Wanderer 94

Chapter 94: Affinity fusion

It had been two weeks since Percy and Nesha settled on the name of their product, and progress had been steady.

Nesha had already reached out to the Asclepius House and hired the Agent. She'd also narrowed down the potential customers to three, having promised to finalize her decision and send the letters by tomorrow at the latest.

Meanwhile, Percy had focused on brewing. Granted, he'd initially lacked the contribution points to purchase the sheer volume of materials necessary – over 40 doses of the regular elixirs per day! Luckily, Nesha had chipped in, buying him the ingredients through the Agent. They both knew they'd make everything back a dozen times over once the sales kicked off anyway.

But none of that was on his mind today.

Estimating he'd prepared enough Aurora Dew to start their upcoming venture, Percy was free to take another day off alchemy. He wanted to practice his magic some more while he still had time to spare. So, he found himself standing atop a softly glowing mushroom once again, the fantastical landscape around him humming with latent energy. Shimmering motes fell lazily from the fungal fronds above, painting his surroundings in all sorts of colours. And another unfortunate wasp grazed carelessly a few paces ahead, the loud buzz of its wings betraying its location no less than its oversized visage did.

'First, let's see how far I can push my spells now…'

Percy took a deep breath, the cool, earthy scents of the Spire mixing with the sharper tang of magic in the air. He activated Circulation with both cores, feeling the familiar rush of mana flooding his channels with power. But he didn't stop there. Having grown a little more accustomed to Synchronization since first discovering it, he could now activate it a bit more quickly. Though keeping it up for long was still difficult.

The moment the technique took effect, he gathered both types of mana in his hands, manifesting his tools. A layer of pure mana formed a pair of gloves. At the same time, the soul mana coalesced into the shape of silver sickles, the ethereal glint of their curved blades resembling crescent moons. Meanwhile

the bug darted erratically in the distance, only now spotting Percy, the undeniable pressure he exerted finally revealing his presence.

'I guess you drew the short end of the stick today pal…'

Tightening his grip on the weapons, he launched forward with no warning, as his boots sank slightly into the spongy surface of the mushroom. He closed the distance in a couple powerful strides, his heart racing in tandem with the steady beat of his magic.

The bug barely dodged the vicious slashes, and only because Percy allowed it to. Naturally, he had no intention of eliminating his training dummy so soon into the fight. Still, the creature was instantly on the backfoot, unable to do much besides clumsily evading his attacks.

Man and insect danced, the former swapping out his spells every few minutes to test them all, as the latter constantly hovered all over the place, struggling to match his footwork.

Over the next few minutes, Percy tried the alternative variants of the Parting Gift – the silver daggers, as well as some throwing stars with three curved blades apiece. He'd developed those in the months before he quit hunting. Later, he even brought the Quarterstaff back from retirement to see how much sturdier it had grown. Finally, he manifested the cyan sheet he'd used to shield himself from the acidic rain, though his Status had never deigned to register it.

'Ok, the results are as expected.'

Obviously, his pure magic had benefited the most from his advancement. Not that the spells were particularly potent, the flimsy constructs falling apart rather easily upon colliding against the creature's exoskeleton. It was to be expected, really, due to their lower grade and lacking affinity. That said, they'd grown at least marginally usable again. As for his Parting Gift, it had already been lethal enough before Percy's promotion, and it had grown more powerful still, mostly thanks to Synchronization.

Satisfied with his improvements, Percy was ready to move on to the next phase. With a quick flick of his sickle, he casually dispatched the soldier, the bug's luck having finally run out. The man-sized creature might have given him a tough fight a couple years ago, but that time had long passed. With its soul cleanly bisected, the wasp's carapace collapsed lifelessly upon the giant mushroom.

“CAW!”

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In typical Micky fashion, the crow eagerly leapt on the carcass, activating Circulation to more easily dig the core out of the bug’s sternum. Not paying his familiar any heed, Percy then concentrated on his mana, gathering both types between his palms.

‘How am I meant to combine them?’

Every affinity had its own properties, meaning each pair was unique and had to be fused in a different manner. While Gabe had run into his share of difficulties, he also had an advantage over Percy. He possessed two elemental affinities. Their fusion was a composite one – light – which existed in nature, making it inherently stable.

Meanwhile, Percy had it easier in other ways, as he controlled both of his cores, and they were currently at the same grade. However, he was also disadvantaged in that his affinities could not achieve a stable fusion. The good news was they could still merge, according to the book he and Gabe had read.

Unfortunately, fusing two otherwise incompatible affinities was trickier. It required the user to actively exert their will upon the mana even more forcefully, essentially commanding it to behave contrary to its nature. Sadly, there were too many possible combinations, and while the documents they’d found had listed a few examples, a pairing between pure mana and soul mana hadn’t been one of them.

‘But it can be done. The only question is how.’

In Gabe’s case, it had been straightforward as his affinities both had physical properties, interacting with one another. Air fuelled the flames, causing them to burn more intensely. From there, Percy and Gabe had only needed to take the reaction to its extreme, ultimately consuming the two substances, converting them to light.

Yet in Percy’s case, that wasn’t an option. His soul mana was incorporeal, and simply phased through the pure mana. The two energies occupied the same space without interacting.

‘One is tangible, while the other isn’t… I suppose this is what the book meant when it said I need to make them behave contrary to their nature.’

Focusing on that clue, Percy allowed most of the mana between his palms to dissipate, the overlapping blobs now shrinking to the size of a strawberry. Perhaps he’d been too greedy trying to fuse more than that on his first attempt.

Next, he concentrated on a single thought – giving the soul mana a physical form. He pictured the silver orb as something he could grab, trying to squeeze it between his hands. Percy had held his soul constructs before of course, but he’d done so with his soul, not his flesh. Next, he imagined the cyan mana touching it and pushing against it.

Nothing.

After going through all sorts of mental exercises over the next hour, he failed to induce any noticeable change.

‘Maybe I have it backwards?’

Without much to lose, Percy spent some more time attempting the opposite – robbing the cyan mana of its substance, hoping it would interact with his soul.

But he failed once more.

‘Well, duh. I obviously can’t make the pure mana incorporeal. That’s a unique property of soul mana. If it was possible to do this, 20% of the people on Remior would essentially be walking around with a soul affinity…’

He had to force the mana to behave contrary to its nature, but he couldn’t just ignore its nature entirely… And the nature of soul mana… no, the nature of souls, was to occupy living bodies, controlling them.

Percy’s eyes widened in realization.

‘That’s it! I need to make my soul mana “possess” my pure mana!’

Confident he was onto something, he overlapped the spheres again. Next, he willed them into cubes, then pyramids, cones, cylinders and other shapes. He observed them with both regular sight and Soul Vision, paying attention to his timing. At first, it was a little off, as he’d never done anything like this before. Sometimes the pure mana would transform sooner, while other times the soul mana would.

But he gradually improved, the transitions slowly beginning to sync up more and more. Percy intentionally allowed himself to fall into a trance, trying to trick his mind into thinking of the two objects as one in the same – components of a greater whole. He imagined the silver shape as nothing more than the soul of the cyan one, hiding within its vessel, obligated to follow its every movement.

At first, this seemed like another exercise in futility. Yet Percy wasn’t in a rush to give up. He had a hunch it was worth trying for a while longer. He could swear he felt some faint feedback from the two objects every now and then. It was as if the silver mana latched onto the cyan shape at times, requiring less prodding from Percy to copy its transitions.

“CAW?”

Percy vaguely heard his familiar call out to him. It was only then he realized he’d deactivated Synchronization entirely at some point, having grown too tired to keep it up. He wasn’t sure how long he’d been at it, but the sun was close to setting.

‘Just a few more minutes.’ he thought, diving into the exercise again.

More time passed, as Percy continued to play with the two types of mana between his palms, his attention glued to the twin shapes.

“CAW! CAW!!!”

Hearing the crow’s cries, the young man noticed it was dark already. Probably late at night too, in fact. Remembering the settlement was a few hours away on foot, Percy decided to finally call it a day. It

sucked to return empty-handed, but perhaps this wasn't the sort of thing he could master after a single session.

'Alright buddy… Let's go…' he replied, allowing the mana to dissipate.

However, something unexpected happened. Right as the two spheres shattered into motes of silver and cyan, they revealed a third, smaller shape resting inside. It was only about the size of a pea, but it looked like it was made of an entirely different material than the others.

'Don't tell me!'

Unable to contain his excitement, Percy carefully pinched the substance between his thumb and index finger, noticing it was corporeal. It felt exactly like his pure mana to the touch, though its colour was different – an amalgamation of its components.

A pale shade of teal!