Wanderer 18

Chapter 18: Wanderer

His thoughts were groggy, taking ages to form. Or maybe seconds? He couldn't tell. Actually, Percy couldn't tell much of anything at the moment. He was blind and deaf. His sense of touch was gone too. The last thing he remembered was activating his bloodline, watching it tear his soul up.

'Either I botched it and killed myself, or I'm the clone.'

Both conclusions sounded possible, though he felt it was more productive to assume the latter.

At least, it was good he retained some sense of self this time. On his previous attempt, this had only happened on the way back. It was certainly nice to have some control over the process. Well, assuming he could figure out what was going on…

'Let's focus on what I can tell.'

The most prominent feeling was something attached to him, pulling him towards a certain direction. The force it exerted was currently weak, but it was strengthening very, very slowly. For now, it didn't affect him much, but he knew it would become irresistible eventually. Perhaps it had to do with how much strength the clone – him – had left? Or maybe with how badly his main body wanted him back? Or something else entirely?

Either way, he should try finding a vessel before that happened.

'If only I could see...'

His normal senses didn't work, but there had to be something he could do. Concentrating outwards, he filtered out the attraction of his body, trying to grasp at anything else. For a long time, there was nothing.

Then, something appeared at the edge of his consciousness. Curious, he focused on it, causing it to expand and expand until…

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Percy felt an impact, shaking his very existence.

‘What the hell?!’

Whatever it was, it was now getting more distant. Making a mental note to approach things more slowly in the future, he wondered why he’d been rejected. Was there a reason he couldn’t possess that person?

‘Actually, was that even a person?’

Unable to tell, he resumed the experimentation. He repeated the same steps for some time, until another object appeared. Proceeding with more caution, he limited himself to fleeting glimpses. Each time he looked, it grew larger. Stopping when he was close enough, he went over what he understood about it, making sure not to focus too hard, to avoid crashing into it again.

It felt like a soul, although it was his first time encountering one in his present state. He’d seen plenty of them before via Soul Vision, but that was nothing like his current perspective. That said, this object gave him a conflicting mix of familiarity and strangeness. On one hand, it resembled his original self, still tugging at him through the connection. On the other, this was clearly somebody else.

Also, there was a sense of rejection. Whenever he stopped ‘looking’, he felt himself drift further and further…

‘I suppose I wouldn’t want to be possessed either.’

Nor did he want to do that to somebody else, actually. He still felt guilty over possessing that baby. He’d rather approach things differently this time if he could help it.

Once more, he scanned his surroundings, struggling a little as the soul obstructed his senses. Instinctively, he wished to move away from it, which seemed to work, the object shrinking in his ‘vision’. Percy continued until he was satisfied with the distance. It only took a second. Or did it?

Come to think of it, he hadn’t a clue how long it had been, nor how far he’d travelled. But he guessed it should be measured at a cosmic scale. After all, he’d essentially sleepwalked out of Remior last time.

‘Focus Percy.’

The young man – or perhaps the even younger soul fragment – felt the pull of his main body growing stronger. He still had time – relatively speaking – but he needed to make some progress.

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He reached outwards once more. A third soul appeared, but he didn’t approach it just yet. He kept concentrating until a fourth and a fifth joined it. Before long – or maybe after long – a sea of souls surrounded him from every direction.

It was nice to have some choice, assuming he could pick from those of course. Still, it was annoying he couldn’t examine them too closely, lest he approached one by accident. Instead, he had to tiptoe around the swarm, trying to learn about them without looking directly.

As he allowed his senses to softly brush over the myriad lights, a strange thought crossed his mind.

‘This is beautiful!’

He didn’t fully understand what laid in front of him, but he suddenly realized he didn’t want to rush things. Perhaps no human had ever experienced anything like this. Percy felt a bubbling urge to take his time, appreciating the exotic scenery. To truly understand it. Even if he failed to find a body today, he would learn a lot for his next attempt.

Thus, he relaxed, letting go of his previous urgency.

The ‘lights’ came in all shapes and sizes. Lacking anything to measure them with, he could only compare them to one another. Some were tiny. There were countless of them clustered together, and he felt they were so weak he could snuff them out even in his current state.

‘Bugs maybe.’

The brightest of them outshone the sun, the mere thought of approaching sending a wave of terror through his splintered consciousness.

‘Those must be gods.’

Still numerous – given the scale of the universe – but far scarcer than the other types.Percy had never seen a god in person. Not even back on Remior. Though he’d seen plenty of statues and illustrations. And stolen a titaness’s mana.

That said, he didn’t want anything to do with these alien deities. Most of them were probably hostile to his species. Instinctively, he wished to move away, but he didn’t know which way to go. There was one no matter where he looked.

‘Calm down Percy. They can’t find you here.’

Pressing down his fear, he considered categorizing the souls using something other than their ‘brightness’. Once more, he scanned them, looking for a different way to tell them apart. That’s when he sensed a rather peculiar soul. Curious, he approached. In terms of potency, it was far more powerful than the insects, and infinitely weaker than the gods.

‘Well, duh.’

Sadly, that was about the extent of what he could discern. Beyond that, Reds and Whites didn’t look too different. Hopefully that would change with more practice. In any case, this wasn’t the aspect he was interested in. Unlike the others, this soul felt wrong, somehow. It was fluttering erratically and dimming quickly.

Then, Percy made a mistake. In his attempt to learn more about it, he focused on it a little more than he'd meant to, causing him to approach it rapidly.

Growing nearer, he averted his 'gaze', trying to stop. It was difficult! For some reason, this one wasn't rejecting him! It was pulling him in!

Intensifying his efforts, Percy actively steered away, eventually managing to slow down. Just in time too, as he had come this close to getting sucked right in.

A moment later, the light fizzled out of existence, disappearing forever…

'Wow. I think the poor guy just died.'

At least that solved the mystery of how to possess somebody. Evidently, only those on the verge of death seemed to lower their defences, allowing others to approach. Perhaps it was some desperate, last-ditch effort to survive. It was a little morbid, but it was comforting to know he hadn't taken over and killed a healthy baby. The alien he'd possessed had probably been a stillborn or something.

Suddenly, Percy was dragged out of his thoughts, as he found himself on the move again. Another soul was pulling him!

However, this one wasn't some dying stranger. It was his main body! Apparently, his time here had ran out. The force wasn't very strong just yet. He could still resist if he wanted, but he knew that wouldn't be the case for long.

Truth be told, he wasn't too bummed out. Even though his original mission had failed, he'd learned a lot about this place, which would greatly help him in his future ventures.

'Still, the main body will be so disappointed…'

Focusing outwards once more, he decided to check one last time, to see if he could find a good target.

The pull was somewhat distracting, but he eventually managed to peer into the sea of souls again. Having a clearer idea of what to look for, he scanned through them much faster than before. He ignored those too powerful or too weak, and he didn't spare the healthy ones a second glance either.

Eventually, his attention landed on another dimming light. But he didn't approach it. It was dying even faster than the one before. Whatever had killed it had done a thorough job. It would suck to possess a body only to find out it had been beheaded.

'I need something a bit more on the fence so that I might survive. And I need to do it fast.'

The pull from the main body grew stronger, this time forcing him to actively exert effort to resist it. Percy found a few more damaged souls, but they didn't fit. One was too powerful, three were dying too quickly, one was too tiny. It didn't seem like it was meant to be. But it was ok. At least he'd tried.

Percy was close to accepting his failure, when he suddenly spotted another dying light. It was a bit stronger than he would have liked. He didn't know if that would be a problem. Also, it was fading a touch too fast. Even if he possessed it, he'd probably die again soon. An unpleasant thing to experience for nothing. Still, he didn't have much to lose. Well, hopefully not.

'Ok, let's do it.'

Mobilizing every iota of his will, he resisted his body's pull for the briefest of instants, reaching for the dying light.

The next moment, he felt it enlarge.

Then, he was gone.