Wanderer 16

Chapter 16: Second core

It took him a few moments to truly register baldy's words. Then, it was as if the floodgates opened, a wave of vigour washing away his fatigue. His heartbeat sped up, as he willed his Status to appear.

Percival Avalon

Mana cores:

Bloodline:

???:

'Finally!'

It had taken months – although they'd felt closer to centuries – but it was finally over!

Of course, Percy would be lying if he said he wasn't slightly disappointed. He had secretly harboured hope of the new core awakening at a higher grade. If only it could have started off at Yellow, it would have changed everything.

But alas, there was no point letting his greed spoil an otherwise good thing.

"Well?" baldy asked.

Percy looked at his grandpa. His expression was also bright, painted with curiosity and excitement.

'This is all because of him.'

He wouldn’t forget the countless hours Archibald had spent filling his core up, one drop at a time. How could he? The man had competed with a titaness! And won!

Well, ok... It was more of a tie. And he cheated. Still. Few could boast of the same!

“Thanks.” Percy said. “For everything.”

Some moisture gathered in the corner of his grandpa’s eyes. But then he blinked, and it was gone. Next, he raised his hand towards Percy’s forehead and… flicked him.

“Ouch!” the young man exclaimed. “What was that for?!”

“If you want to thank me, stop torturing me and tell me what your Status says.”

‘Still a prick though.’ Percy rolled his eyes.

“What is there to say? It’s at Red which sucks. The affinity has question marks.”

Baldy nodded. Then, he took something out of his robe. It was a long bandage, covered in all sorts of strange glyphs.

“What’s this?” Percy frowned.

“It’s warded to conceal mana. From now on, make sure to always have it around your waist. It will hide your second core from Mana Sense, although only while it’s idle. Don’t use it in front of others.”

Percy accepted it, before wrapping it as per his grandpa’s instructions.

“Well then… Can you feel it inside your body?” baldy asked. “Try using it.”

The young man didn’t need to be told twice, also eager to put his new toy in action. Closing his eyes, he recalled his experience sensing his original core for the first time, right after his awakening. Turning his senses inward, he scanned the area around his abdomen, searching for the new organ.

Perhaps, he could have used Mana Sense to speed up the process, but he didn’t mind taking a bit longer. Frankly, this all felt nostalgic, and he wanted to savour it.

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Pinpointing the core’s location with any certainty took a few minutes. The new vessel was empty, without a hint of mana flowing in or out, making it hard to spot.

‘I guess that makes sense.’

Percy’s first course of action would be to fill it.

With some mental prodding, he managed to stir it up. Repeating the exercises he had been taught as a child, he tried to pull the first strand of ambient mana into it. It was difficult. Like pushing honey through a blocked pipe.

Of course, the young man wasn’t a novice in mana manipulation, having done this daily for the last decade. Still, he normally used the core in his sternum for that, and an entirely different set of mana channels. Learning everything again would take some time.

“I’ll need a couple of days to get it to a useable state.”

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A week passed, which was a bit longer than his estimates. Having gone through all of this before certainly helped, but it wasn’t exactly smooth sailing either. It was like learning to write with his left hand.

‘Well, if I only found out I even had a left hand five minutes ago...’

That said, he eventually got there. He could now reliably draw mana into his new core – albeit clumsily. Catching up to the other one would take longer though.

In any case, he had finally filled it up. Its capacity was a bit lacking due to its grade, but that didn’t mean he was without gains. As soon as Percy drew the first sliver of mana, he noticed an immediate change in his body. His muscles surged with strength, his senses sharpening as he felt more… alive.

He’d expected this, having experienced something similar during his recent promotion. The changes were more subtle this time around, but it did confirm his second core would also influence his body and – with some luck – his lifespan.

While he didn’t know how it would all scale, he guessed raising both to Yellow might even let him live long enough to reach Green.

‘That’s in the distant future though. For now, let’s see what I can do with it.’

During the past week, Percy hadn’t pulled any mana out of his second core. He had only focused on clearing the first few channels and filling it up. It was finally time for the main event.

“Hopefully we can figure out its type without another assessment.” baldy said.

Hearing his grandpa, Percy’s feelings on the topic were complicated. Having another rare affinity would be amazing, but it would indeed raise some complications. He couldn’t exactly go back to the temple, could he? How would he explain it?

“Fingers crossed for a life affinity.”

It was one of the few rare affinities they wouldn’t have trouble identifying on their own. Also, it would let him use the regular form of his bloodline too.

The duo activated Mana Sense, as Percy pulled some mana towards his hand. The flow was partially obstructed – another channel he would have to clear later – but not right now.

A blob of cyan soon coalesced inside his palm.

It felt nothing like soul mana. First, it was visible to the naked eye, its colour close to Elaine's. But it wasn't a water affinity, this was a couple shades paler.

Another difference was that it had substance. Unlike the ethereal wisps of soul mana which he now knew he could only hold with his soul, he could feel this new energy pressing against his skin as he squished it in his fist.

His expression stiffened, a bad premonition bubbling up. He turned to baldy, only to see his smile had also soured.

"I'm sorry Percy."

The young man's heart sank as he opened his Status once more, reading the new word that had appeared next to his second core's grade.

The Status was a strange thing.

While the affinity tests were a guaranteed way to fill in many of the blanks, a lot of the information could also be revealed based on one's comprehension. It was why common affinities were so easy to identify, as everyone was familiar with them. Had Percy known more about soul mana, he could have even recognized it on his own, saving him the trip.

For the same reason, it wasn't very difficult to identify his newest mana type. Not that he was particularly happy about that…

'What sort of bullshit is this?!?'

Somehow, his second core had ended up at an even lower starting point than his first! Not only at Red, but also lacking an affinity! Percy doubted he'd get much use out of it. Even when he raised it to Orange – five years from now – it would at most let him produce some weak attacks at the level of a Red core.

Baldy placed his hand on his shoulder, squeezing it gently.

"Don't let this get to you. It's still a good thing."

The young man remained silent for a minute.

"Grandpa, have you ever heard of a way to change one's affinity? Or to raise one's grade faster?"

SIGH

"Neither of those things exist on Remior… But I wouldn't be surprised if they do on some distant world. The universe is vast."

Percy's eyes regained some lustre, though baldy's subsequent words quashed the rising hope.

"You shouldn't count on that." Archibald shook his head. "Even bringing back a second core from the Moirai was an exceptional stroke of luck. You may never stumble on another treasure on that level."

The young man clenched his fists as he read his Status once more. At least the physical enhancements from his second core would help. Also, his soul projectiles should be close to registering as a proper Crude spell.

But he was still a long way from bridging the gap with his peers. There was only one way forward, albeit riddled with uncertainties.

"I'll send out my next clone tomorrow… I'll comb the ends of the universe if I have to, until I find another way to get stronger…"