Wanderer 25

Chapter 25: Spells

The Status was a strange thing. It didn't notify one when they identified their affinity or a bloodline. In fact, it didn't even say a word when their grade advanced. However, there was one thing it did actively inform its user of.

Mastering a new spell.

The people of Remior weren't sure why it worked like that. For the most part, the Status was just a tool of convenience, to help its users keep track of their progress. Still, that didn't explain why spells got special treatment. A widely accepted hypothesis was that it was meant to guide mages into honing their magic. Letting them know when they reached a significant milestone might be a way of doing that. Classifying spells into various ranks could be another.

Either way, Percy had waited his whole life for his first Crude spell to be announced. He should have been ecstatic to see it finally happen. But he wasn't. In fact, he couldn't care less about that right now. His mind was preoccupied with something more important.

'Micky!!! Can you hear me?! We did it!! That asshole is dead!! Micky!!!'

The young man's time on Huehue had been short, but unforgettable. Despite what he'd thought at first, he'd even gained a lot. Mastering his first spell, understanding how his soul clones interacted with dying bodies, learning the fundamentals of the Dance… However, Percy would gladly give all that up to talk to his friend one last time. To tell him they'd killed the man who ruined his life. To bid him farewell.

But alas…

Their connection had been severed, his main body already ripping him out of the battered corpse.

'No. There must be something more I can do.'

The young man felt for the fallen gladiator's soul. There wasn't much of it left. Just some random pieces here and there. Percy gently wrapped himself around them, enveloping and gathering them like a satchel. He couldn't establish a link with them right now, and the last drop of soul mana had been used up in that attack. His only option was to try and take the shards back to Remior with him.

The rope on his "back" tightened, Percy's soul stretching like a rubber band. Still, Micky's fragments refused to budge. They were pinned in place, anchoring them both to Huehue still. Just like Percy's soul belonged on Remior, Micky's belonged here. As broken as it was, its world refused to let it go.

SNAP

Percy felt something tearing, followed by a wave of pure agony. Pulled between two worlds, his own soul wouldn't last long.

'Shit! At this rate we'll both die!'

Of course, his main body was probably going to be fine, safe as it was, back in the Avalon House's mansion. That said, permanently losing the clone couldn't be a good thing.

Not seeing any way of carrying all the pieces back, Percy loosened his hold on them, letting a couple of the smaller shards slip through the gaps. The dying wisps instantly shattered upon leaving his embrace. His hope was beginning to evaporate when he felt the rest of the pile fidget slightly. It was working! But it wasn't enough.

'Fuck, I'm sorry Micky!'

Percy left a few more fragments behind, until only a couple remained – his friend's soul now being even tinier than his own! At least, the gamble seemed to pay off, as the young man's desperate move tipped the scales in Remior's favour. The persistent pull finally dislodged them both out of the four-armed corpse, plunging them into an infinite sea of darkness. The pressure on Percy's wisp was immense, his friend's soul feeling heavy in his grasp. Huehue might have lost the tug-of-war, but it appeared it wasn't quite ready to give up pulling!

'Is it even worth it?'

The young man was tempted to let go. What was the point? So little of Micky remained, he doubted it could be salvaged. But he held on. Even if the odds were abysmal, he had to try. He owed him that much…

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Percy swung the cyan dagger against the trunk.

CH, CRCK

He only managed to carve about an inch into the aged wood before the mana construct broke apart. Plopping down on the grass, he rested his back against the tree, breathing heavily. He considered refilling his core to try again, but it was dark already and he'd been at it all day. Perhaps he should resume tomorrow.

'Man, I miss training with my soul mana.'

Using his second core wasn't as fun. Its lower grade meant he couldn't practice for nearly as long before running out. Furthermore, its lacking affinity made for flimsy constructs that shattered easily.

Sadly, his soul mana was still being funnelled into his injuries to keep him stable. At least, many of the smaller cracks had already closed, while the rest had shrunk significantly. It was only the massive crater in his chest that looked about the same. Or well, at least he thought it did. Had there been any improvement, it was too small to notice. At this rate, it would take years to fully heal.

'How long until that clone is done?'

Around three weeks had passed since he activated his ability. On one hand, this wasn't necessarily a bad thing. It meant the clone was being productive somewhere out there. Still, it did leave him a bit crippled until he returned.

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He shook his head.

‘I guess I shouldn’t be impatient. Besides, practicing with my second core is something that needs to be done.’

While it wasn’t very useful right now, it would be such a waste to write it off so quickly. Especially after all the trouble he’d undergone to repair it. Standing up, he was about to head to his room, when he felt a tug at his chest. He looked down, but there was nothing.

Percy frowned, not connecting the dots until a couple moments later. Actively gathering enough mana for Soul Vision took a while longer, but he got there. Normally, the thread linking him to his clone was invisible even in his augmented sight.

However, he could clearly see his soul trembling in unrest as the ethereal cord vibrated. The pull itself wasn’t much stronger than it had been just an hour ago. The attraction had been steadily rising over the past three weeks. Still, this was the first time he sensed the connection shaking, as if it was attached to a boat sailing in a storm.

‘It’s happening! It’s coming back!’

Percy was over the moon. Closing his eyes, he took a few deep breaths, manually gathering some soul mana. It was hard, as his injuries fought to drain it, but he persisted, hoping to fill his core up by the time the clone returned. Naturally, he hadn’t a clue how long it would take, or even what state the clone would be in. That said, he guessed it might be handy to have some soul mana available, just in case.

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A good idea, it turned out to be. The clone hadn’t returned right away. Percy had to wait a few hours, even after refilling the core. Annoyingly, he had to keep meditating to keep the mana in.

‘Should I just call it a night?’

It was tempting. For all he knew, the clone might not arrive until tomorrow. Right when he was seriously considering heading to his room, he felt a powerful impact slam onto his soul, a potent wave of vertigo nearly knocking him off his feet. At the same time, a flood of memories invaded his mind, one after another.

A dark expanse, a sea of souls, a fight over a body, a damp cell, a blood-stained arena, an ancient dance, a heart-felt melody, a bitter story, an unlikely victory, a painful death… There was plenty to sift through, but Percy brushed all of it aside, focusing on what mattered.

'Micky!'

Activating Soul Vision, he fought against the nausea to check his friend's condition. Upon tapping into his core, a lot more soul mana gushed out than he'd intended. Only a trickle flowed to his eyes, the rest pouring into his chest by itself, trying to attach the new chunk back to the rest of his soul. But Percy pressed it back into his core, suppressing his body's instincts. He might need every last drop to save his friend!

Examining his chest, he found three separate entities at play. One was the main part of his soul, still with a large crater right around his sternum. However, this hole was no longer empty. Inside, there was another piece, about the size of a grapefruit, already stuck to the larger section in a few spots. Finally, inside the ball representing his clone, there was a third soul – a foreign one. There wasn't much left, and the pieces were swiftly being assimilated.

'Crap! I'm going to kill him if this goes on!'

Back on Huehue, the two had been at an equilibrium. Both souls had been fragmented, though Percy's had his ability to back him up, while Micky's had quantity and the home advantage. Right now, however, they were in Percy's body, his soul being much healthier and – for the most part – intact. Sporting an overwhelming advantage, the young man watched his own soul gnaw at the last shards of Micky's, causing it to shrink at an alarming rate.

'I need to move him elsewhere.'

It was easier said than done. Percy had already learned that healthy souls tended to reject others. What he needed was a dying body. He looked around with his Soul Vision still on, though he was alone in the garden.

'Please! I must find somebody! Fast!'

Grasping for any idea he could think of, he forced more soul mana into his eyes. He'd never tried this before, but it should work. His soul constructs could phase through walls, so perhaps he could see through them too, right? His guess seemed to be on point, as a few wisps of silver became visible from somewhere inside the mansion.

Then, he slapped his forehead. That was such a dumb idea. He could scan his house all he wanted, but what were the odds he'd find somebody dying right now? Nobody was on their deathbed as far as he knew! Of course, he wasn't very close to any of them, but he'd have heard something like that. Plus, even on the off chance he found one, what was he going to tell the others?

'I'm sorry everyone. I know uncle Balin is dying and everyone is knee-deep in tears, but can I borrow his body real quick to shove an ALIEN inside? It'll only take a moment!'

Finding a human body for Micky was obviously out of the question. Examining his surroundings again, he inspected the critters scurrying about on the grass. Shoving his friend's soul inside a caterpillar would be such a crappy move, but it was all he could think of.

'Better than a plant at least.'

And he did find a few candidates. The training grounds were teeming with ants, worms, ladybugs, butterflies, snails and all sorts of other not-so-great options. Not many of them were on the verge of death, but that could easily be arranged. The question was whether he could do better.

Five minutes later, Percy noted he was running out of time. Micky's soul was dissolving into his own, like an ice cube dropped in a cup of tea. The largest body he'd found was a praying mantis. It was healthy, so injuring it just enough would be a little tricky, yet it sounded like his best option at this point.

He was about to go for it, when a stroke of inspiration led him to toss one last glance at the tree. There! A faint wisp of silver flickered somewhere atop its naked crown. It was weak, but the young man had a hunch it was worth looking into. Climbing up was a challenge considering his splitting headache and the lack of purchase on the trunk, but he made it there eventually – after an embarrassing fall or two.

Reaching the top, he spotted an old bird's nest. It was abandoned. Its owner had either died or forgotten about it. Still, it wasn't empty. Percy counted six eggs, five of them already dead. In fact, three of those were already cracked and hollow. But the last one wasn't fully gone yet!

'Good enough.'

Percy didn't exactly know what he was doing. It had taken him ages to figure out how to craft that clone in the first place. Bringing Micky's soul back to Remior had also been a fluke. Still, he had to try.

Stirring his bloodline again, he skipped the whole procedure. He didn't have the time to slowly grow and carve out a proper clone. Luckily, he didn't need to. The last one had just returned, so the grapefruit-sized ball was only loosely attached to its surroundings. The ghostly claw hungrily pounced upon it, snapping it violently from the rest, twisting his and, most importantly, Micky's souls into one before shooting out of his chest again.

This time, Percy was ready for it, having angled his sternum just above the egg. With the last trace of lucidity, he fell backwards, unwilling to crush the nest under his body as he passed out. He didn't know if he had succeeded, or what the repercussions of his reckless move would be, but he'd done his best...

[Congratulations! You have mastered a new spell: Secret Art: Familiar – Crude!]