

THE LONE WANDERER

Chapter 2: Alive

Percy was pulled towards a certain direction. It was as if a tight rope was glued to his back, forcing him to travel, to plunge through a seemingly infinite darkness, unable to resist. He couldn't tell how long it took. Maybe a week? A year? A century? Either way, his mind was murky, his thoughts failing to fully form.

Perhaps, this was purgatory, his punishment for casting that ability. It's not like he'd known what it would bring, but he appeared destined to pay the price all the same. At least it wasn't so bad. He was at peace. The pain was gone.

Until it wasn't.

A throbbing headache was the first new sensation, followed by warmth. He instinctively took a breath and then another, and a third, ecstatic to have functioning lungs again.

Next, he tried prying his eyes open, but his sight was blocked by something wet. A towel? He tried lifting his hands, but his limbs were weak. In the end, he shrugged. Or he would have if he could. Instead, he just remained in that position, enjoying the rhythmic sound of his own heartbeat.

'Did they manage to fix me?'

He opened his Status again, but what greeted him wasn't at all what he expected.

Percival Avalon

Mana cores:

- **[Mana core 1 – Orange – ???]**
- **[Mana core 2 – Seed – ???]**

Bloodline:

- **[Clone]** – Create a copy of yourself. Effect varies by affinity.

???:

- **[???**] – Grants access to your Status.
- **[???**] – Grants a bloodline.
- **[???** **(Fractured)**] – Grants the seed of a second mana core. Requires potent life and mind mana to germinate.

'Holy shit!'

The shock somehow gave him the energy to sit up, the wet towel falling from his face. Glancing around, he found he was back in his room.

His *human* room. His *human body*.

'No "Guhat" or "Percival's clone"? I guess the clone's memories return to me when it dies...'

He exhaled in relief. Not only was he somehow still alive, but it appeared he wouldn't be condemning a version of him to a horrible fate every time he used his bloodline. More importantly...

'There it is. My Orange core is back. Also... the Clone bloodline...'

This was Percy's first time seeing his bloodline listed in his Status. Not because he didn't have it before now. Both bloodlines and core affinities were fixed from birth. Naturally, he had had Clone his whole life. He just hadn't known.

The Status page wasn't omniscient. The only things it could detect through the simple test most kids underwent at age five were the starting grade of one's mana core and the common elemental affinities. As for rarer affinities and bloodlines, those required a more specialized investigation, which was only reserved for kids lucky to be born at Orange or higher. The rest had to either earn enough money to pay for the test, or to slowly discover their affinities and bloodline – if they even had any – on their own.

'But what is this section with the question marks?'

He frowned. He had never seen or heard of anything like that. Still, most of its contents weren't new. This section seemed to contain three separate items. One was access to the Status itself, which everyone had. Another was the access to his bloodline. It appeared to be like a hidden section.

'Did it become visible because I brought this other thing back?'

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Percy wasn't sure what to make of this. He seemed to have partially retained the unique trait of the alien body, but not the complete version. His second

core was in a dormant state, at a grade below even Red. He wasn't sure if it could be salvaged.

'Either way, this is good.'

His core had advanced to Orange. And it turned out he *did* have Cloned despite what everyone told him. Finally, he probably had a rare affinity too. At least, he couldn't imagine doing what he'd done with pure mana.

'Even if I can't get the second core to work, I'm still better off than before...'

Not that he wouldn't try of course.

He was about to make a mental checklist of things he needed to do, when the door opened.

"PERCY!!" a female voice yelled.

His ears were sensitive, the shout giving him a buzz. Still, he barely raised his arms to shield himself from the incoming aquamarine-haired missile.

THUMP

A silhouette leapt on top of him, the two bouncing on the mattress. She hugged him tightly, as if he was about to disappear.

“It’s alright Elaine... I’m alright.”

The girl hugging him, Elaine, was the only member of his family who didn’t treat him like shit. In fact, the only reason he hadn’t been kicked out entirely was probably because Elaine had been born at Yellow, which made her one of the more talented members of the House. Naturally, it gave her some sway with their grandpa.

“What do you mean you’re alright?!?!” she yelled. “I found you on the floor! You’ve been out cold for a week! I had to use my water magic to feed you soup!”

Percy raised an eyebrow. He hadn’t quite realised he’d been unconscious for so long. He felt a pang of guilt for worrying her, but also a fuzzy feeling in his chest. If it wasn’t for Elaine, they’d have probably left him alone to die. That’s assuming they even realized he was missing.

“I’m sorry. I tried to use Clone upon advancing and it had a weird interaction with my affinity...”

Elaine let go of him, covering her mouth in surprise.

“Advancing?!?” she asked as she closed her eyes, trying to sense his mana.
“Oh my god! You’ve reached Orange!”

Percy rolled his eyes at her reaction. He knew she was just happy for him, but it wasn’t that strange he had advanced. Most people took about 10 years for their first promotion, so reaching Orange at 15 was pretty much expected of him. If anything, nobles typically had access to resources doubling their purification speed. All his cousins had advanced at 10. Sadly, those resources weren’t abundant enough to be wasted on lowly Reds. The world of Remior was a cruel one, where the talented were showered with resources, letting them grow even faster, while the rest were left in the dust. Elaine who was roughly the same age as him had already advanced to Green years ago.

In any case, it was only a few seconds later that she seemed to grasp the rest of what he’d said.

“Wait, you said you have Clone?! And an affinity?! I told grandpa to test you properly before writing you off!”

“Yeah, right. As if baldy would waste a copper on his worst grandkid.” Percy chuckled.

Elaine flicked his forehead, causing him to wince.

“Stop calling him that! I know he needs to start treating you better, but this isn’t helping!”

Percy wanted to protest that it was just a shorthand for the guy’s name. Archibald. Baldy. Also, he didn’t have a single hair on his head, so it fit. But they’d had that conversation before, and he was too tired to get into it again. In the end, he shrugged.

“Well, this is all wonderful news. Have you figured out what your affinity is?” she spoke again.

Percy shook his head.

“No, but I’m 100% sure I *do* have one.”

It wasn’t just optimism speaking.

Bloodlines were hereditary. Occasionally, somebody would fail to inherit one from their parents and on even rarer occasions their bloodline would mutate into a new direction. Still, for the most part they were passed along intact.

Affinities were *less* hereditary. Sometimes, one would inherit one from their parents. Other times they wouldn’t. But there were exceptions. The Clone bloodline his family possessed was strongly correlated with the rare life affinity. Most members of the Avalon House tended to inherit both, while few got neither. It was a potent combination which made their family one of the stronger noble Houses, even though they lacked a White core.

Still, there had been instances over the centuries when individuals would be born with the Clone bloodline and a different affinity. And there had even been cases where people had the bloodline and no affinity. But no other combination ever did anything noteworthy. The only explanation for Percy’s misadventure was that he had an affinity never before seen in his family.

“Then we need to ask grandpa to get you a proper test!” Elaine said, grabbing him by the forearm.

He nearly stumbled as he was pulled, his legs still a bit wobbly, but he managed to follow her without falling.

Truth be told, Percy wasn't exactly thrilled at the prospect of asking his grandpa for a favour. The man had never deigned to give him anything, despite the rosier version of him in Elaine's head.

Still, he needed to figure out what his affinity was before he could even begin to understand how to use it. If he had to pay for the test himself it would take him several more years as he had already used up his savings for his advancement. So, in the end, he swallowed his pride and hoped his cousin would help advocate his case for him.

Besides, baldy had something else he needed.

*‘A potent source of life mana, huh? I bet **that** qualifies.’*