understand what the condition was for the constructs to bother chasing. His best guess was that disarming it would do the trick.

'Do you want to keep going like this?' he asked his host.

While they seemed equally matched with the golem at the moment, they possessed an advantage their opponent sorely lacked.

The ability to grow.

Right now, they could only use their newer limbs as a way to disengage, but it wouldn't be long until they weaved them into their fighting style. Plus, it would only be a matter of time until they grew accustomed to the golem's movements too.

'Sure.' Gabe shrugged. 'Let's take it nice and easy with this one.'