Wanderer 88

Chapter 88: Synchronization

The soldier stabbed repeatedly with its stinger, trying to poke holes into Percy's brain. Though the latter didn't have much difficulty dodging.

'I can't believe I even missed the scent of their acid…' he thought, sniffing the acrid odour, unbothered by the slight burning sensation in his nostrils.

Ok… perhaps he needed to get out of the lab more. Brewing nonstop was clearly driving him insane.

In any case, Percy had yet to summon any of his weapons, nor had he used a spell other than Circulation. Maybe it was a little reckless of him, taking on a beast a full grade higher barehanded – especially right after such a long break from hunting. That said, his newly sharpened reflexes seemed to carry him just fine.

Not that he wasn't a little out of shape, yet it wasn't nearly as bad as he'd expected. Fighting alongside Gabe over the past month must've helped. While Percy had only been in partial control of his friend's body, and while his host's style had been very different to his own, they'd still faced off against elite opponents at Green. That was a level Percy wasn't even remotely ready to touch by himself. Evidently, the experience had been more than a little eye-opening.

'But why does this feel off?'

He'd already casually evaded dozens of lunges, his agility having grown to a monstrous level following the promotion. The wasp even showed signs of tiring by now. Yet, Percy just couldn't shake this irritating feeling he wasn't giving it his all.

'Weird. I'm using both instances of Circulation at maximum output.'

Oblivious to his thoughts, the insect suddenly disengaged, flying a little higher. Percy wasn't surprised, having expected it to resort to this move sooner or later. He tensed his calves, preparing for the incoming attack. Probably realizing it was outmatched, the wasp didn't hold back, desperately releasing all its venom at once.

Three blobs of purple spread above Percy. Yet it only took him two steps to escape the splash zone, comfortably leaping out of the expanding shadows with plenty of time to spare.

SSSSSSSSSSSSSS

Perhaps, the sheer ease by which he'd evaded the deadly acid should have satisfied him. However, it only exacerbated the feeling there was something more. It simmered beneath the surface, waiting to be unleashed.

'I suppose the advancement has opened a new door for me… Can I push Circulation even further?'

Putting some distance from the bug, he turned his senses inwards. This arrangement suited the wasp fine, as it wasn't in a hurry to follow, instead taking the opportunity to recover a little.

But Percy didn't care about his cowardly opponent, his focus now entirely on the ethereal organ in his abdomen. The core was filled to the brim with mana, as more kept flowing in and out to his channels. In fact, the pathways were all stretched to their limits too, making them unable to accommodate another drop.

Or well… that should have been the case. However, they didn't seem quite as strained as usual upon further examination. Shifting his gaze towards the one in his sternum, he noticed the same phenomenon happening in the second set of channels. The flow coursing through them was about as potent as it normally was, yet he felt he could push it further if he really tried.

'Strange. Is it because both my cores are at the same grade now?'

The interesting thing about Circulation was it both strengthened one's body and required it to be stronger. That was why Percy had needed to exercise for several months before he could use it. It was all about finding the highest stable level at which the spell could operate without harming him. But what happened if a mage had two cores and just as many instances of Circulation?

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‘Let’s find out.’

Taking another breath, Percy pushed more pure mana into his abdomen, forcing it into the corresponding channels. He encountered a lot of resistance – his whole body hurt – but the pathways ultimately swelled a little further to accommodate his wishes. Next, he repeated the process with soul mana, which was even more painful. He couldn’t help but wince as the maelstrom swirled more violently, carving nasty grooves in his soul.

But it held.

Percy paused for a moment to examine his body. Overall, the gains were minuscule – hardly worth the trouble so far. That said, he couldn’t help but notice his channels felt slightly less saturated once more.

‘Is this some sort of positive feedback loop between the two cores?’

“CAW!” Micky called out to him, a trace of worry worming its way into his voice.

‘Don’t worry buddy… I’m being careful.’

Over the next few minutes, Percy continued to push his body further and further, one tiny step at a time. Eventually, there seemed to be no more room for improvement, as both sets of channels settled at their new upper limit.

Only then did Percy stop using Mana Sense, examining himself through his eyes. His muscles had swollen even more than they usually did, his flesh now painted a deep crimson colour. His veins throbbed, as the glow from the cyan and silver lines was almost blinding. And most curiously, motes of mana leaked out of his pores about as fast as they were being replenished, giving his skin a magical sheen, shrouding his body in a dual halo.

‘Ugh… this is going to take some getting used to…’

Everything ached, from head to toe. Not just his flesh, but his soul too. And that was without even mentioning how taxing it was on his mind. While Percy could normally use Circulation all day long, he'd be lucky if he could keep this version up for a couple of hours.

'Another project to work towards, I guess.'

Still, he couldn't help but crack a smile, eager to put this power to the test. He stretched his limbs and flexed his muscles, hearing all sorts of popping sounds coming from his joints. Then he took a step forward.

BZZZZZZZ

The Starry Soldier had spent the last few minutes staring at him cautiously, but it appeared to have run out of patience, Percy's current appearance scaring it out of its mind. It turned around without missing a beat, fleeing at top speed, leaving Percy staring at its back with his mouth agape.

"Seriously?! Come back here!" he yelled, running after it.

At first, the wasp looked like it was going to get away – it was a fast one even among Yellow beasts. It also didn't help Percy's steps were measured, as he was careful not to overexert his body before understanding his limits.

However, he didn't need to be so cautious, as the spell seemed to work as advertised. It greatly boosted both his mobility and resilience, letting him easily keep up with the creature, accelerating with each stride. Before long, he was confidently gaining ground on the bug, leaving it no choice but to fly upwards, trying to escape to the sky.

'As if I'll let you!'

Percy quickly formed a silver sickle before throwing it above the creature, blocking its path. The chase went on for a little longer as he drew nearer and nearer, tossing projectiles at his prey whenever it tried taking an inconvenient turn.

Eventually, the wasp understood it wasn't going to get away, suddenly turning around to land a sneaky stab in Percy's eye. But the young man grinned, his passive Soul Vision having already warned him. With some elegant footwork, he pivoted around the giant insect, soon finding himself staring at it from behind. Before the beast could even tell what was happening, he jumped to its back, stepping on its smooth exoskeleton, grabbing a membranous wing with each hand.

The Starry Soldier crash landed on the giant mushroom, sliding along its surface for about a dozen metres before coming to a halt. It struggled weakly for a few moments, trying to shake Percy off. Not particularly bothered, he took his time pulling out the thin plates of chitin held in his palms.

At some point, the insect did manage to shake him off, but only because his footing loosened after ripping the wings out of their sockets. Next, the creature pounced on him, the two rolling atop the giant fungus engaged in a slugfest.

Of course, Percy could easily put an end to this charade at any point with a Parting Gift. But he didn't. He wanted to savour his new spell, exploring the limits of his physical strength.

He dodged the bug's sharp mandibles, ignoring the putrid droplets of spittle they spread every time they moved. With every opportunity, he tore out another of the wasp's limbs, slowly wrestling the beast to the ground, ripping it apart inch by inch.

Eventually, he stood alone amidst a sticky pool of green, filled with severed chunks of bug flesh. His face and hands were covered in the substance too, though his robes had done their job once more, the enchanted fabric looking about as immaculate as it had earlier that morning.

Percy breathed hard, the fight – or at least the way in which he'd stubbornly chosen to conduct it – having taken its toll on him. Yet his face beamed with a radiant smile, as he revelled in his new strength. And only now did the Status see fit to announce his latest accomplishment.

[Congratulations! Your spell has evolved: Circulation – Refined -> Synchronization – Refined!]