Wanderer 90

Chapter 90: Compromise

The blueish-green concoction stopped boiling, giving Percy a moment of reprieve.

But he couldn't relax for long. The mixture was currently unstable, so delaying could easily cause the yield to suffer. Moving quickly, he grabbed a pinch of ground leaves he'd prepared earlier, tossing the colourful dust in the cauldron. Next, he turned up the temperature much higher than before, stirring it again.

"The rainbow grass seems to work!" Orin exclaimed as he watched it bubble.

Upon learning of the cyan paste's ability to mend one's core, Percy had been trying to incorporate it directly into the elixirs, aiming to maximize its effectiveness.

The first additional step had been relatively simple. He'd only needed to mix the powder with a finished elixir. Naturally, it had involved some heating and stirring, much like the previous steps. That had allowed the crystallized mana to bond with the beast mana already present. And of course, this hadn't been very complicated, so Percy had actually succeeded on his first try!

However, the resulting elixir hadn't worked as intended. The moment he added his own mana to the concoction, it reacted violently inside his stomach, nearly injuring him. After some reflection, the problem had become clear. The recipe for the regular elixirs involved three stages, commonly referred to as the "three pillars" of alchemy.

First, the pacification step delayed the activation of the beast mana, allowing the elixir to work gradually over several minutes rather than surging through the mage's body all at once. During the redirection step, the beast mana was modified to target impurities more strongly than the rest of the core, enhancing the elixir's purifying effects. Finally, the deattunement step allowed the beast mana to blend more easily with the first new type of mana it encountered, so that it could be guided through the user's channels.

And this was exactly where the problem lied. It was precisely because of deattunement that the cyan powder could bond with the beast mana. However, that meant the elixir was no longer deattuned afterwards.

Of course, the solution had been rather obvious too. Since the deattunement was “used up” after adding the cyan powder, all Percy had to do was deattune it a second time. Essentially, the new recipe required five steps now: pacification, redirection, deattunement, bonding and then deattunement again!

Though that came with its own set of challenges.

To start, the same ingredient used for the first round of deattunement couldn’t be used again. At least not without massively impacting the yield and quality of the elixir. In fact, the same was true for the overall procedure. Percy and Orin had discovered it was best to perform the second deattunement at a much higher temperature. That meant they’d needed to modify the procedure, fine-tuning everything to accommodate the changes. Furthermore, not all ingredients could handle the increased heat, greatly narrowing down their options. Ground rainbow grass was simply the most recent in a long string of experiments.

“It’s done!” Percy said once the mixture settled into a turquoise gel.

Distilling the contents of the cauldron into a vial was a struggle, his hands shaking from excitement.

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. We need to make sure it works first.” Orin said, though Percy didn’t miss the grin on his mentor’s face.

Stretching out his arm, he offered him the experimental product, but the old alchemist shook his head.

“You do the honours. It’s your recipe.” Orin said.

It was true.

Percy had led the whole endeavour, testing all the provisional iterations by himself. As for his mentor, he’d only taken on a supporting role, giving him tips and advice whenever he got stuck.

“Bottom’s up then.” he said, before gulping down the liquid.

It tasted just as bitter as the regular elixirs. At least, the second round of deattunement seemed to have done its job, his soul mana easily blending with the substance, guiding it to his core with no issues.

And the moment it reached the ethereal organ, it behaved in a very peculiar way. His sternum both burned and itched at the same time. The exotic substance washed over the core's walls, chipping away at the impurities, mending the resulting scars right afterwards. It was somehow even more unpleasant than the regular elixirs!

A case of literary theft: this tale is not rightfully on Amazon; if you see it, report the violation.

While the damage it left behind was greatly reduced, the dual action of the two materials was rather intense. That was in stark contrast to the refreshing effect of the cyan paste Percy had grown fond of over the past year.

"Well?" Orin impatiently asked about half an hour later.

Only then did Percy shift his gaze back to his mentor, remembering he was still in the latter's lab.

"I guess we'll have to wait a few hours to make sure, but I believe it works."

"How effective do you think it is?"

Percy spent a few moments gauging the state of his core. It was better than if he'd used the elixir and paste separately, though it was hard to estimate exactly by how much.

"I think I'll be able to drink three of these per day." he ultimately concluded.

The old alchemist drew a sharp breath, clearly finding Percy's assessment difficult to accept. Perhaps, he wouldn't have been so surprised if his student had come clean about the details of the cyan powder and paste. Percy had actually held back a lot of information about the substance. For example, he'd yet to disclose where he got it from, nor had he told Orin it could be used even without fusing it into the elixirs.

Obviously, the old alchemist wasn't dumb – he could tell Percy hadn't been entirely honest. Though they'd tacitly agreed to postpone their inevitable argument for after the recipe was perfected. Which, unfortunately, was now. Pulling a couple of chairs from a nearby desk, Orin moved one close to Percy, before sitting on the other.

"Percy… you know we have to talk about this, right?"

The young man shrugged, taking a seat.

"To be honest, I'm surprised you didn't bring it up before now."

"I considered it. But to tell you the truth, I wasn't entirely convinced by your claim you could improve the elixirs. It sounded too good to be true. That said, this has been a fun project, so I figured I'd indulge you and see where it went."

Percy remained silent for a while, contemplating his mentor's words. The latter's explanation was pretty much in line with his guess.

"Now what? You know where I stand, don't you?" he asked.

"I imagine you want to keep this knowledge to yourself. Otherwise, you wouldn't have been so secretive in the first place." Orin said, getting a nod back.

"Yes! I need this! I'm just a Red-born! I worked hard for a chance to catch up to my peers!"

But the old alchemist shook his head.

"You understand me well enough too. I can't agree with that."

Of course not. Orin was too nice and too principled to hold back such a huge breakthrough from the rest of Remior… It was why Percy had been dreading this conversation. In fact, he would have tried

modifying the recipe on his own if it had been an option. Sadly, he'd need years to accomplish that without help.

Orin smiled bitterly.

"Son, I know it's not fair. You did work hard for this… But this is bigger than you or I. Our whole world can benefit from this knowledge! Everyone will reach higher grades! We'll get more Violet cores! More gods!"

Percy clenched his fists.

"I care about Remior! Believe me, I do! And I get how important this is. If some faction invades us, this recipe might make the difference between everyone I know surviving or getting enslaved!" he said.

It was the same conundrum he had about sharing any of the other gains his clones brought back. Though this was a little different. It was easier to claim he'd accidentally stumbled upon the cyan powder. That wasn't the case with an intricate spell like Circulation, or the Moirais' Decree.

"But I need to think about myself too! Nobody else will! I'm currently at the bottom of the barrel. This can help me climb higher. Even if Remior was the strongest world in the universe, it won't mean a damn thing when a random noble steps on me like a bug!"

Orin placed his hand on Percy's shoulder, gently squeezing it.

"Kid, even if we publicize the new elixirs, you'll still benefit from them. I'll make sure you do! If you can't afford them without my help, I'll brew you some personally! If you don't want people to know you came up with the recipe, I'll pretend it was my idea! No matter what, I promise I won't let you suffer a loss!"

Percy felt a fuzzy feeling in his chest. Orin had already done so much for him. He'd mentored him, sponsored him and even helped him with the new recipe. Now he was offering to shield him from all the repercussions too.

Still…

“It’s not that simple. Power is relative. If everyone gets an advantage, then nobody does. Besides, it’s not just about the advancement speed. I was planning to monetize the new recipe. I need the funds...” Percy’s voice trailed off.

He couldn’t tell Orin about Micky, or the enlightenment potions. As much as the man cared about him, his reaction would be the same. And unlike the cyan powder, none of his other secrets were safe to leak. With this, he could at least cut his losses if things went downhill. At worst, he’d miss out on a potential advantage. But the rest could actually endanger him. Orin was about to say something, but Percy raised a hand to stop him. Flashing him a resolute look, he made an offer.

“How about this… Give me a head start. Just 200 years. With the new elixirs, I can advance a couple of times by then. After that, you can share the recipe with whomever you like.”

The old alchemist didn’t immediately decline, which was good news. All things considered, it wasn’t a terrible suggestion. Two centuries might be a long time for a young man like Percy… However, it wasn’t much for the leader of a Great House or a god of the Divine Order. Though, Orin shook his head in the end.

“Normally centuries come and go without much happening at the cosmic scale. But we could still get unlucky. Remember the incident with the lotus a couple years ago? It was a good thing, yet it could easily go differently next time.”

Percy’s expression fell, thinking his mentor wouldn’t agree. Suffice to say, his heart skipped a beat when the man ultimately extended his hand.

“20 years. That’s the highest I’m willing to go. It’s still a gamble, but I suppose you deserve that much.”