Wanderer 85

Chapter 85: Gabe's gamble

Gabe's palms burned as the white sphere expanded between them. The dark blob rapidly took shape right below the duo, putting pressure on them to fuse their mana faster.

Naturally, they'd already abandoned all caution, willingly accepting the painful cost of the technique. Their eyeballs felt like they were melting in their sockets, the entire front side of their body peeling.

'We need to time this right.' Gabe said. 'We'll only get one shot.'

Percy nodded.

'Yes. There're three things we need to do at once. We have to push the rest of our mana into the sphere, while at the same time unleashing your blessing to raise the temperature even further. Meanwhile, I'll try to direct as much of the explosion towards the golem and away from our face.'

'Make those four things then. Let's also try tossing our wings into the mix. Even if the ambient mana fails to add to its strength, it might shield our body from some of the damage.'

With the plan set in stone, the duo held their breath, focused on their opponent's form. Of course, they couldn't gaze at it directly, as their head was tilted away from the radiant star thrumming between their hands, but they could still observe it through Mana Sense.

The vague outline of Green finally finished taking the shape of the golem, complete with four sabres tightly grasped in its fists. Not wasting a moment, the two rushed to their tasks before their enemy started hurling weapons at them.

First, they stopped flapping the wings, only slightly adjusting them to maintain their orientation, allowing themselves to fall closer to the construct. Pushing all the mana out of their two cores, they let it gush through their channels, soon flooding the spell with an influx of fuel, causing it to burn brighter than ever before.

The golem finally reacted, tossing the first sabre towards them. But they were ready for that. They dodged with a quick flap of their upper wings, before returning to their previous position using the second pair.

Next, estimating they were already close enough to the golem – hardly three metres away – they finally folded all four wings to their chest, dipping the tips into the sphere.

To nobody's surprise, the mana from their sternum had already dominated its counterpart, technically making the attack more of a fire affinity spell laced with hints of something else. Its temperature had already surpassed anything they'd tried before, as it happily devoured part of the wings too.

They heard the golem throw another blade, but they didn't care. This one never reached their body, melting mid-flight, unable to withstand the intense heat of the sphere.

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A few scorching droplets landed on Gabe's skin, causing him to wince as his flesh sizzled even faster in those spots. If it hadn't been for his passive resistance to heat, he would have long turned to ashes by now. But the two were already far too deep to back down. When they were mere inches above the golem's head, they finally let go of the mana, doing their best to divert it away from their body.

Making a shrill, high-pitched sound, the sphere burst out in every direction. The shockwave itself wasn't that powerful, as the spell's focus was its luminosity and heat.

The last thing Gabe and Percy saw through their closed eyelids was a flash of white, as a warm trickle rolled halfway down their cheeks, before evaporating. They could also tell when their left hand literally crumbled into dust. The entire front side of their body felt like it was dropped on a frying pan.

Yet, despite all the pain and worry, Percy couldn't help but feel some fleeting pride over the sheer power of the spell he'd just helped cast. It had truly pushed the upper limit of what a Green core should be capable of. That said, his Status remained silent, as this wasn't something he could reproduce on his own. Though, had he been the one responsible for naming it, he did have an idea what to call it…

The light affinity spell, Collapsing Star.

Luckily for them, the viscous tar coating the room's floor cushioned their landing, sparing them from further injuries. Of course, the bubbling liquid was rather hot to the touch, but it couldn't compare to the attack they'd just eaten to their face. Though it did aggravate their burns some more.

Sinking to the bottom, they remained motionless on the floor, waiting with hope for their victory to be announced. And soon enough, the viscous metal was drained out of the room, as the soulless voice spoke again.

"Congratu… cleared… rewards…"

The tale has been illicitly lifted; should you spot it on Amazon, report the violation.

The two had some trouble making the words out through the ringing in their ears, but there wasn't any question as to their contents. Oblivious to Percy's thoughts, the system kept speaking.

"Awarded… Current…"

"Wave… Bonus reward… request… limited…"

'Gabe! You're up!' Percy prodded his host after realizing he'd remained silent for a few seconds too long.

'W-What happened?' the latter asked, apparently only now regaining consciousness.

'We've done it! Get it to heal you! Remember to ask for the soul mana first.' Percy advised.

Gabe tried nodding, but even this slight motion hurt.

"H-Heal… my soul… and my body." he spoke in a hoarse voice.

“Evaluating request…”

Percy sure hoped the cube had heard the message clearly. It would be so stupid to fail at the last stretch because of a simple miscommunication. Luckily his worries had been misplaced, though the response wasn’t the ideal one. Not that they heard it in its entirety, but they still made out the gist of it.

“Evaluation complete… outside parameters… only eligible… one type of mana… prioritize soul…?”

‘It’s your call Gabe. My offer is still up. What do you want to do?’

Before coming to the Vault, Percy had no intention of creating a second familiar anytime soon. While he’d grown somewhat used to having two connections at the same time, it would inhibit his ability to send out more clones for the foreseeable future.

Of course, it would be worth it if it was part of his project to get a Starry Wasp familiar, but that wasn’t on the table right now. Sadly, he had no idea how to get his hands on a suitable egg. Still, he wouldn’t abandon his new friend for his own convenience.

‘What do you think about the state of my body?’ the latter asked.

Naturally, Gabe understood his own physiology better, but he knew Percy had possessed dozens of dying bodies in the past. Evidently, he could use a second opinion. Percy remained silent for a few moments, considering it. Every now and then, he tried moving a muscle, gauging the condition of his host’s various body parts.

‘I don’t think your wounds are quite lethal, but they aren’t exactly minor either. I’m sure you’ve noticed some of the most egregious injuries already.’

Gabe sent a mental nod back. He’d lost both eyes and one hand. What wasn’t as clear was whether the remaining limbs could be salvaged. Even if they could, the numerous burns on his body would easily take several months to heal.

At first, Percy had thought his friend could just look for a mortal with the life affinity to heal him, but Gabe had already explained that was unlikely to work. Mortals in the Vault were highly competitive, as the available resources were limited. There was no sense of camaraderie between them, plus the gods liked things this way, as it helped them cultivate the strongest ones. Sadly, Gabe would only have himself to rely on.

Worse still, his next opportunity to fix his body was decades away, at best. Even if he mastered the rest of his arsenal after Percy left, he couldn't reach the twelfth wave in either the "swarm" or "gauntlet" challenge. Probably not even if he'd been healthy. Certainly not in his current state. Plus, getting into magiscript would be much harder now that he was both blind and crippled. In fact, advancing to Blue didn't exactly guarantee he'd clear the sixth wave either. It was entirely possible he was stuck like this forever.

'I'd still rather give this a shot… I don't think reincarnation is my cup of tea…' he spoke after a while.

Percy didn't say anything, respecting his host's decision.

"Heal my soul." the latter said.

By now, the ringing in their ears had subsided somewhat, letting them hear the cube's next words more clearly.

"Accumulating soul mana. Healing begins in 6 rits."

Though they'd been working towards this very moment for weeks, Percy was suddenly overcome by a wave of panic, realizing they were mere seconds away from parting for good. What was he even supposed to say to a friend he might never see again?!

A crisp sound broke him out of his thoughts, as something soft brushed through the air. The familiar feeling of a cool droplet landing on their forehead was soon followed by a refreshing sensation spreading through their soul. Wherever it passed, the cracks in Gabe's soul rapidly closed. Not wishing to waste their last few moments, Percy said the first thing that came to mind.

'I'm so sorry for leaving you behind in such a shitty state.'

Perhaps he should have gone with something more positive, but he did feel strongly about this. While Percy had only promised to do his best to help Gabe, returning to Remior without knowing whether he'd succeeded didn't sit well with him. Especially since he was leaving his friend crippled, and with a heavy secret to bear.

However, a wave of amusement soon seeped through their bond.

'What are you apologizing for?' Gabe asked. 'It's not your fault I got myself killed before we met. As far as I'm concerned, you're leaving me better than you found me.'

Another droplet fell, causing Percy's soul wisp to recede even further down the mending cracks. The patches he'd been struggling to hold together continued to fizzle out, no longer required. And as he started getting pushed out of the vessel, Percy noticed the pull of his main body had grown extremely strong, trying to pry him out of this world. But he wasn't thinking about that. His mind was focused on Gabe's words. Hearing his friend didn't blame him lifted a weight off Percy's chest.

'Then I suppose the only thing left is to wish you a quick recovery. And… who knows? Maybe I'll visit again sooner or later!'

Gabe chuckled.

'Huh, as if it's so easy sneaking into this place…'

'Hey, who do you think you're talking to?! I'm the sneakiest guy in the universe!' Percy snapped back in mock outrage. 'In fact, all I need is some kind of compass and I can stop wandering around blindly!'

He was part-joking around of course, though he did mean what he said. Percy fully intended to find a proper way of navigating the cosmos eventually. There already were one or two places he'd like to return to, and he was sure there would be even more in the future.

And just like that, the third droplet landed, the divine mana soon sealing the last few injuries in Gabe's soul, pushing Percy out. As the powerful cord on his back tensed, he was finally pulled away, as Gabe's final message echoed in his mind.

‘Thanks, Percy… For everything.’