Wanderer 87

Chapter 87: Advancement

Percy tried – and failed – to get some more sleep following his clone's return. His insomnia was largely a symptom of his stress. He couldn't help but glance around the room every few seconds, fully expecting to see Metatron standing there, smirking at him.

Only when the sun rose did Percy finally shake off his rampant paranoia. Of course, logic had told him hours ago he'd most likely be alright, but it wasn't until the warm rays snuck past the curtains, gently caressing his face, that he managed to put his worry to rest.

Though, the new Decree hadn't been the only thing keeping him awake. There was more – some of it even being good news! While he'd been exhausted after another day of brewing, he was always a little reinvigorated whenever a clone returned. The missing soul fragments tended to fill him with energy as they settled in their rightful place.

And to top it all off, today was special in more ways than one.

'It's finally happening!' Percy struggled to contain his bubbling enthusiasm.

Through an amusing stroke of luck, the end of his trip had coincided with another important development. The first strands of Orange had appeared in Percy's second core the day before!

Estimating that around 12 hours had passed since the last dose, he sat cross-legged on the bed, before stretching his arm to grab a gemstone vial from the nightstand.

POP… PTUI

Naturally, Percy didn't miss a beat, uncorking it and spitting out the lid with a single motion, gulping its contents down before the cork even landed on the floor. And as soon as the elixir settled in his stomach, he drew some mana from his abdomen, swirling the two substances together with practiced ease. Only when the deattuned beast mana finished bonding to his own did he begin circulating them back and forth to his second core.

Percy activated Mana Sense, watching as wave upon wave of mana washed over the crystalline walls. Usually, one didn't need to directly observe the purification process, but he wouldn't miss this moment for the world.

Whenever he pulled the mixture inwards, it chipped away at some of the dimmer Red segments, causing his abdomen to itch. And every time he pushed the mana outwards, the impurities were the first to go, leaving the ethereal organ a little emptier, though its contents purer.

At the beginning, only a single new strand appeared during each revolution. At that speed, it would take several days for the promotion to be completed. Luckily, it didn't work like that, as the purification rate tended to snowball as one inched closer to the finish line. Two strands appeared together during the fourth cycle, while five of them popped up at once by the tenth.

However, it was still a bit slow.

'It's not going to be enough…' Percy couldn't help but crack a bitter smile.

The advancement was around halfway complete, though the elixir in his stomach was already nearly exhausted. Not that it was the end of the world. Far from it! It just meant he'd have to complete the promotion in the evening. He'd already waited years for this moment – he could wait a few more hours.

'But it's a little anticlimactic…'

Accepting it simply wasn't meant to be, he watched the last traces of elixir about to be consumed.

Yet, something suddenly changed.

At first, a single new strand appeared. It wasn't enough to fill the core by itself, but that was only the beginning. Having crossed some kind of threshold, the newcomer soon attracted its neighbours, as the pure lines of Orange mana twisted together, forming a thicker band. And it seemed to exert some influence on the smaller ones, starting a chain reaction. More of them joined together, as the thicker ropes also began attracting one another.

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Yet there was some final barrier preventing those from merging. They tried to, but couldn’t take the last step, causing them to swirl around the organ even more violently than before. Their ends lashed out against the walls of the core, scraping more impurities out. This caused Percy’s abdomen to burn more intensely than it usually did after a purification session.

Of course, he didn’t panic. Having experienced this before, he knew what to expect.

As the thicker ropes purified the core, they allowed more of the thinner ones to appear. With nowhere to go, they had no choice but to merge much like their predecessors had done mere moments ago.

The situation kept escalating, until the core was filled with only thick bands before long. By now, the Orange colour had overwhelmingly dominated the Red, leaving no more space for new strands to form. This seemed to push the reaction to its final stage, as the densely packed ropes overcame the barrier, fusing together.

The rest happened too fast for Percy to register.

With a satisfying sound reverberating through his body, all his core’s contents fused into a singular blob of Orange, splashing down at the bottom of the organ. The new mana was a lot denser than before, only filling up about a third of the volume.

Though that could easily be fixed. Taking a few deep breaths, Percy quickly replenished his reserves over the next couple of minutes, as a potent wave of vitality washed over his body and soul, elevating every inch of his existence. His senses grew sharper, letting him observe details in the room he’d never quite noticed before. His thoughts became clearer, as time even seemed to slow down a little. But the greatest improvement was to his physical strength, as his muscles twitched, their fibres coursing with new vigour.

‘I’ll never get tired of this.’

Advancing to a higher grade was easily the greatest joy for a mage, comfortably beating even the exhilaration felt after mastering a new spell. It was something most people would only get to experience

a few times in their life. Well, high-borns like Elaine might do it a couple more, but they also tended to live much longer, so it averaged out. Either way, Percy got to enjoy the rare privilege of going through each milestone twice!

'And it hasn't even been 5 years yet!'

The thought reminded him to grab a bowl of cyan powder he'd prepared on the nightstand before going to bed. Dripping a splash of water from a nearby cup, he hastily mixed the two materials into paste before downing it.

It hadn't been that long since he began using the miraculous substance, but it had already proven its worth, having shaved several months off his advancement time. In fact, he'd probably just set a brand-new record – unbeknownst to anyone – for the fastest promotion on Remior!

Furthermore, it would probably become even more effective when he and Orin finalized the new recipe, fully integrating the cyan powder into the elixirs. Something they were extremely close to doing!

'But not today…'

Percy had already notified his mentor he was going to take the day off. After all, he had a new toy he couldn't wait to play around with. And it wasn't even just for fun. He did need to get used to how his spells felt after the advancement, to avoid any surprises in case he ended up in a fight. Furthermore, this promotion would have a significant impact on his ability to condense the crystals, hopefully letting him produce more of them per day. Right now, he could still barely keep up with his needs, but he had to greatly increase his output if he wanted to make money off the new elixirs.

'I suppose it's time to pay my good old friends – the Starry Soldiers – a visit.'

It had been around a year since Percy made the switch to full-time alchemy. Suffice to say, his combat skills had probably grown a little rusty, making this a great opportunity to get in shape again. He could put his new power to the test, while also stretching his limbs.

Leaping to his feet, he took a couple minutes to wash up, before grabbing another dose of elixir and paste for the road.

Leaving his house, he sent a message to his familiar.

‘Morning, buddy! I’m on the way to the Spire! Man, I’ve actually missed you!’

‘CAW?’ the crow sent him a questioning sound back.

From the bird’s perspective, they’d only met a couple days ago. Well, technically the same was true for Percy, but he was still sorting through his conflicting emotions.

‘It’s complicated.’ he said, not bothering to explain.

A few hours later, Percy stood on a giant mushroom, with Micky sitting a few metres away. The former took deep breaths, appreciating the colourful motes boosting his regeneration. Of course, they had them in the settlement too, but fewer made it indoors where he spent most of his time. It was nice getting some fresh air for a change.

Around three dozen paces ahead, a wasp the size of a man was strolling carelessly atop the colossal fungus, completely oblivious to the grim fate that awaited it.

Two sets of glowing lines thrummed underneath Percy’s skin, as he cracked his fists, eagerly eyeing his prey.

‘Well then…’