Wanderer 401

Chapter 401 – The hunted or the hunter?

Percy raised an eyebrow as he examined the footprints a little more closely through Micky's eyes.

'Only two sets?'

They should have sent more, shouldn't they? Hadn't they heard about the dead Blues from Femel's House?

Then again, Percy expected the people hunting them to be somewhat disjointed. There was the Divine Root which was looking to punish him for his crimes and potentially extract his secrets. Then, there were the families of the Green-borns he'd killed that had a personal vendetta against him.

Finally, there were the rest of the noble Houses.

He imagined that many of them would steer clear of the mess entirely, for all sorts of reasons. They might not have the spare manpower to send after him, or their headquarters might simply be located too far from the regions where he and Micky were active in.

But there should be plenty of families that couldn't wait to join the fun.

A few would do it out of zealous reverence to their gods, while some might do it out of a selfish interest to get their hands on the Aurora Dew as soon as possible. Most of them, however, would be after the bounties.

According to Nesha, news of his exploits had already reached every corner of the continent, and the Root had placed a rather generous prize on all of their heads. Thirty million contribution points for each of them – Percy, Nesha and Micky. Twice as much if they were brought in alive.

Percy had been surprised to hear that the Root was okay with him dying, but it hadn't taken him long to figure out why. Other than the fact that he'd pissed them off thoroughly, they were probably counting on Orin to eventually spill the recipe in Percy's stead.

Luckily, Elaine's involvement with them was still unknown. As for Nesha, she was currently keeping her head low, trying to avoid anyone recognizing her. But a hundred and twenty million contribution points for just Percy and Micky was still a colossal sum. It was worth nearly twice as much as the elixir Percy had looted from House Tantalus. It was enough to last a medium-sized House for years!

And this was without even including Percy's spoils from all his fallen enemies, which everyone likely understood had already accumulated into another sizeable stash.

'Micky… Maybe I should turn you in myself.'

'Not if I do it first!'

Percy chuckled, before focusing back on the task at hand.

In all seriousness, things had gotten quite dangerous. Hunting him and Micky down was already a profitable venture even from a purely financial standpoint. Several noble Houses would find it worth their time to freeze their other operations, delegating some of their Blues to this mission instead.

As for the two they had already killed – they had probably been outliers. Dispatched by Femel's father as soon as he'd learned of the Green-born's death, they had likely headed out even before the bounty had been put in place. On top of that, they'd had a specialized means to track them down, so it was no wonder that they'd reached them ahead of the pack. But Percy fully expected the situation to grow even more hectic over the next few weeks.

'It's not all bad though…' he thought with a shrug.

The good news was that each of these groups wanted to get to him first. After all, nobody wanted to share the spoils with others. It meant that his enemies weren't necessarily communicating with one another. Most of them would underestimate his fighting strength and pay the price.

'Micky, for now let's collect some information on them. Do you think you can locate them without being seen? I'll change spots in the meantime, to gauge their reaction.'

If his suspicions were correct, these people weren't affiliated with Femel's House. They'd probably just spotted him and Micky flying toward the mountain, and followed them here. Luckily, this was something they could easily verify.

Taking a few deep breaths, he activated his boosting art. Next, he headed west and downward, descending from the mountain while using the snow-covered boulders as cover.

It wasn't until half an hour later that Micky caught sight of the Blues. Flying a few kilometres away, he had an easier time observing them through Soul Vision, since the blizzard didn't inhibit it. As for their targets… They didn't seem to have realized they'd been discovered.

Sure enough, there were only two of them again. But that was all the crow could discern from this distance. The good news was that they'd kept travelling in the same direction, unaware that they wouldn't find Percy there.

'Okay… It seems it was just a coincidence they were headed toward me before. We can probably avoid them entirely if we want. Votes?'

'I think we should deal with them now,' Micky said.

'I agree,' the clone added.

Percy nodded.

Even if they didn't have a bloodline to locate him, leaving these people alive would be a hidden danger. The region was bound to get quite crowded once more hunting parties arrived, so it was probably in Percy's best interest to thin the herd with every opportunity.

Of course, the previous battle had made him quite wary towards the Blues. Even with just two, he'd be a fool to underestimate them. At the same time, the fact remained that neither he nor Micky could grow without risk.

‘Try to get a little closer. It’s better if they don’t see you, but it’s not the end of the world if they do. We need to figure out what we’re dealing with.’

Percy circled around the Blues, making his way toward his familiar. He wanted to be ready to help the crow if they got spotted.

Approaching by another kilometre, Micky was finally able to make a few more details out. There was a man and a woman. The latter appeared like an older Orange-born, though the man was probably younger.

This was already great news. It likely meant they were weaker than the previous team. Adding the fact that Percy and Micky had grown stronger, he felt confident about their odds.

Getting even closer, the crow caught a fleeting glimpse of their insignia. From what little Percy and Micky managed to piece together, it depicted an animal they couldn’t quite recognize, doing something with two objects.

He scratched his head.

‘A dog hiding behind a couple of bushes? Or a hedgehog sitting between a pair of rocks?’

Struggling to connect it to any of the families in his memory, he turned to the one person who was a hundred times more knowledgeable than him about these things.

‘Hey, other me… Can you ask Nesha if she recognizes this symbol?’

Sending the mental image over, he waited for a response. Luckily, it didn’t take long for his girlfriend to relay the information he needed.

‘A lion sleeping on its front paws… House Ypnos.’

Percy felt the urge to slap himself for failing to recognize the insignia of a Great House. Especially since he’d seen some of their nobles from afar during the past few weeks. Either way, it made sense for them

to be among the first to come after him. Many of the surrounding areas belonged to their House. They had plenty of Greens and Blues deployed in the wildlands, capturing beasts to send to the Valley.

'If we're lucky, we'll counter their bloodline too…'

Percy couldn't be certain that they both possessed their family's famous ability of lulling beasts to sleep, but he was willing to bet at least one of them did. Why else would they have been sent to this region?

He also didn't know if the bloodline worked on people, but he was confident his Insomnia trait would protect both him and his familiar from it – if it did. Its effectiveness had been limited against the demonic infestation that had devastated Amenthes, but he doubted the bloodline would be nearly as powerful.

After all, the infestation had even forced a goddess into deep slumber, and Percy had still managed to stay awake for over an hour under its influence. That should be plenty of time to finish the fight – as long as the Blues' ability didn't somehow surpass the world-ending disaster.

'That still leaves two unknown affinities and one potential bloodline to be careful of, but I feel good about it,' he said as he got closer to Micky.

The crow didn't get a chance to respond, however, since their opponents had finally noticed his gaze. Turning around, the two shot toward the bird. The woman was riding a rolling mound of dirt and stone that carved a wide path through the frozen slope. As for the man, he had formed two cyan discs beneath his feet, using them to slide down the mountain rapidly.

'Earth and pure…'

Percy couldn't help but grin. He didn't want to get ahead of himself and end up dying due to carelessness, but this was looking like an easy fight.

'Let's not split them up this time,' he said, getting a nod back.

It was tantamount to handicapping themselves, but this was a good opportunity to learn how to fight under a couple of stacked domains. They wouldn't always have the luxury of separating their opponents, and they would likely have to face groups of more than two Blues in the future, so this was the best value they could get out of this battle.

"There's the other one!" the woman yelled at some point, gesturing at Percy.

Both her eyes and those of her partner shone with greed.

The poor fools had yet to realize that they were no longer the hunters…

Chapter 402 – Good matchups

Two domains landed on Percy with crushing force, causing him to sink deeper into the snow, his feet stepping on the bedrock beneath. Rather than panic, he merely grinned, however.

'As expected, one of them is much weaker than the other… Micky, do you think you can take him down by yourself?'

Between the man's pure affinity, his relative inexperience and weaker domain, Percy was confident his familiar could win without help this time, even while having to resist a second domain.

To nobody's surprise, the bird sent him a mental nod a second later, already gathering some ice mana to his wings. Trusting Micky to handle things on his end, Percy shifted his attention to the woman. Contrary to his friend, he understood he had his own work cut out for him.

Before the two sides even clashed, Percy felt a strange wave of drowsiness slam into his brain. It nearly caused him to stumble, though he shrugged it off the very next second.

'There it is… Just as useless against my trait as we thought…'

The woman's expression lit up with shock, probably not used to her bloodline failing. Certainly not against Yellows. But she pressed the emotion down quickly enough. Releasing a lot of earth mana from

her core, she sent it beneath Percy's feet. A massive pit opened right where he was standing, as the very landscape flipped, trying to flatten him.

Having seen the attack coming well in advance, Percy stepped on a pair of scythes, shooting to the sky just in time. Ironically, his Winding Corridortechnique had already made him a better fighter in the air than he was on the ground, as he could move much faster with his platforms helping him.

The shockwave still caused him to sway, the earth mage capitalizing on what she perceived as an opportunity. She shot over a dozen pillar-sized spears in an attempt to skewer him – or rather, pulverize him – as each construct was even wider than he was tall.

Sadly for her, Percy didn't have much trouble evading those either.

The woman wasn't exactly weak, but she was definitely at a disadvantage against him. Her domain was as powerful as those of Percy's previous opponents, and having another stacked on top of it certainly helped. Her earth mana, on the other hand, made her attacks even slower than the water mage's serpents, so Percy didn't see her landing a hit anytime soon.

Putting some distance from her, he continued to leisurely dodge her attacks, sparing Micky some of his attention.

To his relief, his familiar was holding his own just fine. Even better, he was actually dominating his opponent. Countless cyan needles constantly pelted the bird's location, but not many of them connected. Between Micky's superior agility and the frigid gales of wind revolving around him, most of the attacks either missed or got shredded to harmless motes. Even the few that reached him didn't do much damage.

At the same time, the crow found many opportunities to strike back. He didn't even spend much of his mana, as his opponent was neither fast enough to dodge his Frozen Shards, nor strong enough to block them. Several projectiles found their mark every few seconds, leaving the man's body full of holes.

In fact, Micky would have won already, if not for his opponent's bloodline. Apparently, the man had one too – at least, Percy didn't think it could have been anything else. And this one wasn't countered by their traits.

Every time the crow landed a hit, the man's wounds rapidly closed by themselves. A rather handy ability. Percy could hardly fathom how many times it had saved the Blue's life – in this battle alone. Most curiously, he couldn't spot a single drop of life mana in the man's body.

'How does it even work? Is it fuelled by ambient mana, or is his body just built different from everyone else's?'

Percy shook his head the next moment, reminding himself that the inner workings of a bloodline were something that even gods struggled to comprehend. Besides, this was neither the time nor the place.

Admittedly, he did feel a little envious of the man's ability. Then again, he understood he was the last person on Remior – probably in the entire universe – who had the right to feel that way about another's bloodline.

He shrugged.

'At least, it's more annoying than downright dangerous…'

The crow would have to inflict a lot of damage in a short amount of time to win, but that wasn't that big of a problem.

Everything considered, Percy was quite happy with both of their opponents. Neither of them possessed the means to truly threaten them. That was not to say they would be easy to take down, however.

Leaving aside the man's high-speed regeneration, Percy wouldn't underestimate the woman's defences either. While her speed was sorely lacking, it was clear he would have a tough time putting a scratch on her.

Happy to test that theory, he hurled several of his spare scythes at her, turning a few of them invisible.

It didn't work.

The earth mage noticed all of them without exception – even the ones spinning towards her from below. She didn't even bother using her mana, or much of her domain, really. She merely retracted a sliver of her willpower – so minuscule that Percy barely felt its absence, forming a protective layer around her body. The ethereal weapons shattered harmlessly against her skin, not even nicking her clothes.

Percy clicked his tongue.

It was entirely predictable, of course, but she was clearly an even tougher nut to crack than the water mage, thanks to her affinity.

'Well, if all else fails, we can always just leave…'

It wouldn't be ideal – especially now that they'd shown themselves and even revealed so many of their spells. But it was better than dying or wasting days fighting these people. At least, Percy didn't think that the Blues had the means to stop them if it came to that.

However, he did want to try overcoming the woman's defences. After all, this was part of a broader issue he was facing – one that he'd inevitably have to deal with, sooner rather than later. During the previous fight, his familiar had risked his life and endured a lot of pain to make up for Percy's shortcomings and give him an opening to attack

Percy wasn't satisfied with that in the slightest. There was no way they would survive the coming months if he struggled to injure half the Blues they fought. His movement technique was great, but speed alone wouldn't win him every battle.

He sighed, dodging another sluggish wave of attacks shooting toward him. The woman seemed to have realized her spells weren't getting her anything, so she'd started being more conservative with her mana at some point, prioritizing her safety above all else. She was probably betting on Percy eventually making a mistake.

'Improving my attacks won't be easy…'

Over the past couple of weeks, Percy had spent some time reflecting on the issue. One obvious solution that he'd considered had been to upgrade his Soul Harvesters, to increase their offensive power. The problem was that his runecrafting hadn't really improved all that much since he crafted the latest

iteration of his constructs. If he went all out, he might be able to sneak a couple more sharpness runes on their blades, but that wouldn't change the situation all that much.

Yet, elevating the quality of his weapons wasn't the only way to increase his offensive power. As the saying went, quantity had a quality of its own. And if there was one thing Percy's attacks had in spades, it was quantity.

Against the water mage, he hadn't felt confident in coming up with a suitable technique in the heat of battle, as he estimated this to be a much more ambitious project than his movement skill. However, there was something else that had changed since then.

He currently had a magical pyramid full of Wiseman's Murmurs floating inside his soul. In fact, the priceless substance had already filled his head with over a dozen ideas on how to proceed.

'No harm in trying, I suppose…'

Their opponents this time were the perfect – if somewhat unwilling – sparring partners. Both he and Micky could take as long as they needed to hone their magic against them. Even if they failed, they could just flee without losing much, other than revealing a few more of their tricks than they were comfortable with.

But it didn't have to come to that, as Percy fully intended to win.

Overall, he had three separate goals for this fight, two of which he had already started working on. The first, was to learn how to better endure the stacked domains. They messed with both his movements and his constructs, the immense pressure causing his bones to creak and groan. But it was manageable, and a valuable experience to go through. Even if nothing else went according to plan, this alone would make the fight worth it.

The second goal was to fight with his connection to Micky fully open. They wouldn't attempt to cooperate today – simply handling the excess information without getting in each other's way was a victory in his book. This was also going okay for now, though Percy expected to struggle more once he focused on his new project.

Finally, there was the very tool he intended to crack the woman's defences with. Percy didn't have a complete name for it yet. That would come later, once he saw what the technique ended up looking like. But he did know one thing…

It was time for the Carnival of the Savage Gods to gain its Second Parade.

Chapter 403 – Second Parade

A grey streak shot through the battlefield, bouncing from platform to platform around the earth mage. It was naturally Percy, who took advantage of his higher mobility to dodge all his opponent's attacks.

Domain blasts and stone constructs of all shapes and sizes fell everywhere, leaving the rocky terrain full of craters as wide as houses. As for the snow, it was long gone, the ground beneath the two combatants laid bare.

No matter what the woman did, she couldn't get anywhere close to hitting Percy. Sadly, the opposite was also true.

A storm of burning scythes spun around him. Some, he used as footholds, while a few more ended up crashing into – and shattering against – one of his opponent's domain-infused spells. Most of them, however, broke into pieces on their own, only to regenerate into more copies a second later.

Whenever he gathered enough, he sent them after the earth mage.

"Another failure…" Percy clicked his tongue as he saw his constructs shatter against the woman's willpower for the hundredth time.

At least, he had pressured her into withdrawing more of her domain. He'd even forced her to throw some of her mana into the mix. Still, Percy was a long way from inflicting any lasting damage.

The problem was that none of his individual attacks packed much of a punch. A thousand times zero was still zero. To win, he'd have to somehow leverage the sheer number of his weapons, to land a more powerful blow.

‘What if I time all the hits better?’

It wouldn’t be easy. The only way he could handle so many weapons in the first place, was by offloading part of the task to his mana. Through his affinity’s innate properties, he breathed life into the constructs, merely directing them as they moved on their own. But the Harvesters were neither truly intelligent, nor very coordinated. Landing a thousand slashes in an instant was something he hadn’t done before.

‘Well, it’s worth a try… I should probably change the imagery too…’

Up until now, Percy had grouped his scythes into tornadoes. It was a relatively simple formation that had allowed him to maintain a lot of them, but it was way too chaotic for his current purpose. To get what he wanted out of the spell, he’d have to switch to something more orderly and densely packed.

Scrambling his brain for a few seconds, he eventually settled on something he figured might work. Not missing a beat, hundreds of scythes broke free from the whirlwinds, shooting to the woman’s sides.

Responding to Percy’s intentions, the constructs rearranged themselves into two densely packed groups, their tips pointing toward the earth mage as their edges gleamed with unconcealed hunger.

The woman raised an eyebrow, but didn’t lose her composure. Releasing more mana from her core, she shot several large boulders at the scythes, trying to stop the attack before it even commenced.

Having expected her reaction, Percy willed the scythes to move out of the way, but did so without disturbing their formation. The Harvesters flew in a flexible circle around the earth mage, dodging her spells while staying together. Some inevitably got hit, only for their neighbours to copy themselves to replace them

The formation approached the woman, the scythes inching several metres closer with each violent revolution. They flew faster too, turning into a blur before long.

The Blue fired more spells at them, accomplishing nothing but wasting her mana. Eventually, she seemed to realize she couldn’t prevent the attack, so she switched her focus to blocking it.

Giant walls of stone rose around her, encasing her into a dense sphere over a dozen metres wide. She clearly withdrew more of her domain too, as the pressure on Percy instantly weakened. In fact, her companion's domain was nearly gone too, which probably meant that Micky had done a great job with his own battle.

But Percy didn't have the time to worry about his familiar. His new attack had already reached a critical point, requiring his undivided attention. Pushing all the distracting thoughts aside, he cleared his mind of anything unrelated to his constructs.

Right as they were about to sink their blades into the barrier, the Harvesters turned immaterial. That wouldn't allow them to ignore the Blue's domain, but they could at least bypass the physical components of her shield.

The very next second, the two spells collided.

The battlefield hadn't exactly been quiet before. Between the frigid winds still howling in the distance and the shrill cries of the grey wisps dancing by Percy's side, it had been rather noisy, in fact. But it might as well have been as silent as a graveyard, compared to what ensued.

A grating sound split Percy's ears, as countless scythes ground themselves into dust against the barrier. The stone walls crumbled too, one after the other, the colossal sphere shrinking rapidly. The weapons weren't cutting into the material directly, but they did push back against the willpower holding it together.

Once the Harvesters were gone, the woman lowered her defences, revealing her shocked expression. She clearly hadn't expected Percy to gain so much ground in so little time.

In the end, the attack never reached her, however. Taking everything into account, Percy estimated he'd need to pack five times as much power into the move, if he wanted to peel the rest of the woman's domain off.

'The timing could use more work – I need to visualize the attack better. And I have to use more scythes too…'

The first issue would be easier to solve, but the second was rather tricky. There was a limit to how many scythes could hit the woman at once. The more he added, the more they got in each other's way.

Over the next few minutes, he shifted to defence. He dodged the Blue's spells, slowly rebuilding his flock of Harvesters. At the same time, his mind raced at a hundred miles an hour, trying to come up with a solution.

Eventually, he felt the urge to slap his forehead, realizing that the answer – or a huge part of it, at least – had been staring him in the face all along.

'I don't actually need the shafts for this type of attack…'

If he focused on just the blades, he could fit more of them in a tighter space. He should be able to produce them much faster too. In fact, the opposite was true for his Winding Corridor technique. He didn't need the blades if he only wanted to use the constructs as footholds. As for the complete scythes, they were only needed when he wielded them properly – with his hands.

Putting his new idea into effect, he ditched the useless handles, seeing some immediate results. The burning crescents broke into smaller fragments, their enchantments greedily drinking the ambient mana to repair them. They flew around the woman faster too, forcing her to put her defences up again, in anticipation for the inevitable blow.

Before long, Percy had amassed enough for another attempt.

Repeating his previous actions, he watched the blades dig even deeper this time. The attack ultimately exhausted its momentum before the halfway mark, however. Had this been the water mage from before, Percy would have probably won already. Unfortunately, his efforts were still insufficient against his current opponent.

'Man, domains are so troublesome… Zoris, is there no way for me to awaken mine before Blue?'

'Doubt it. If you were at Green, maybe you could have tried to touch at it. Even then, you wouldn't have been able to do anything particularly useful. But Yellow is way too low.'

Percy felt the urge to curse, but the former god wasn't done.

'However, you don't necessarily need to possess a domain of your own, to effectively fight against one. The only difference between Blues and you is that they can manipulate their willpower more freely.'

Percy nodded thoughtfully.

It was a well-known fact that everyone – from Reds to gods – used their willpower with every spell. Mana cores passively attached willpower to mana after all, which was what allowed their owners to control it.

The potency of one's willpower, as well as their control over it, improved with each promotion. This was why Yellows and Greens could manipulate their mana with more finesse than Reds or Oranges. Mages at Blue or higher merely took that to the extreme, wielding their willpower as a weapon in and of itself.

Percy might not have a domain, but he still had his own willpower. It permeated every drop of his mana, and thus, every inch of his constructs.

Realizing he was onto something, he replaced his lost weapons once more, before unleashing another attack against the earth mage. This time, he delved farther into the image in his mind, deepening his connection to the Harvesters.

When they shattered against the stone walls, he pictured his own teeth breaking. He could almost feel the sting of his gums splitting, and the taste of iron in his mouth, or the warm trickle of blood rolling down his chin.

He wielded the blades in a less linear manner too. He moved them back and forth – entire rows grinding against the enchanted rock in unison, stubbornly trying to chew through it. The edges sliced through the domain, while the back of the blades phased through the crumbling stone to find purchase for the next push.

The constructs still broke by the hundreds, but Percy didn't let that get to him, losing himself in the picture.

Blueish-grey dust and flames permeated the area around the shattered blades, breathing life to a strange shape. It was as much a figment of Percy's imagination, projected there by his mutated eyes, as it was an illusion forged out of his fused mana.

The shape grew clearer and clearer as the blades continued to phase through the stone, and to slice through the domain. The barrier kept crumbling, despite the terrified Blue's desperate efforts to reinforce it.

Percy felt his willpower clash against the woman's. If he compared hers to the full moon, his was but an insignificant firefly – countless times weaker. His control of it was much cruder too.

Even so, he refused to yield.

"You aren't the first Blue I kill, and you won't be the last!" he hissed through gritted teeth.

Pushing the constructs through the final stretch, he saw the illusion settle into place. It was the spectral visage of a colossal beast. It looked like the cross between a lion and a wolf, the skin on its elongated maw wrinkled in fury, as its burning mane flared in the wind.

The creature wasn't native to Remior. Strictly speaking, it wasn't native to anywhere, because it was only loosely based on one of the many nameless beasts Percy had encountered in his travels. He'd picked this one due to the strange way that the fangs on its top and bottom jaws curved in opposite directions, which more closely aligned with the way he wielded his own blades.

A deep rumble permeated the area as countless cracks formed on the giant sphere. Percy could practically feel the structure giving way under his own teeth, the muscles in his mouth almost aching from the pressure.

Then, the monster's jaw snapped shut.

The sheer force sent a tremor through the entire mountain, as the beast's slit pupils glinted with satisfaction. Its fangs – the few remaining, at least – stabbed and sliced through the woman's soul, shredding the silver silhouette into tattered rags as the name of Percy's new technique grew clearer in his mind:

‘Carnival of the Savage Gods, Second Parade, Thousand-fanged Maw’

Chapter 404 – Silver snow

The clone exhaled in relief as Micky flipped over the Blue’s corpse, pecking out his core – and a large chunk of his crumbling soul with it.

The man’s high-speed regeneration had been annoying to deal with, but overpowering him had only been a matter of time. After all, the mage had probably been in his current grade for years, his strength having long plateaued. His weaker affinity certainly hadn’t done him any favours either.

Micky, on the other hand, was still in a state of rapid growth. With two fairly recent promotions, just as many new mutations, and multiple upgraded spells, he had yet to exhaust his potential. Not to mention that he had a second mind in his body helping him improve even faster.

The good news was that their opponents hadn’t been from Femel’s House this time, making them safe to eat. And there was no way the crow could pass on such a nourishing meal. The Blues had chosen to come after their heads of their own volition, so Percy didn’t feel particularly guilty over their grim fates.

That said, the taste of human flesh inside his beak was quite disturbing. Doing his best to filter it out, he shifted his attention to his main body. It looked like he was about to finish his own opponent off. The colossal visage of some ferocious animal appeared around the sphere of stone and willpower, chewing through it one layer at a time.

‘I suppose he’s figured out whatever he was working on.’

The clone obviously didn’t need to guess, as he could easily access his main body’s thoughts if he wanted. He was only ignorant of his counterpart’s efforts because he’d been busy focusing on his own fight. Letting his mind blend with the original’s, he soon had his answer: the Second Parade – another technique built atop his boosting art. This one elevated his offensive power to a frightening level.

Micky was already done with his meal – the first one, anyway. It was rather unsettling how quickly the familiar could devour an adult human, but Percy ignored that, concentrating on something else.

A wave of potent soul mana spilled out of the crow's stomach, permeating his frame. Breaking down the souls he devoured always gave him more juice than a core of the same grade could contain, and this was the first time Micky and Percy got themselves some Blue-grade soul mana to play with. The last people the bird had eaten had been Acton and his group, but all the spare mana had gone towards his evolution at the time.

'It's such a pity the main body can't circulate it.'

The problem was that the Carnival relied on the constant absorption of ambient mana from his surroundings. This meant that the boosting art was ultimately capped by the grade of its owner's core. At the rate Percy exhausted and replenished his reserves, the extra mana would barely last him for a few attacks. It could still make for a decent trump card in the future, of course – they could take advantage of one of their fallen opponents to unleash a stronger attack against another. Alternatively, Percy could bestow the Blue mana to his clones, though there were issues with that too.

Sadly, his wisps would struggle to contain the potent energy, as they weren't nearly as robust as his main body. Equipping them with mana that wasn't suitable for their grade and having them carry it around for weeks would be a recipe for disaster. A difference of a single grade might still be okay – Percy had actually done it before, when he escaped from Melodia filled up on Sol's mana. Still, he'd only held the superior resource for a short time. Giving Blue mana to his Yellow wisps was a bit much.

Thankfully, it didn't look like that would be necessary today.

Percy didn't need any help to deal with the earth mage, and he didn't have an open clone slot either. That was not to say that the Blue mana would go to waste, however – the clone had another use for it.

'I should hurry up… The main body is about to hand us another snack…'

Drawing a hefty amount of ice mana from Micky's abdomen, Percy manifested a snowball in their right talon. One thing that sucked about his familiar's body was that it didn't have proper hands, which made it difficult to work on anything delicate. But he knew he shouldn't complain – his friend had it worse, since he was permanently stuck here. In some ways, losing his memories might have been a mercy.

'It would be nice if I could find a way to improve his quality of life…'

It didn’t have to be a spell to grow hands on a beast’s body. They were living in a universe full of possibilities and obscure magical secrets. Surely, there was a solution out there.

‘All in due time. Micky’s already come a long way since his rebirth,’ Percy reminded himself.

The crow could already communicate like a regular person, wield magic the old-fashioned way, and didn’t even suffer from his bestial hunger nearly as much as he used to. There was still some distance to being able to live in a society, but they were certainly on the right track.

In any case, this wasn’t the time to be worrying about that.

Shaking the distracting thoughts out of his head, Percy’s attention returned to the task at hand. Gathering some of the dense mana permeating their souls, he pushed it into the snowball. He closely mirrored the construct’s shape, going as far as to trace the faint contours on the object’s surface.

‘Are you trying to fuse them again?’ Micky suddenly asked, causing him to mess up and crush the soft snowball by mistake.

Percy clicked their beak in irritation.

‘Yes. Let me focus for a couple minutes. We don’t get as many chances to work on this.’

Granted, Percy didn’t have to use Blue mana. It made his life harder, since it was two grades higher than the ice mana. The Orange and Yellow beasts they ate every few days were arguably more suitable for the task.

The main body’s mana was also a perfect match, and they even had an infinite supply, in theory. In practice, the original was swamped with half a dozen other projects, so the clone preferred not to disturb him. That was why he only played around with affinity fusion when they ate something.

Pulling more mana out, he resumed his work.

There were a couple more complications besides the grade mismatch. Unlike the relatively simple pure mana that he was used to fusing with soul mana, ice was a composite affinity. It was based on two other elements, each with its own quirks. Even though Percy had grown proficient with all of Micky's mana types over the past few months, he still wasn't as skilled with them as he was with his own.

But it wasn't all bad.

While his proficiency with ice mana could use some work, his skill with soul mana had reached a high level over the years. Even better, fusing his own mana was a routine task by now – something he did passively while using the latest version of his boosting art.

This was quite relevant, because Percy was planning to follow a similar approach – he would have his soul mana "possess" the ice mana, by phasing the former into the latter, having it closely follow its movements and slowly adopt its properties. It had worked for his pure mana, giving him the option of turning it invisible and immaterial at will, so he saw no reason it wouldn't apply here.

Maybe it wasn't the best, nor the easiest way to fuse the two mana types. Perhaps, he could study a better method if he ever got the chance to step in a Moirai library, but affinity fusion was nebulous and open-ended. As far as he could tell, there were often multiple ways to combine two mana types. And he was confident he was on a viable path.

'If this works, I'll be able to send ice mana to my main body through the cord!'

Percy repeated his actions for a while, trying to stick the two mana types together. He copied the same exercises he had used in the Alchemists' Guild, transforming the snowball into all sorts of geometrical shapes – from cubes and pyramids to cylinders and cones – having the soul mana track its transitions.

Unless he was horribly mistaken about this, it would only be a matter of time before he succeeded.

Half an hour later, he took a short break for Micky to consume the second corpse. They didn't get as much mana from it, because the woman's soul had already degraded a lot by the time they made space for it. The heavy injuries his main body had inflicted on her hadn't helped. At least, her core was still in a decent enough condition.

Diving back to work, the clone exhausted the rest of the stash. The original hadn't remained idle either, cleaning up the battlefield and tallying their spoils. By the time the trio had taken off again, the clone had obtained some tangible results to report. Hidden in the very depths of the snowball, Percy found a pinch of snow that sported a slightly different colour. It glinted in a silver light but felt otherwise identical.

At least, until he willed it to turn invisible…

Chapter 405 – Soul-freezing

Sitting on Micky's back, Percy was preparing the ingredients for his mana threads as he paid the clone some attention. After seeing the latter make some tangible progress with the new mana type, he'd started sending him soul mana to accelerate the process.

Another week had passed since the battle against House Ypnos's mages, and the clone could already reliably produce about a talonful of augmented snow every couple of minutes. Only, the substance now sported a dull grey colour, as Percy's soul mana was affected by his blessing, unlike the silver version that Micky extracted from his meals.

Given how slowly the clone produced the mana, they weren't ready to use it in a fight, though he was thankfully getting faster at it by the hour. Unlike Percy's original fuse mana, the new resource was multifaceted, however, opening several new doors at once. That was why the clone was currently experimenting with something different.

Playing with the two concepts inside the crow's second core, he tweaked the fragile balance slightly, before drawing the ice mana to their talon. Unlike their previous attempts, the manifested construct wasn't solid. Instead, it was a semi-amorphous blob of frigid water that spun and squirmed between the bird's claws. Adding some soul mana to the substance, the clone attempted to fuse it again, only to end up with nothing half an hour later.

'It's tough. Every time I alter its properties, I have to relearn how to fuse it…' the clone groaned.

Percy nodded thoughtfully. They essentially had to master three new variants of affinity fusion – a solid, a liquid, and a gas. And each of them was more complex than pure mana was.

'Send some of it back. I want to test it out too.'

Doing as instructed, the clone produced some more of the grey ice, before turning it incorporeal and feeding it back through the cord. A trickle of mana entered Percy's body the following second, causing his very soul to shiver.

"D-Damn… this is r-really unpleasant…" he spat through chattering teeth.

The clone hadn't suffered this much while doing it in Micky's body. Other than the fact that souls were inherently more sensitive than flesh, there was another reason why Percy was affected so strongly. The ice core wasn't his own, and thus he lacked his familiar's innate resistance to the affinity.

'Will you be able to use it like this?' the clone asked.

Percy shook his head.

'I'm not as worried about the cold – I'll get used to it. The fact that I don't have a way to store it is a bigger issue.'

Percy didn't have the right core, though he might still be able to hold the new resource in his channels. Once fully cleared and tempered, all the pathways in one's network had a capacity on par with a mana core. The only question was, which set of channels would the augmented ice mana go in?

His pure channels wouldn't work, as they were entirely incompatible with the affinity. His soul channels were better, as they should be able to contain it in its incorporeal state, but there was a problem with that. He didn't have any free space for it. During a fight, his soul channels had to stay mostly saturated with his own mana, to keep the Carnival active.

'I suppose I'll have to clear ice channels in my body,' he concluded, not particularly thrilled with the idea.

Worse still, once the clone figured out the liquid and gas variants of the augmented ice, Percy might need water and air channels too. At least, he hoped that would work, since the ice mana essentially behaved like either of its components at that point. However, clearing and tempering three brand-new mana networks would take a lot of time.

The good news was that he would then be able to keep plenty of the grey ice in his body. After everything was said and done, Percy would have a buffer equal to three Yellow cores' worth of the new resource. Unleashing all of it at once, he should be able to produce a very powerful sneak attack, without even having to give up his boosting art or leave himself vulnerable.

'Do you think we'll be able to circulate each other's mana too?' the clone asked.

'Doubt it.'

Their boosting arts required the right mana core to work. Admittedly, there was some flexibility in that, since they could extend the organ's properties to their channels or the external flows outside their bodies. As Percy had discovered, multiple cores could even be forced to behave, not getting in each other's way.

Still, there was no way a single core could sustain two bodies at once. Certainly not with just a pair of cords linking them – no matter how wide these connections were, or how smoothly they allowed the mana to pass through them.

That was okay.

Even if they could only store enough of the new mana to fuel a couple of attacks, they should be able to accomplish some extraordinary things.

'How will you find time for this though?' the clone asked again.

Percy sighed.

That was the big question, wasn't it? Based on his previous estimates, he would have to spend several months working tirelessly on his silk before he was ready to upgrade his armour. Between his clones coming and going all the time, the constant interruptions whenever they got attacked by their pursuers, and having to keep supplying Micky's clone with soul mana, he'd never get the chance to clear so many new channels.

Closing his eyes, Percy pondered the issue for a while. Eventually, a flash of inspiration hit him.

‘You’lltake care of that,’ he said, before elaborating. ‘I’ll focus on the silk and the clones... and the Aurora Dew, I guess. You’ll handle everything related to the new fusion.’

‘Do you think it’s possible?’

Percy shrugged.

‘I was able to seize Micky’s mana by force, years ago, from dozens of miles away, with just Soul Resonance. It should be even easier to do something similar with Soul Harmony. Especially for you – since you’re basically me. I think we’ve been underutilizing our Secret Art.’

Ever since he upgraded the spell, Percy had thought of it mostly as a tool to coordinate with his familiar and help him in a pinch. But he’d disregarded one of the most valuable features of the Secret Art – no, his entire bloodline. His clones didn’t just let him visit exotic worlds or possess other beings. They also allowed him to sprout copies of his mind.

To experience multiple lives in parallel.

Normally, these versions of Percy had no choice but to do everything in isolation, somewhere far away. Yet, this wasn’t the case for the one anchored in his familiar’s body and having such open-ended access to his own.

Percy continued.

‘You’ll reach into my cores and take all the soul mana you need by yourself. Master all three of the new forms of affinity fusion, feed the results back to my body, and use them to clear and temper my channels.’

‘I can try, but it sounds pretty invasive. Are you sure it won’t distract you while you’re spinning the silk?’

‘It will. I’ll just have to get used to it. It’ll be easier to adjust to somebody messing with my mana than to find time to do everything by myself. Besides, I don’t need as much mana for the threads, so you taking some won’t be a problem.’

‘What should I do in the meantime?’ Micky asked, jumping into the conversation.

Now that the crow had finished applying Regulation to the new mutation and merging the spell with Circulation, he was kinda free.

‘Help the clone with affinity fusion. You need to learn it too. But you don’t have to worry about clearing my channels. Instead, try circulating your augmented ice mana in your water and air pathways. I bet it should be possible.’

Percy wasn’t just shooting at random. This was precisely what he’d done to merge Synchronization with the Dance, so this was probably a key step towards Micky evolving his own boosting art. Why bother circulating regular water or air mana, when Micky could triple down on a superior resource that could do all of the same things and more?

Of course, Percy didn’t think the bird would be able to circulate the soul-infused variants of the mana. Micky’s cores wouldn’t support it, since he didn’t have the soul affinity, and Percy couldn’t possibly supply both of them with enough to fuse all their other mana types with.

The soul-freezing ice would be their secret weapon – something they slowly accumulated over the course of a battle, releasing it at an opportune moment to deliver a devastating attack. Percy would keep the stash in his new networks, while Micky would store it – admittedly less of it – in his soul channels.

The good news was that the crow wouldn’t have to clear his soul channels. He’d had those ready from a young age. Every time he consumed a soul, the influx of mana exerted a lot of pressure on him, forcefully clearing and expanding the network. Micky had inadvertently completed the project a long time ago, even though he’d never used it for much, other than temporary storage or to supply Percy with some extra mana here and there.

‘It’s nice to have one less thing to worry about, I suppose…’

Perhaps, it might be worth having Micky clear some pure channels in his body too, to contain some of Percy's old fused mana in its corporeal state. It wasn't a priority, since Micky didn't have a use for it, but they might as well – just to leave the door open. As for merging all three of their affinities – soul, pure and ice? It would be several times harder, and Percy didn't see a reason to bother with something so tedious right now.

'Maybe one day…'

With that, they had accounted for all their projects, other than their collaborative fighting strength. That, was something they could work on whenever they ended up cornered by their enemies.

It was going to be a busy year, but Percy had all the tools he would need to extract a whole decade's worth of training from it.

Chapter 406 – Pinesap town

Seeing the first of the small houses appear on the horizon, Elaine exhaled in relief. It had been around two months since they'd left the Valley, but they'd finally made it back to the Camelot province.

They'd completed the trip much faster than the last time, too. Elaine's higher grade and their Insomnia trait had certainly helped – along with the fact that they didn't have to worry about any companions keeping up.

They could've arrived even sooner, but they'd tried not to overdo it, to avoid getting seen running faster than Elaine should've been capable of. They'd also taken a few detours to hunt beasts from different regions. After all, they had to stick with Elaine's story that she'd spent the past couple of years training in the wilderness – so they needed some evidence to back that up.

'Well, it doesn't matter. We're here now.'

Percy shrugged. Next, he and his cousin deactivated the nascent Dance as they approached the town. A wave of weakness rippled through their body, the bubbles around them bursting in unison. A harmless spray of water washed over the tall grass by their knees, the cool droplets rolling off the long blades.

The two had deliberately avoided travelling on the road as much as possible. The fewer people they ran into, the longer they could spend working on the spell. And they'd made a ton of progress with it as a result.

Soon after starting their journey, they'd realized the azure ribbons weren't well suited to Elaine's version of the boosting art. Water mana was denser and moved more slowly than other affinities Percy was familiar with, so his cousin had struggled to maintain the elongated whirlpools.

Instead, they'd switched to gathering and converting ambient mana into countless small bubbles entering and exiting her body – not too different from her defensive Bubble Coat spell. In fact, they were convinced she wouldn't have much difficulty merging the two techniques in the future. But that was for Elaine to figure out at a later time – not a priority right now.

Another change they'd made was in how she absorbed the mana into her body. Due to its properties, it wasn't practical to have a single drop of water mana travel through her entire network. Instead, she only let the bubbles seep into her skin briefly, moving them a short distance to exchange the primed ambient mana with her own, before pushing them out again.

As luck would have it, the wave-like patterns glowing on her body made for an excellent reference point, indicating how far the mana was supposed to travel. Percy and Elaine had observed the best results when they had the bubbles enter through the peaks and exit through the nearest valleys, barely moving an inch through her channels. This gave the whole spell a gentle – if somewhat lazy – rhythm.

Of course, her Status had yet to register the upgrade.

They both understood there were still a few kinks to iron out, but they knew they were getting close. If things kept going like this, they might not even need Galahad's help after all. Between Percy's experience with two other versions of the spell, and the fact that Elaine had been working on it for years, they'd progressed much faster than they'd expected.

Alas, that would have to wait a little longer, as they were about to enter the town.

'Why are we stopping here first? I thought you were in a hurry to see your parents.'

Percy was also getting a bit anxious. He still had no idea what had happened to Baldy and Galahad after his messy departure from the province. He sure hoped that Deimos hadn't held his grandfather responsible for his crimes. And he didn't know what had happened to House Tantalus either. Having lost so many of their strongest mages, they couldn't have continued harassing his family, could they?

Nesha had tried to ask around during her stay in the city – both times – but it hadn't been easy to get reliable information on Percy's House. The whole continent had been in turmoil since before the Lotus bloomed, with hundreds of noble families at war – a centuries-old House getting destroyed seemingly every month.

The chaos was starting to settle, as many of those conflicts had already reached their conclusion. In part, Percy's exploits had helped with that a little, since he had given the nobles another spicy topic to focus on, but his involvement with the Aurora Dew and the Holy Children had actually muddied the waters even more.

Admittedly, some concerning rumours had reached his ears, but he knew he couldn't really trust them, as he'd already heard multiple conflicting accounts. Apparently, his family had both been completely razed to the ground as punishment for Percy's crimes, but also elevated to a Great House by the Order as a reward for his contributions to alchemy. Archibald was both alive and dead, and Percy himself had been a god all along, having hidden his identity and snuck into the Alchemists' Guild to have some fun.

Suffice to say, the surest way to find out the truth was to go home and ask.

'I am. But I have a few relatives on my mum's side here that I haven't seen in years. It's a good opportunity to stop by, since it's on our way,' Elaine replied.

Percy nodded, not saying anything else. They'd reach their House soon enough. Besides, they might be able to ask Elaine's extended family about Archibald or House Avalon. Commoners weren't very involved in such matters, but these people still lived in the same province and had strong ties to his family, so they should know more than the rest of Remior.

Moreover, Percy was a little curious about the town. He'd never actually visited any of the towns under his family's jurisdiction before, so he didn't mind seeing how they compared to the others they'd passed through during their travels.

This was Pinesap town.

It wasn't the largest under his House's control, but it was the one closest to the Whistling Woods. And it was famous in the nearby provinces for a certain edible product native to the region: the whistling sap. It was a sweet, syrupy liquid extracted from the pine trees in the forest.

It was customary to give some to young children when they got their affinities tested, celebrating the start of their new lives as mages. It wasn't the most lucrative industry – the income was barely worth mentioning compared to House Avalon's other ventures – but it was a rather wholesome one that nobody wanted to see gone.

Of course, Percy had never actually tried the snack. He'd been way too old by the time Elaine and Gawain had escorted him to the temple, and the sight of a teenager eating something made for children would have given people another reason to look down on him.

Thinking about it, Percy felt the urge to chuckle.

'Look at how far I've come already… from being too scared to eat a bowl of syrup to essentially declaring war on Remior…'

Reaching the town's border, Elaine circled around it, heading toward the nearest gate. The stone wall was barely a metre tall and a foot thick. It was mostly here to keep pests out, rather than any truly dangerous beasts. Not that there were any in the vicinity, since the Whistling Woods were relatively safe.

There was only a man seemingly in his early thirties guarding the entrance. His cheap linen clothes betrayed his status as a commoner – probably a resident of the town. His Green core would have deterred any bandits from trying to sneak in, though it wouldn't have done much if House Tantalus was to invade.

The guard waved at Elaine with a smile on his face. Percy didn't know if the man had recognized his cousin, but he'd certainly recognized the insignia on her clothes. While she still had to hide her grade and her second core, she no longer had to conceal her origin now that she was travelling on her own. The Green's smile did freeze for a second when he noticed her missing limb, but Elaine waved his concern away, reassuring him that it wasn't a big deal.

‘Wow, I didn’t know the commoners in our towns had such a good opinion of our family…’ Percy said as soon as the man let them in.

‘There’s some friction here and there, but we generally treat them much better than other Houses.’

Percy nodded. It wasn’t that hard to guess the reason either. Everyone living west of the river understood they’d found themselves on the luckier side of the province. The nobles of House Avalon weren’t saints – even Percy himself had been treated rather coldly by his own relatives as a child – but they might as well have been, compared to the monsters of House Tantalus.

And there was another reason his family was better received here.

Walking around the town, he marvelled at the wooden houses lining up on either side of the street. They weren’t very large – he’d seen bigger houses, and not just in Twilight City, but also many of the other towns. However, they were in good condition – clean and tidy.

Among the residents, Percy spotted a couple people he recognized. Or rather, people whose faces he recognized – save for their dull gazes and vacant expressions. They were carrying heavy-looking crates for the townsfolk.

They were clones.

While Percy had never been to their towns before, he did know a few things about them. Archibald frequently stationed some of their Greens who had the bloodline here, providing the commoners with free labour.

A Green could have up to twenty-seven clones at once, though they typically only maintained a handful each, so as to not affect their mana reserves too badly. Still, with two Greens in each town, and given the strong physique that their clones inherited from them, they lent a ton of manpower to their subjects.

On top of that, these Greens obviously had the life affinity too, meaning that every commoner living on this side of the province always had a powerful healer staying nearby. Thus, nobody had to worry about injury or sickness – not even the Red-borns.

This was the complete opposite from how House Tantalus treated their own people. Not only did they kill and harass them, they didn't even bother to protect their towns, letting their artificially weakened populations fend for themselves…

'I guess the situation has calmed down a little…' Percy said, getting a nod back.

During the war, Archibald had been forced to deploy more mages here, to protect their people. The lack of any visible damage to the structures and the relatively low number of clones walking around indicated that it had been a while since the last raid.

In any case, Percy wasn't very interested in meeting Elaine's relatives. It wasn't like she could introduce him to them either. And since they couldn't practice the Dance while in the presence of others, he had to find something else to keep himself busy during their stay here. Luckily, he had just the right thing in mind.

'Time to play with my domain some more.'

Chapter 407 – Percy's domain?

Elaine was currently sitting in her aunt's kitchen, dining with her extended family. Or was that her grandaunt?

Percy hadn't paid much attention.

She looked like she was having a ton of fun too, catching up with relatives she hadn't seen in years.

'I have to hand it to Uncle Gawain for not having a stick up his ass…' Percy thought.

Typically, nobles only bothered to marry a commoner if they were a Yellow-born, bringing more talented mages into the family. It was practical, if somewhat callous and transactional.

This wasn't what Elaine's father had done, however, getting together with his Orange-born wife out of love. This wasn't news to Percy, but getting a feel for Ragnelle's humble origins still put everything into perspective.

'They're all good people… No wonder Elaine turned out so nice...'

Regardless, Percy was bored out of his mind here. Not only did he not know any of them, but he couldn't even reveal his existence. Admittedly, the roasted duck tasted nice, but meat was all they'd eaten since Twilight City, so he wasn't all that excited about it either.

Of course, Elaine was planning to ask them about Archibald and House Avalon later, but she hadn't brought it up yet, probably not wanting to sour the reunion with what promised to be a gloomy topic.Consequently, Percy had no choice but to wait quietly in a corner of his cousin's mind.

Luckily, he did have something quite interesting to focus on in the meantime.

Filtering out the conversation, he gathered his willpower, allowing it to spill out of his host's body. He let it gently unfold inside the modest room, taking great care not to touch any of the others, else they might notice. He also had to avoid breaking anything or making noise, which limited what he could do by quite a bit.

Thankfully, it wasn't his first time playing with his domain.

Percy felt the invisible field roll like a carpet on the floor around the table, gently brushing against the wooden planks while enveloping the furniture. Given the circumstances, he couldn't test the range or power of the ability, so he instead concentrated on sensing his surroundings with it.

The tactile feeling of his mind tracing the gaps and grooves of the planks was intoxicating. If he focused harder, he could even tell which ones were dustier or full of scratches and dents – Elaine's aunt clearly hadn't swept behind the cupboards in weeks.

'It's fascinating… having this much control over your surroundings without spending a single drop of mana…'

He obviously wouldn’t do it, but Percy knew he could bring the whole house down with ease if he wanted, without lifting a finger.

It hadn’t taken him long to discover that he could produce a domain while inhabiting Elaine’s body. This wasn’t even her domain. It was his own. He could only use it due to her grade, but it was made entirely out of his willpower, not hers.

Had he known it would work like this, he might have chosen to possess his cousin instead of Nesha during the fight against the Blues. A big concern when inhabiting another’s body, was that he and his hosts were limited to the same shared mana pool. And since Elaine was better at manipulating her water mana than him, Percy would have only gotten in her way, had he tried to pitch in.

Evidently, the same restriction didn’t apply to one’s domain. As long as he possessed a body with a Blue core or higher, it appeared he could generate a separate domain of his own. In hindsight, it made a lot of sense – two wills, two domains. Needless to say, he and Elaine would have made quick work of their opponents had they realized.

This book's true home is on another platform. Check it out there for the real experience.

Then again, he didn’t really regret how things had turned out.

Had he not been forced into a corner, he might have never merged his spells into the Carnival. And Phoebe knew whether he would have survived this long without it. Not to mention that his clone had saved Nesha’s life, his armour having protected her from a potentially lethal sneak attack. Granted, had he possessed Elaine instead, his girlfriend might have not even needed saving in the first place, but it was hard to guess how things would have played out in this alternative universe.

‘Well, it doesn’t matter… It’s still a great opportunity to learn more about domains…’

This was especially relevant now that his main body was fighting Blues on a frequent basis. Once this clone merged back into the original, his experiences were bound to serve as a good reference point.

It still wasn’t a priority, since he’d rather help Elaine master the Dance and bring the knowledge back to Micky as soon as possible. After all, Elaine wouldn’t be his last Blue host, so he could continue exploring

the subject with his other clones in the future. That was why the two had prioritized the boosting art during the return trip.

However, Percy had investigated a few things over the past couple of months.

The first was obviously the possibility of transferring the domain to his main body via the ethereal cord. Had that worked, Percy wouldn't have even entertained the idea of leaving his cousin's body. Having a clone permanently stationed here would have been a small price to pay, in exchange for the ability to wield a domain whenever he wanted. On top of that, it would have given him the option of equipping all his clones with a domain too, besides the standard stash of fused mana.

And he'd thought the odds of that working had been good. The soul mana he transferred to his clones and familiar already contained willpower, so why wouldn't he be able to send his willpower on its own?

Sadly, reality was a cruel mistress.

While he could indeed transfer his domain through the cord, it turned out that the exotic resource was a lot more evanescent than he'd expected, vanishing after the briefest moment of inattention. The mere act of trying to pass ownership to his main body caused ninety-nine percent of it to dissipate. The scarce traces that made it to the other side didn't last very long either. He clearly wouldn't be able to as much as tickle his opponents with it, let alone having it survive inside his severed soul wisps for more than a second or two.

'I suppose that's why they call it a "domain", and not "soft mana" or anything like that…'

The good news was that he'd managed to replicate some of the tricks his enemies had shown him. After discussing this with his main body, and whenever he and Elaine hadn't been able to practice the Dance, he'd worked on moulding the domain into a thin protective layer around his cousin's body, or a condensed blast powerful enough to shatter a large boulder.

Neither he nor Elaine had made much progress with incorporating their understanding of their affinities into the ability, but Percy didn't even know if he would be able to do that while borrowing her body. Would he have to infuse the properties of his own mana types into it, or his cousin's?

Either way, they weren't in a rush.

Percy was about to resume his practice, when he noticed that his host had stopped talking at some point, as had the others. A quick glance revealed that everyone's plates were empty – Elaine's, her aunt's, the husband's and their adult daughter's. And the woman had left the room at some point, when Percy wasn't paying attention.

A minute later, she returned, carrying four wooden bowls in her hands. Looking at the thick, syrupy liquid glistening in a deep golden colour, his borrowed mouth couldn't help but water.

'Elaine… is that…?'

His cousin smiled internally.

'It's part of the reason I wanted us to come here. I knew my aunt would treat us to some whistling sap. I didn't realize this until after you left for the Alchemists' Guild, but you've never tried it before, have you? I'm sorry I forgot during the trip to the temple.'

Percy chuckled inwards.

'I appreciate the sentiment, but you didn't have to bring us here for that. It's not a big deal.'

But Elaine shook her head internally, while thanking her aunt for the bowl on the outside.

'It is a big deal. I've said this before, but you can't spend your whole life training, Percy... I know the last few years have been hectic, but everyone needs to unwind once in a while. Even you. Even if it's just your clone bringing the memories back later…'

Relinquishing her control over her hands, she let him take over, to enjoy the rare dessert by himself.

Moving the wooden spoon into his cousin's mouth, he tasted the sticky substance, its rich sweetness reminding him a little of Freddy's Honey Rolls. But the sap differed a little, as it left a slightly bitter

aftertaste. It wasn't enough to deter the young children it was often given to, but it was more than sufficient to make the snack unique and memorable.

More than anything, it was Elaine's nice gesture that filled Percy with warmth, however.

'Thanks, cuz... You're the best.'

Chapter 408 – House Avalon's fate

Elaine walked along the dirt path, her fists clenched tight. She couldn't bring herself to enjoy the gentle morning sunlight or the cool breeze teasing strands of her hair. It was hard to do so, after the unsettling news her aunt had shared the night before. She and Percy had anticipated consequences, of course. Still, the revelation had shattered the warm, homey mood that had settled over the small hut during their shared meal.

At the time, she'd wanted nothing more than to storm out of town and head straight to the mansion. In the end, she'd held herself back, opting to spend the night at her relatives' home. It was what they had expected of her – after weeks of travelling. In truth, she hadn't felt tired in the slightest. Not with Percy's trait eliminating the need for sleep. But that wasn't something they could afford to reveal. Percy's connection to their family was precisely the root of the trouble.

'He's worried too…'

Her cousin's guilt and anxiety bled through their connection, heavy and raw. But Percy had always handled negative emotions differently to most people. Instead of stewing in them, he turned them inward, training and pushing himself further. This was probably the correct approach too. Remior was a world where power spoke. What better way to deal with your problems than to strive for more strength?

He was already back to practicing with his domain – since the area wasn't isolated enough for them to risk activating their boosting art.

'At least, my parents are okay…'

According to her aunt, their House was intact, having suffered no casualties in recent years. Their family was still immersed in a sea of trouble, of course, but that had to count for something. As long as her loved ones were alive, everything else could be fixed.

'I just hope Grandpa's alive too.'

Apparently, Archibald had slipped into the eastern side of the province not long after their departure. Leaving their family unprotected, even briefly, had been a massive gamble, but the results spoke for themselves.

The mighty Violet had annihilated House Tantalus on his own – save perhaps for a handful of individuals who might have been away on missions. Assuming those people even existed, none had dared return. The massacre had marked the end of the centuries-old grudge, sparking a brief period of celebration. Even the towns formerly under House Tantalus's control had joined in, thrilled to be free from their cruel masters.

Sadly, the moment of peace had been a fleeting one.

Mere days after the destruction of the noble family, a second wave of rumours had rippled through the province. Archibald had left for the Alchemists' Guild, summoned by an envoy of the Divine Root to answer for his grandson's crimes.

Following that, Galahad had stepped in as the acting patriarch, doing everything in his power to muddy the waters, and to keep the neighbouring provinces guessing. Denying the rumours about Archibald, he had claimed the Violet had merely secluded himself to work on his spells. The lie had bought them a few weeks, until people reported seeing him at the Fungal Spire.

With the ruse exposed, the rival Houses had pressured Galahad, forcing him to surrender the new territories.

By all rights, the land east of the river should have fallen in House Avalon's hands. Every map worth a damn marked it as part of their province, and it had actually belonged to them too, in the past – before the emergence of House Tantalus. More importantly, Archibald had been the one to reclaim it. The new towns were their spoils of war, won fairly.

Yet, the other Houses hadn't cared for logic. Not in the face of benefits, and a weakened competitor they could bully around. At least, Galahad's concession had bought their family some time. After splitting the territory between themselves, the other Houses had calmed down.

It wasn't due to kindness or mercy though, that they'd stopped bothering them.

Many of them were still licking their wounds, having fought wars of their own in recent years. For now, they'd agreed to take a step back to consolidate their gains, but everyone knew it was only a matter of time before their greed returned with a vengeance.

'Things aren't that dire yet,' Percy suddenly said, probably guessing her thoughts. 'According to your aunt, Grandpa is still alive. When I infiltrate the Guild, I can try to break him out. And our family is a lot stronger than those bastards think, even without him.'

Elaine nodded, but didn't say anything. She wasn't a kid anymore – she could tell Percy was just trying to cheer her up. They both knew things weren't as simple as he made them out to be. Rescuing Archibald would only provoke the Divine Root further. That was the very reason he'd surrendered in the first place – to avoid drawing their wrath down upon the family. And that was assuming he was still alive… or that the Root wouldn't strike first, even before the other Houses did.

As far as their strength was concerned, Percy had a point.

Galahad had already been a very powerful Blue, even before mastering Circulation or getting the petal. Once he learned the Dance too, he'd be as strong as a Violet. Adding to that, their family had secretly gained another Blue in her. She wasn't as talented, nor as experienced as her uncle, but with her boosting art and her second core, she should also be able to at least hold a Violet at bay. If Percy stayed with her a while longer, they'd have an extra domain too.

The problem was that they couldn't reveal any of this. Doing so was the same as admitting their lingering ties to Percy. Even if the news didn't attract their enemies' greed, it would certainly bring the Root's ire upon them. Having powerful trump cards didn't mean much, if they couldn't use them. And when it came to politics and diplomacy, flaunting one's strength to deter their rivals was often as important as actually defeating them – if not more.

‘I know it’s not ideal, but we can at least protect ourselves if they dare invade. We just have to make sure not to leave any survivors. It’ll raise a few eyebrows, but it’s better than getting killed,’ he said.

Nodding, she picked up the pace. It wasn’t her job to figure this out. For now, her best bet was to report her situation to Galahad, get her hand fixed, and hear the man’s opinion.

Reaching the mansion didn’t take long, the two spotting the nostalgic building later in the morning. Some moisture gathered in Elaine’s eyes, as her gaze lingered on the insignia of the two faces looking away from one another, carved in several spots along the wooden walls. More than the symbol itself, it was the thought of seeing her parents and her baby brother again that warmed her heart – even if her grandpa’s absence was bound to leave part of it empty…

Stepping into the main hall, she scanned the room, spotting many familiar faces.

Their eyes lit up in recognition too – Elaine had always been somewhat popular in the family, and her rare aquamarine-coloured hair made it difficult to confuse her with somebody else.

But the emotions in their expressions were complicated. There was a lot of relief. She guessed many of these people had worried about her over the years, oblivious to her fate or the reason for her prolonged disappearance. And there were flashes of concern, mainly whenever their gazes brushed over her missing limb.

Yet, that wasn’t everything. She also spotted traces of anger and bitterness on some of them.

‘I suppose I can’t really blame them…’

She sighed.

Elaine had technically abandoned her family in the middle of a war. Sure, Archibald had single-handedly ended said war shortly after, but she hadn’t known about it when she decided to follow Percy. Her guilt had gnawed at her over the years, though she didn’t really regret her actions. Her cousin had needed her more than the others. Percy would have never rescued Micky without her.

Ironically, the situation right now was the exact opposite.

She'd chosen to abandon Percy – who was currently being hunted down by dozens of powerful mages – prioritizing her family instead. She didn't regret that either though. Her cousin had grown strong enough to take care of himself, while it was their House hanging off a cliff this time.

Shrugging, she walked around the room, greeting her relatives and telling them about her "adventures" over the past two years. Lying to them was another thing she didn't particularly enjoy, but she was doing it for their sake more than her own.

To their credit, they all kept the interactions amicable. Even the ones who clearly harboured some resentment ultimately chose not to voice it. Many of the life users offered to heal her, but she told them she'd rather report to Galahad first.

Her healer would inevitably notice her true grade during the treatment, which was another issue they'd have to deal with. They did have several Blues with the life affinity, so fixing her up wasn't going to be very difficult. Even though their power and skill paled in comparison to Archibald's, it shouldn't take more than a few days.

But she'd have to consult with her uncle to decide who to bring into the fold. She didn't distrust any of the family's leaders, yet every person who learned of their secrets was an additional risk.

An hour later, Elaine knocked on Archibald's – no, Galahad's – office. In the end, she hadn't stopped by her parents' yet. As much as she longed to see them, she figured she should probably get herself healed before meeting her brother. Waiting a few more days was a small price to pay to avoid traumatizing the poor kid.

The man replied almost immediately, having probably expected her. The commotion had already reached his ears, no doubt.

"Come in."

Chapter 409 – I won't get caught

Galahad was sitting behind the desk, at Archibald's usual spot.

He appeared stronger than the last time they'd seen him. Even without consciously releasing his domain, the pressure he radiated was undeniable. He'd clearly mastered his new affinity already. The man was dressed sharply as always, without a single wrinkle visible on his silken trousers or his shirt, buttoned to the collar. His dark hair was neatly cut, and even the office itself was tidier than when Archibald had been in charge.

But his eyes were tired. Evidently, exhaustion was the one thing he couldn't just tuck in place. A spark of relief still lit up in his pupils upon seeing Elaine, however.

"Help me make sense of this," he said. "I've heard that your cousin has been killing Blues. I assumed that had to be your doing, but not a single mention of you has reached my ears."

Elaine shrugged, pulling a chair to sit across from her uncle.

"Part of it was me," she admitted as Percy deactivated the controlled concealment runes on the bandages.

Galahad's eyes widened at the sight of not only her Blue core, but the second Green one right underneath it. Yet, she continued.

"But make no mistake. Percy is more than capable of killing Blues by himself. In fact, he's taken down several more since we parted ways. Luckily, it seems they haven't learned of my involvement, or I wouldn't have dared to return."

Saying that, Elaine couldn't help but crack a smile, some pride bubbling up at her cousin's exploits. He'd already mostly closed the gap to her by the time he'd returned from the Guild. The only reason she'd still been ahead of him was because he'd taught her Circulation. And she'd only managed to remain stronger due to the new core he'd given her, and his help with her advancement.

Percy was always grateful whenever she did some small gesture for him, such as celebrating his birthday, or getting him to experience some traditional snack he'd missed out on. Somehow, he didn't seem to realize how much more he'd done for her over the years.

And even though the gap between them had widened once again, Percy was already working tirelessly to close it. Perhaps, he'd be stronger than her the next time they met in person.

Galahad took a few seconds to gather his thoughts before speaking.

"We're in a ton of trouble. Your grandfather is held captive at the Alchemists' Guild, and the neighbouring Houses want our land."

"I've heard. I stopped by Pinesap town on the w–"

"Uncle, I'm sorry," Percy butted in, taking control of her body. "This is all my fault. I don't regret keeping the Aurora Dew from the Order, but I should have never returned to the mansion after becoming a fugitive. If that bastard hadn't found me here, things wouldn't have been this bad."

Elaine felt her cousin's voice choking in her throat. Of all the risky choices he'd made over the years, this was probably the one that bothered him the most.

"Percy? Are you here too?" Galahad asked.

He nodded.

"Just one of my clones. My main body is still on the run. I'll hand Deimos the recipe right now if you think he'll release Grandpa."

Galahad shook his head.

"Don't. You were wise not to do that. The only thing giving Father the benefit of the doubt is the fact that we've denied all involvement with you. If they see you compromising to help us, it'll make the situation worse. Besides, things are somewhat stable for now."

Percy raised an eyebrow.

“How so?”

“The Root has allowed us to visit Father a few times over the years. They’ve kept him and your mentor alive, since they’re still trying to extract the information they want from them. Deimos is in a difficult position, because they’ve both refused to break under torture, and he can’t risk going too far.”

“Why hasn’t he harmed our family?”

“Two reasons. First, he knows your grandfather has only surrendered to keep us safe. If he tries anything funny, Father will fight back. Also, our official position is that we’ve excommunicated you, condemned your actions, and complied with all their demands. Even for the Root, wiping out an entire family without evidence of wrongdoing would send an unsettling message to the other Houses.”

“Is there nothing we can do to save Grandpa?” Elaine asked, her voice shaky.

She didn’t know if Galahad had realized who had spoken, but it didn’t really make a difference.

“Not for the time being. He wouldn’t want us to worry about him either. He’s entrusted me with keeping our family safe, and that’s what I intend to focus on.”

Percy tapped her fingers on the desk, leaning back on the chair.

“We might be able to help with that,” he said after a while.

Next, he took a few deep breaths, activating Circulation. Galahad tilted his head at first, since this wasn’t anything new to him. But his eyes widened as soon as Percy took the spell a step farther, countless azure bubbles feeding ambient mana into their channels.

“It’s still incomplete, but we’re getting there. We can explain how the water version of the spell works, though you’ll have to figure the lightning and acid portions by yourself. I assume you’ve already worked out the Circulation patterns for them?”

“Naturally,” Galahad said, a rare smile finding its way onto his face. “How about Elaine’s second core. Is it close to Blue?”

She shook her head.

“Over five years with Aurora Dew, but I haven’t brought much with me. Fifteen with the regular elixirs. Speaking of that, I’ll need your help to buy my second daily dose. It doesn’t have to come from the family’s stash. I have enough resources to pay for it.”

“Alright. I hope I don’t need to tell you how important it is to keep everything a secret. If you’re forced to reveal your strength, make sure not to leave any survivors.”

Elaine nodded, as Percy spoke again.

“What about her hand? She’s been like this for months.”

Galahad sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose.

“We’ll get Isolde to do it. Of all our Blues with the life affinity, I trust her the most. I suppose we can teach her the boosting art too. No sense in keeping it from her if she knows everything else. Father left me detailed instructions on the life pattern before leaving.”

Isolde was Galahad’s younger sister. The third and final child from Archibald’s first wife. And she was also a Yellow-born, about thirty years younger than Galahad. Elaine hadn’t interacted much with her, but her impression of the woman wasn’t bad. With the pattern readily available and a life affinity to accelerate her physical conditioning, she’d learn the spell in no time. If she managed to figure out the Dance too, they’d have three Blues as strong as Violets, even if they couldn’t really flaunt them. That was enough strength to practically crush any lone family dumb enough to attack.

Elaine could teach her father the Dance too, since he already knew Circulation and had the same affinity as her. Gawain was “only” at Green, so the impact wouldn’t be as great, but no family would say no to another Blue-level combatant. If they got lucky, he might obtain a domain too with the spell active.

She was about to get up, to let her uncle arrange everything, when Galahad spoke.

“Wait. There’s something else I need to tell Percy.”

Her cousin flashed Galahad a questioning look, prompting him to continue.

“Don’t beat yourself over what happened. Father was right to protect you, and so was Elaine. Noble families always encounter some resistance when they get their hands on a big opportunity, and they have to overcome it to grow. Usually, the trouble isn’t as exaggerated as it is in your case, but then again, the rewards can’t be compared either. Truth be told, you’ve helped us just as much as you’ve endangered us.”

“I have?” Percy asked.

“Father wouldn’t have been strong enough to wipe out House Tantalus without your help. Those demons were a thorn in our side for centuries. Also, you’re part of the reason why the other families haven’t attacked yet. The rest of Remior might not be certain about your connection to us, but you still serve as a powerful deterrent.”

“They’re afraid of me?”

Galahad smiled again, for the second time this meeting.

“Why wouldn’t they be? Noble Houses are fixed in place. Bound by rules and all sorts of concerns. But you’re not. What’s more scary than a criminal that freely roams the continent, slaughtering Blues left and right? They’re all hesitant to touch us. After all, what if you do care about your family? The amount of damage you can cause is significant. There were a few signs of them gathering their forces to invade a couple months ago, right until the news about the dead Holy Children spread.”

Percy nodded, but their uncle wasn’t done.

“At the same time, this is only true as long as your main body remains free. The moment the Divine Root catches you, our enemies will no longer have any concerns. Do you understand what I’m trying to say?”

A wave of determination gushed through their connection, as Percy clenched their fists.

“I do. I won’t get caught.”

Chapter 410 – Firm wills

Once again, Percy found himself in the space between worlds, shopping for a host. And just like many clones before him, his “gaze” eventually landed on a rather promising destination.

‘Another lesser spring…’

Most planets in the universe were devoid of life. Had Percy been forced to sift through all of them, he would have never found anything useful. Thankfully, no lives meant no souls, and no souls meant that he couldn’t even perceive those places via his current means. Consequently, most of the worlds he saw were teeming with life but no way for sapients to advance – even if such planets were supposed to be relatively uncommon in the grand scheme of things.

Lesser springs were rarer still, yet finding them was ultimately just a numbers game. He only had to keep searching for a couple of weeks at most, looking for a world with higher-graded souls. And Percy’s current clone was clearly luckier than most, as he’d only brushed over a couple dozen planets before finding one that had piqued his interest.

‘I seriously doubt it’s a greater spring though.’

There weren’t enough people here in the first place, and the distribution wasn’t very favourable either. Going from lesser to greater springs presented him with another massive challenge, as there were only a few hundred of those in the entire universe.

‘Well, whatever… It’s still worth checking out…’

This planet had everything from Brown insects to gods. Percy spotted over a dozen deities – they were hard to miss – which meant that this place was among the most developed lesser springs he’d seen, surpassing Remior and, by extension, Huehue, Felmara or Amenthes. Atlantis might have had more

gods, but Percy hadn't paid as much attention to details like that during his earlier trips. He'd lacked the experience with his bloodline to properly examine a world, as well as the knowledge about the cosmos to make sense of the information.

As for the Vault?

There was no doubt in his mind that Metatron had lots of gods and titans under him, but Percy usually entered the place through the portals, and left it in a hurry, dragged away by his main body's pull. In hindsight, he did want to slap himself for not getting a better look at the artificial world during his first visit.

'Anyway, I have to decide who to possess… The only real options are Yellows, Greens and Blues…'

It would be pointless to go for anyone weaker, and borderline impossible for anyone stronger. Not to mention that he couldn't even spot any injured Violets or Whites at the moment. The Blues were also scarce, but he did see a couple here and there.

A higher grade obviously meant more knowledge and greater access to valuable treasures, but also more resistance, suspicion, and downright hostility. While Percy's clones had made a lot of progress practicing Zoris's tricks, he didn't think he was quite ready to go for a Blue just yet.

He could latch onto a soul that had rejected him for a while, but forcing their connection to remain open wouldn't be easy. He could also suppress the blessing's effects on his mana for a couple hours, but it wouldn't last for the whole trip, nor could he extend this to his soul.

Of course, it didn't necessarily mean that his host would be an asshole. They might be able to cooperate just fine. But the added risk wasn't worth it until he could handle himself a bit better.

'Maybe next time… Let's go with a Green today…'

Observing his prospective hosts for a few minutes, Percy noticed something unusual. Many of them appeared stronger than they were supposed to be. He could still distinguish their grades with ease, but their souls seemed to have a strange quality to them that they had no right possessing.

The healthy ones rejected him more adamantly, while the injured ones invited him more strongly. It was as if their very wills burned brighter, imposing themselves on the world around them. This wasn't exactly a new thing to Percy, because he'd long known that souls at Blue or higher did this. He'd always assumed this was just a side-effect of their domains.

It was different here, however, in a bunch of key ways.

While the Reds, Oranges and Yellows were completely normal, this strange situation seemed to affect some of the Greens. Not all of them had it, and it was really subtle even for the ones who did, but it still made no sense to see something he'd associated with domains present in Green souls. As for the people who were supposed to have domains – the Blues and above? Every last one of them had a significantly firmer will.

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'Interesting… I doubt their Greens have proper domains of their own, but they clearly have something similar…'

The fact that the difference was so small meant that this ability wasn't all that powerful at first. Yet, it seemed to have a massive impact on them after their promotion. Had these people learned of a way to train themselves at Green, to give themselves a stronger domain down the line?

Either way, this was worth looking into. There was a good chance that a lesser spring with so many gods would have a titan or two, so this weird ability might even be a Decree he could steal. The only question was, how would he maximize his odds of getting it?

'Hmmm… I need to pick a Green host, but not just anyone… It's better if they don't have the ability yet, but are close to getting it…'

Every Decree worked differently, but Percy felt his best chance to snatch one was at the very moment his host obtained their own copy. At least, that was what he'd done with Enki. Had he possessed somebody on Atlantis who'd already had Ea's Gift, Percy would have probably missed out on the opportunity. Then again, it was entirely possible that this was the type of Decree that had to be obtained from birth, like the one giving him his bloodline. If it was like that, then it was probably not the type he could steal in the first place.

Scanning the sea of souls again, he looked for an injured Green who lacked this unique quality. Knowing this was swiftly turning into a very promising trip, he didn't rush, taking his time to find a host in just the right condition. Eventually, a figurative smile formed on his non-existent lips.

'This one isn't injured that badly… did they die from exhaustion or something?'

Percy hadn't even known it was possible for a Green to work themselves to death, but this was good. If his host had killed themselves while training, there was a decent chance they had been trying to master the very ability that Percy was interested in.

More importantly, they seemed rather young. Telling one's exact age through their soul wasn't that easy. Leaving aside all the differences between species, Greens could theoretically live for thousands of years even without further advancements. Thus, the fact that Percy could tell probably meant he was dealing with a child.

'A Green-born?!'

His heart would have skipped a beat if he had one. It was perfect!

Percy had no idea what kind of amateurs would allow a kid this young – a Holy Child no less – to die during training, but he couldn't think of a better host to help him accomplish his current objective. If this place was anything like Remior, a Green-born who'd never advanced had to be younger than ten. They clearly hadn't failed to master the ability due to a lack of talent – just due to their youth. Growing rapidly as they were, his host stood a decent chance of succeeding – especially with Percy's help. And he wouldn't be surprised if this person had a ton of backing.

'Even if we fail, saving the kid's life is the right thing to do.'

Not wasting another moment, he sank into the dying Green-born's soul. Fortunately, the kid's mind was present this time, and in a good condition too. Admittedly, their thoughts did appear a little groggy though…

'I can save you if you let me,' Percy said, cutting to the chase.

Some surprise seeped through their connection, but his host didn’t ask any questions, giving him a mental nod back. Percy didn’t know if this was just the kid’s personality, or if they were just too tired from all the training to engage in conversation. Whatever it was, he’d figure it out later.

Weaving the preservation runes with practiced ease, he swiftly stitched the child’s soul up, before allowing his senses to blend with theirs. Before he even opened his eyes, he pulled his Status up, eager to see what he was dealing with.

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Duwa (Percival's clone)

Mana cores:

Spectral traits:

Spells:

Alchemic principles:

Decrees: