Wanderer 15

Chapter 15: Soul clone

'What's gotten into her?'

Percy had no idea what had brought on that outburst from Elaine yesterday. At least she'd seemed more concerned than hostile, which was good news.

Unfortunately, he couldn't heed her plea to stop using his bloodline. Especially now that he'd finished mending the cracks and could finally begin cultivating his first proper clone in earnest.

Using Soul Vision, he scanned his soul carefully, willing his ability to activate. Unlike the previous time, he held back significantly, only allowing the tiniest strand of mana to seep out of his core.

"Careful." said baldy, sitting next to him.

Starting today, the two had resumed their training sessions, though his grandpa was currently focused on Percy's experiment, ready to intervene if necessary.

Under the influence of his bloodline, the mana leapt out of his core more violently than usual, like a claw grasping everything in its path, pushing itself out of Percy's chest. The sudden pain made him wince, causing him to grab the mattress tightly, nearly ripping a hole in his bedsheets. Despite his preparations, he wasn't quite ready for this.

He hurriedly deactivated his ability before it did any further damage.

PANT, PANT, PANT

"Are you ok?" baldy asked.

It was only a few minutes later that the young man steadied his breath, calming down enough to answer.

“No wonder I passed out last time. Back then, I pushed all my mana into it like an idiot.”

He shook his head, reactivating Soul Vision to assess the situation. His soul was in much better shape than his previous attempt, but it hadn’t exactly made it out scot-free either. A few new cracks had appeared near his chest, where the ghostly claw had tried piercing out of his body.

They would only take a couple more days to heal, but it meant he had to slow things down again. At least, that gave him the chance to come up with a better plan.

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Three days later, Percy pushed mana out of his core, letting it ripple through his soul. He’d already mended the new batch of cracks, but he wasn’t ready to tap into his ability just yet.

Instead, he was trying to replicate his family’s technique, to see what effect it might have in his case. His grandpa had made it look easy during his demonstration, but Percy quickly discovered that getting the waves of mana to flow properly was rather tricky.

Where almost all of baldy’s mana had reflected uniformly off his skin and towards his hands, Percy’s instead bounced randomly from one corner of his soul to the other. He struggled to get even a tenth of it to head in the correct direction. Whenever he adjusted the intensity or the angle of the flow to make one side of his soul work, the rest fell out of phase.

Though Percy wasn’t deterred, knowing a lot of it came down to practice. After all, Archibald had been using this technique for centuries.

Still, there was another issue. Life mana was meant to flow through one’s physical body, which was relatively rigid. This wasn’t the case for Percy, who was channelling it through his soul, flickering around like an amorphous flame.

That said, it wasn’t all gloom and doom.

‘Let’s hope this works better.’

He and Archibald had modified the technique slightly, hoping to make it more suitable for him. Rather than gathering the mana in his hands, forming the clone between his palms, they figured it would be easier to concentrate it near his chest, just an inch from his sternum. After all, that was clearly where his ability wanted it to go.

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Percy pulled mana from his core, sending it randomly in all directions. Some was reflected towards his sternum right away, while the rest bounced around a few times. Overall, about a quarter eventually made it to his chest where he wanted it, albeit at different intervals. Most of it, however, either leaked from his pores, or got reabsorbed into his core.

“Hmmm… We might be on to something. Try playing with the timing until the waves converge.” his grandpa advised after being brought up to speed.

Percy nodded.

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The young man stared intently at the small silvery bump right in front of his core. He’d spent a long time observing how the mana got reflected, playing with it as he fired it in various directions, eventually managing to gather about 40% of it at once.

It had taken him another week to get here, and he didn’t think he’d be able to improve much more in the short term. Thus, he and Archibald had agreed to try and make do with this current version of the technique.

Percy repeated his actions, observing the changes. As soon as the waves gathered, they caused his soul to swell in that spot for an instant.

‘I almost look like a pregnant lady.’

Except he wasn't a lady. Plus, the bump was in his chest, not his belly. And in his soul, not his flesh. It also didn't last long before deflating. Ah, and he wasn't trying to carry a baby, but a ghostly clone he could send out to uncover the secrets of the universe. Still, close enough.

"The biggest problem is that it reverts right away, so I don't have enough time to make progress. If only I could hold it there for a moment…"

Baldy scratched his chin.

"Well, why can't you?"

The young man pondered over his grandpa's question. It wasn't like he hadn't considered it, but there were a few issues with that. The first was that his soul flowed about an inch under his skin, so it was harder to grab a hold of.

'I suppose if I time it right, I can catch it when it bumps.'

The other problem wasn't as easy to solve, however. He'd need to use his mana to interact with his soul, which was dangerous. If he wasn't careful, he might injure himself.

SIGH

"No pain, no gain…"

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Once more, Percy fired the mana from his core, letting it bounce all over. At the same time, his eyes remained glued to the area right in front of his sternum. The moment his soul bulged, he closed his fingers around it, grabbing the protrusion as softly as he could.

Over the past five days, the young man had learned to coat his hand in a layer of soul mana. At first, it had looked like a glove, though it hadn't taken him long to realize he didn't need to cover his whole palm. Only his fingertips ever came in contact with his soul.

Right now, his right hand looked like he had stabbed five silver cherries with his fingers. It was a bit silly, but he didn't care about optics.

'Just a little more.'

Percy pulled his soul gently, letting it stretch like an elastic fabric. Everything was going well, at least while the silver flame remained within the confines of his flesh. The moment part of it exited his skin, however, all hell broke loose.

"AAAAARRGGGHHH!!!"

His soul squirmed, frantically struggling to return inside his body where it belonged, plunging Percy into a world of agony in the process.

Soldiering through it, he held on to the bump, as tears formed not only where he touched it, but in other parts of his soul. At least it wasn't his first time going through something like this.

Though souls were surprisingly resistant to blunt damage, that only seemed to be the case while they remained within the safety of their body. Once removed, they apparently turned a lot more fragile. Still, Percy had never expected to use his bloodline painlessly. His only goal had been to optimize the process as much as possible, to minimize the risks involved.

'Can't make a soul clone without a few cracks.'

A few seconds later, the young man's lips curled up as the situation stabilized somewhat, the pain becoming more bearable. A few tears continued to form, but not as quickly as before.

Next, he used his family's technique again, sending more waves of mana around his soul. This time, he allowed the new cracks to absorb whatever mana they could, to offset some of the damage.

Percy remained in that position for several hours, slowly feeding the nascent clone while struggling to keep his soul from falling apart. The trickiest part was that he ran out of mana every so often, forcing him to hold everything still until he recovered enough to continue.

'It's going well, all things considered…'

The bump in his hand had already quadrupled in size, though he wasn't sure how much he needed for a functioning clone.

Shrugging, he let go of his soul, watching it snap back into his body. It sucked to give up on the last five hours of work, but he wouldn't be able to complete his clone during this session. Sadly, he couldn't pause and resume his progress like the others, which meant he'd have to do the whole thing in one go.

'I seem to be on the right track. I'll go for it after a good night's sleep.'

Next, he wiped the sweat off his brow before turning to baldy. He was about to explain his thought process, when he found his grandpa staring at him with a shit-eating grin plastered all over his face.

"What's up with the creepy look?"

"Percy. I didn't want to interrupt you earlier, but your second core stopped accepting mana two hours ago."