

Waiting in a queue must have been a novel experience for Elaine.

There weren't that many people in their House. Being one of the chosen ones, she was generally given priority for most things. Strictly speaking, the same was true here. Just like everywhere else on Remior. *Yellow-borns always went first*. Still, the sheer number of people waiting their turn was simply staggering. Even the lucky groups who had a Yellow-born among them easily numbered in the triple digits, which meant the trio would have to spend the better part of the morning in the line.

Percy on the other hand was amazed he got to skip *most* of the wait for a change. He flashed the Orange-borns behind him an apologetic expression, not too comfortable cutting in line. It wasn't like he particularly minded waiting at the back either. For one, he was already used to such things by now.

More importantly, this was perhaps the only time he *wished* he could stay here longer. Well, ok. He was naturally eager to find out his affinity, plus his legs were killing him. Elaine was propping him up right now which wasn't exactly ideal. Still, he had another reason for taking his sweet time.

Soon after entering the valley, he quickly verified his guess had been correct. Once the density of mind mana around him increased to the point where each breath carried with it a sliver of the rosy mist, he felt a part of his body stir. It wasn't his sternum, where his original core – everyone's core – was located. Instead, this was happening in his abdomen. He hadn't been able to examine his temporary alien body for long enough, but it seemed that's where the second mana core took root.

'Doesn't matter where it's located.'

In any case, he'd be happy to get one on his *forehead* if it meant giving him an edge.

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

The text in his Status read the same, as his abdomen continued to suck the mind mana like a gluttonous vortex. Percy even made a conscious effort to take deeper, more frequent breaths. He didn't know if it would help, but it couldn't hurt. *Right?* He had no idea how much mana the seed needed to 'germinate', although he hoped he would manage to collect enough by the time they had to leave.

But he shook his head. This was too important to leave up to chance.

'I'm not going anywhere until it's done.'

If necessary, he'd make up some excuse to get Gawain to wait here for a couple more days. He knew his uncle wouldn't be thrilled, but if he told him his injuries were acting up, the man would listen. *Maybe.*

'Hopefully it doesn't come to that.'

Percy then looked around to pass the time. There were two types of people standing in the queue.

Some wore finer clothes, much like them. They were nobles of various Houses. And he recognized many of their insignias, having stumbled upon them in his studies. All in all, there weren't too many prominent Houses on Remior, only about a thousand. Each required a Violet core at minimum to survive, and they didn't exactly grow on trees. Even Yellow-borns had to guzzle down expensive elixirs for several centuries and survive countless assassination attempts to get to that point. Only 1% of them did. *Baldy was one of those.*

The second group were dressed in simpler clothes, ranging from worn linen outfits to dirty rags. Those were the commoners. They rarely had a bloodline of their own, and even the few who had one didn't particularly stand out, as it was obviously not powerful enough to help them establish a House. Still, even the poorest commoner could give birth to a Yellow cored baby. And the Divine

Order made sure that all the talented kids were given a chance to rise in the world.

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'How nice of them.' he sneered.

Both the nobles and the peasants had a few things in common. First, every group escorted at least one toddler, about five years old. Furthermore, all of those kids were Orange-born at a minimum. Percy's was the only group who escorted a Red-born teenager, earning him no small number of disdainful stares.

'Yeah, well. Fuck all of you.'

As annoying as it was, it made sense really. Phoebe was powerful, but she couldn't fill the whole world with mind mana. Instead, she mostly focused it on places such as this temple which administrated the more advanced test.

Beyond that, she also mass-produced a lot of trinkets, which smaller temples used for a more basic version of the test. Kids were typically brought to one of the minor sites at 5, where their Status was awakened, and the grade of the

core measured. From there, all the promising kids would be brought to temples like this by their parents, to be tested further.

It was possible for a Red-born to pay for an advanced test of course, but most of them didn't bother. After all, few had a rare affinity or a bloodline they couldn't identify on their own. Even fewer had the disposable income to waste on such a pointless endeavour.

'Well, unless you have rich parents who care enough to pay for you.'

Sadly, Percy was out of luck in that department too. First of all, both his parents had been Red-born like him. Secondly, they had both been killed along with most of the other Red-borns of the family in a nasty attack from a rival House, only a couple years after his birth.

He was only brought out of his thoughts when it was their turn to enter the temple. The structure looked even more grand from up close. It had a strange shape, its roof like a staircase of progressively smaller concentric rings, rising about a hundred meters to the sky. Each of those steps were lined with rows of marble statues, depicting various men and women, their features more beautiful than any mortal he had ever seen. The figures were polished and immaculate, clearly enchanted to weather dust and rain alike.

'The gods of the Divine Order.'

Each of the temples supposedly depicted statues of every single god that had ever risen in the history of Remior. Apparently, whenever a new one emerged, another statue was added. Not that it happened often.

"The test is only free for Orange-borns and above." a male voice said.

Percy looked at the guard who had just spoken. He was a tall blond guy appearing to be in his late twenties, possessing a Green core like his uncle. He wore a funny-looking toga and a pair of sandals, holding an intricate spear that looked more decorative than suited for combat, as did the other guard opposite him. The two had crossed their weapons, blocking the way to the tall golden gate of the temple.

"Naturally." said Gawain, handing him a heavy pouch filled with coins.

The guard opened it to check its contents, allowing Percy to partially glimpse at their golden lustre.

GULP

At that point, he realized the test was even more expensive than he'd thought. If he hadn't convinced baldy to subsidize him, gods-knew how long he would have needed to pay his own way.

A few steps into the temple, Elaine spoke.

"Dad, why do they charge so much for a simple test? Aren't they just making things difficult for Red-borns?"

Gawain shook his head.

"Listen, Elaine. I know it seems unfair, but the Divine Order genuinely wants what's best for Remior."

"But then why?! Isn't it best to help everyone figure out their affinity?!"

"In a perfect world, yes. But it takes a tremendous amount of mind mana to perform the test and Red-borns are 60% of the population. There just isn't enough for everyone."

Percy who was only partially listening to their conversation felt cold sweat trickle down his back.

'Shit, I hope nobody realizes how much I've taken already.'

The density of the mist had already tripled by the time they reached the temple, but that wasn't even worth mentioning compared to the changes upon entering it. Inside, it was easily a dozen times thicker, to the point where they could barely watch where they stepped. And even worse, the seed in Percy's abdomen didn't seem to care about optics, only doubling its efforts to absorb it. By now, he could even see the mist spiral around his mouth if he paid close attention. He was forced to slow down his breaths, trying to hide what was happening.

So focused was he on doing so, that he failed to notice when Gawain stopped walking, crashing into his uncle.

"Ouch!" he said, rubbing his forehead.

It felt more like he'd bumped into a wall than a person.

Gawain tossed a glare his way to shut him up, when Percy realized they weren't alone.