Wanderer 48

Chapter 48: Limit

“What?” Percy asked.

Freddy gave him a concerned look.

“I said, are you sure you’re ok?” he repeated.

The young man felt his mind slipping again, but he resisted the pull.

“Yeah, sorry. It’s been a long day.” he forced himself to say.

It was only now he remembered he was holding a Honey Roll.

‘Thank Phoebe I haven’t dropped it.’

Not that he was in the mood to eat, but it would have looked strange. He searched his pocket for some change, but his friend stopped him.

“It’s on the house today. Just look after yourself man. You’re the only one I see who’s hunting 18 hours a day, no breaks. Clearly, it’s not sustainable.”

Percy nodded, thanking Freddy before leaving in a hurry. Going out in this state hadn’t been his brightest idea. It wasn’t until he got back home that he allowed himself to fall on the bed, leaving the snack on a table for later.

Soon, another episode hit him, but he allowed himself to sink into Micky’s body this time. They were pecking the core out of the drone when he joined him. Percy had watched the bird hunt, as Micky had inadvertently sent him the images. He’d nearly got stung too, having lost his concentration during what would have otherwise been a trivial kill.

As the soul got digested in the familiar's stomach, Percy's mind followed the soul mana back to his own body. He quickly forced it to his eyes, to see what the hell was going on with him.

'Nothing too weird there.' he frowned.

His soul didn't look much different from the time he went to Huehue. There was the small scar near his sternum, a grapefruit-sized crater above his stomach, and a bunch of cracks all over. Fewer than before too, due to his increased resilience.

'It's not due to excessive damage...'

This was different than even the time he'd woken up after creating the familiar. Rather than pain or weakness, it felt more like his sense of self was shaken. As if he had trouble remaining himself.

'Is it because I have two connections at the same time?'

This didn't bode well for his ambitious plan of forming an army of familiars. At this rate, he'd be lucky if he could keep sending out clones.

'Hopefully, the clone isn't affected.'

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And there it was – the good old infinite nothingness he fondly remembered.

Unlike the last clone, this one accepted his identity promptly, beginning the search for a body without delay. He knew this was one of the most critical parts of the journey.

During his previous attempt, three weeks had passed on Remior, but he shouldn't have spent longer than a couple of days on Huehue. This could only mean one of two things. Either there was a huge

mismatch in the flow of time from one world to another, or he had spent most of it in the space between them.

Consequently, the faster he moved here the better.

Retracing his actions, he allowed his senses to expand outwards, touching upon the sea of souls. Brushing over them without focusing too intently was a little tricky at first. Percy had grown rusty, having not done this in over a year, but he soon got a grip on it.

'Too powerful… too weak… too powerful again… too broken… too broken… too weak…'

He couldn't tell how long it took, but he eventually picked one he liked, reaching towards it without missing a beat.

A moment later, he found himself lodged between the nooks and crannies of the dying soul. It was more cramped than last time, but that was a good thing. It meant his new host was in a better condition than Micky had been in.

And, having learned from his past experience, he was a lot more careful moving around, trying not to exert much pressure on the fragments before the new guy accepted him.

'Hello? Anybody home?'

No reply.

Nothing verbal, at least. A sense of panic and pain assaulted him. Also, hunger… and cold… indescribable cold. Percy's very soul shivered.

'Did this person freeze to death?'

This story has been taken without authorization. Report any sightings.

His host felt distant. They didn't seem aggressive – at least, they didn't push him away yet. But they cowered in a corner, trying to avoid being touched.

'I'm not here to hurt you. Can you talk?'

The creature didn't understand him. Its intelligence seemed even more rudimentary than his familiar's had been right after hatching.

'A beast perhaps?'

That put Percy at a bit of an impasse. He couldn't begin the process of patching up their souls into something workable unless his host opened up. But they couldn't even communicate properly. The only clues he had were that it was afraid, in pain, starving and really cold.

'Well, I don't know how to deal with the fear or the pain… I could send it the taste of a Honey Roll, but I don't even know what this thing eats.'

There was only one thing he could do. He dug through his memories for anything suitable. The first one he found was a time he was nestled in a blanket, enjoying some hot soup during the winter. He couldn't even tell how old he was. Maybe 4 or 5?

It was after his folks died, and the blanket was cozy, almost reminding him of his mother's hug. A weird thing to replace one's parents with, he knew, but he was willing to cut himself some slack. It wasn't like toddler-Percy had anybody else in his life back then. He hadn't grown close to Elaine until later.

'Does this work for you pal? I'll help you find warmth like that too if you let me in.'

Suspicion.

Percy counted it as progress. You'd only get suspicious about something you hoped was true. Well, not that it was true of course. It was an empty promise. He had no idea if he could deliver. He'd try to make good on it if possible, but he wasn't going to cry if he ended up lying to the animal either.

‘Better keep this last part to myself.’

At least, he was more in control of what he allowed to leak through the connection this time. The bond was more intrusive when he possessed something than it was with his familiar, but he’d still gained enough experience over the past year to filter his thoughts somewhat.

A few more carefully picked memories and some placating later, the creature opened up enough to let him move around without harming it.

‘The hard part is over.’

His soul wisp expanded and twisted, stretching through the gaps and touching as many of the broken shards as possible. Only then did he unleash his sizeable stash of soul mana, letting it do its thing.

Like glue, the potent substance forged a bridge between the two entities, as they came closer together than ever before. Memories flashed through Percy’s mind, one after another…

Hatching through an egg, a nest full of tiny gecko-like things, cannibalism, running away, hiding from giant shadows, scavenging for scraps, cold, cold, shivering, FREEZING COLD…

Oh, and they were all monochrome.

‘Great, because who needs colours?!’

Percy tried opening his new eyes. They refused to budge. He wasn’t sure if he was signalling the wrong muscles or if the problem lied elsewhere.

‘Any help? Can you open our eyes?’

Silence.

The beast was still in there somewhere, but it refused to come to the surface, happy to observe from the background.

‘Ok, fine. Thanks for the body I guess…’

Unable to figure out how to control this thing, he fell back to his Status instead.

Percival's clone

Mana cores:

Spells:

???:

Percy would have frowned if he could.

Nothing special there. His clone didn’t have a proper name this time, which frankly made sense. An Orange core was decent. Not too high, but it could have been worse. Only his Parting Gift was listed under spells, because it was the only one he could currently use. The beast affinity and the incomplete second mana core were also expected.

‘So, what do we do with you?’

There wasn’t a question mark thingy to bring back to Remior and he didn’t think the lizard knew any profound techniques to teach. He also doubted it would make a good familiar, nor had he any intention of crippling himself again to try.

‘Yeah… This one is definitely a lost cause.’

He'd thought the exact same thing on Huehue, only to be proven wrong. Still, he was willing to bet good money it was true this time. He could walk around, hoping to find something interesting, but he hadn't a clue how to even bring it back. Were there even any sentient races on this world?

'Maybe I can try finding a life source and learn what happens when a beast gets a second core.'

That sounded like a plan. It would be a good datapoint, so he'd know what to expect from Micky. Not the most rewarding venture, but probably the best he could get out of the creature.

'Assuming this body is even capable of moving, that is.'

It didn't respond to any commands. He couldn't even hear his own heartbeat. Frustrated, he grew less gentle with it. Its owner didn't seem to care, so why should he? He willed any muscle to move. He tried to give himself a panic attack. Anything…

A twitch.

It wasn't much, but it was the first sign of feedback. Capitalizing on it, he redoubled his efforts, trying to expand on the sensation.

CRACK

More twitches. A muscle group.

He could feel a limb unfold slowly. A foreleg – if he understood the lizard's physiology correctly.

CRACK. CRACK. CRACK.

Every time a joint moved, something broke.

'Are we frozen solid?'

It would certainly explain his host's aversion to cold and their impairment. Why didn't it hurt though? Were they numb?

A couple frantic spasms later, Percy received his answer. He didn't get the chance to celebrate his newly freed limb before it began burning, as if on fire.

'Fuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuck!!!'

That didn't make him give up though. If anything, it was proof his efforts were paying off. He figured the pain would stop either when he froze completely again, or when he fully thawed. And the latter seemed preferable. He ignored the other limbs, focusing inwards. The sooner he jumpstarted their heart the faster his torture would come to an end.

'Assuming we even have one at the usual spot.'

Fortunately, they did, as he found out a couple minutes later. Its beats were soft and infrequent. He thought there was something wrong with the organ, or that it would take a while to get back to normal.

But it never did. At some point, he was forced to accept that this was normal for the lizard. In any case, the pain had receded slightly. Even more importantly, he realized – to his great joy – he could finally open their eyes.

A flash of white greeted him, which soon died down to…

…an everything else of white.