Wanderer 74

Chapter 74: Gabe

The state of his latest host shocked Percy. On one hand, he'd spent way too long searching for a body, so he had no choice but to compromise. This person's condition was much worse than he'd like. However, as broken as it was, this was still one of the strongest souls any of his clones had come across.

'Probably a sentient. Also, a higher grade than usual.'

Knowing that a good first impression was half the battle, he wasn't in a hurry to reach out. Instead, he took a moment deliberating how to best introduce himself, unwilling to spook an otherwise promising host. Though he never got the chance. The stranger spoke first.

'Wow, sending ghosts now? You guys are getting really creative.'

This wasn't among the reactions Percy was expecting, but he didn't sense any hostility, which was a good sign.

'I'm not a ghost. Just a soul clone.' he explained.

'What's the difference?' his host asked.

Percy would have creased his brow if he had one. While he'd never thought of his clones like that, they were invisible, incorporeal and could possess bodies. Functionally, they did fit with what he imagined a ghost to be.

'Ok, I can see why you'd call me that. Still, I should clarify that I wasn't sent by whoever you think sent me.'

'Oh really?' the spirit sounded amused. 'Are you not here to uncover the magical secrets of this world?'

The response left Percy stumped.

‘Alright. You got me again. But how could you possibly know that? I’ve only been to a few places so far. Rather remote too. Do you often get visited by foreign souls?’ he asked.

‘Souls, no. That’s why I was surprised by your approach. But lots of people want a piece of our world. Sadly for them, infiltrating this place is impossible. Or well… it used to be, I suppose…’ his host explained.

The spirit’s words made Percy want to rub his hands. This was shaping into quite the treasure trove already. A powerful host he could communicate with, and a rich world coveted by all. But their body was deteriorating fast, and this person seemed suspicious of him.

‘Look, I admit you got me figured out. I guess I am a ghost, and I am also here in search of knowledge to make myself stronger. However, I’m not some powerful god, nor is there any organization behind me. I’m just a random guy with an Orange core, wandering blindly around the universe, picking up whatever crumbs I find.’ he said.

‘My point is, I couldn’t really do too much damage to your world even if I wanted to. Which I don’t!’ he hurriedly added.

His host sent him something akin to a mental shrug.

‘I’m sorry… I may have inadvertently given you the impression I care. The truth is, I have no loyalty to this place. Even if you were sent by our enemies to hurt us, I wouldn’t give a shit.’

Percy was surprised once more. He wasn’t the most altruistic person either, but he wouldn’t be so indifferent if an outsider tried to use him to take down Remior. Still, his host’s callousness made him easy to work with.

‘Alright, then perhaps we can strike a deal. I’ll patch your soul up for a while, and you’ll let me learn whatever I can in that time.’

A pang of laughter rang in their shared consciousness, but it sounded hollow.

‘That’s a great start, but it seems to me you’re getting the better end of the bargain.’ the spirit protested.

‘How so?’

‘I’ll still be dead in a couple of days. Meanwhile, you get to return home, enjoying your gains for the rest of your life.’

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Percy remained silent for a few seconds. It was true his offer was lopsided, but he couldn’t help it.

‘Look… As I mentioned, you’re not the first person I possess. Sadly, I can’t fix you permanently. The most I can do is hold your broken soul together for a while.’

‘Then there’s nothing in it for me. Or do I look like a charity?’

They appeared to be at an impasse.

‘So, are we going to waste this? Can’t you think of a way to make it work?’ Percy asked again, unwilling to lose this chance.

‘Well, I know how to fix my body, at least. But it won’t be easy. Plus, it’s basically squandering an otherwise valuable opportunity. Originally, I was hoping to use it for something else. Do you think that’s enough to save me?’

Percy considered it for a few moments. Despite what his new host might believe, he wasn’t exactly an expert on souls. Everything he knew were just bits and pieces he’d discovered by accident. Still, he took this seriously. Technically, he could lie to get what he wanted, but deceiving a dying person didn’t sit well with him.

‘Honestly, I don’t know.’ he ultimately said. ‘I’ve never managed to heal my hosts’ bodies before, so I have no idea what that does to their soul. At a minimum, it should slow down its degradation, buying us more time. As for anything beyond that, I can only promise to do my best to help you.’

The spirit didn’t reply right away, taking a few minutes to contemplate Percy’s words. Eventually, he probably realised this was the best he was going to get.

‘Fair enough. Name’s Gabriel by the way. Friends call me Gabe though. Or well… they would – if I had any.’

Percy felt the natural resistance of his host disappear, allowing him to move more freely in the damaged vessel. Seeing that their condition was critical, he stretched his soul wisp, touching as many fragments as he could without delay. Only then did he release some of the stashed mana, letting it flow to the cracks, gluing himself to Gabe.

Having already sent out over thirty clones, Percy was a bit of a veteran by now. He’d grown somewhat proficient at patching his hosts up efficiently, meaning he didn’t need to use all his mana right away. The rest, he kept as a trump card, in case Gabe needed a follow-up treatment.

‘Percy.’ he replied.

Finally able to tap into the body’s senses, a bizarre sight greeted him. He found himself lying face-up in a spacious room, its ceiling as high as its sides were long. It appeared to be a dark grey cube, over 50 meters wide, entirely made of a smooth metal.

Bright runes covered all its surfaces, their combined glow more than sufficient to illuminate the place. They were smaller, denser and far more intricate than anything he’d seen before. The symbols were joined together with all sorts of geometric shapes and curved lines.

If this magical script could be likened to a detailed painting from a talented artist, then everything they had back on Remior – including the glyphs in the Alchemists’ Guild – were nothing more than a toddler’s scribbles.

‘Ah, shit!’ shifting a little made him wince, the pain breaking him out of his daze.

It hurt all over, though this wasn't his first rodeo. Soon, he filtered out the unpleasant sensation, before gazing down at his body.

'Geez, what are we?! Some kind of man-shaped jellyfish?!'

While Gabe was vaguely humanoid, his flesh was transparent. Through their skin, Percy saw an assortment of strange organs decorating the interior of their torso. A pale sphere-like thing pulsed rhythmically like a heart in their chest. It was right behind the bright blue star burning in their sternum. Percy didn't know what affinity it was, but a quick activation of Mana Sense revealed the core was at Green. As for the rest of the squirming organs, their colours varied from turquoise to deep purple, and Percy couldn't name any of them if his life depended on it. He also had four limbs – his favourite number to have – but they all ended in just three digits.

'Workable, I guess.'

More concerning was the lack of clothes – other than a pair of brown shorts – and the numerous cuts all over their body, all oozing out a clear, viscous liquid.

'Please tell me that isn't your blood.'

Seemingly oblivious to the novelty of his guest's situation, Gabe didn't even register his words, clearly impatient to get himself healed. Without even giving Percy a chance to read his new Status, he spoke.

"Cube. Restart the 'swarm' challenge. Green level. User ID: 004527945512."

"Authorization granted. Restarting 'swarm' challenge, Green level. The user has already cleared wave 5. Do you wish to resume at wave 6? WARNING: Wave 6 contains elite enemies." a soulless voice boomed from all around them.

"Yes." Gabe said, not missing a beat.

"Choice confirmed. Wave begins in 18 rits."

‘Whoa! Slow down man!’ Percy protested. ‘Shouldn’t you bring me up to speed before diving into a challenge?’

Gabe shrugged.

‘What for? You said it yourself – your main body is only at Orange. Unless you’ve possessed another Green core with a fire affinity in the past, you won’t be much help. Just let me handle this. Besides, time is too precious, and waiting is only going to worsen my condition.’

“Wave begins in 12 rits.”

Percy wasn’t sure how long a rit was. He estimated it was a little longer than a second, which meant they were running out of time. Fast.

‘At least tell me you can handle this.’

“Wave begins in 6 rits.”

‘Probably. I was this close last time, but the attacks from the mini-bosses caught me by surprise. The injuries will make it harder though.’

Gabe’s words didn’t sound particularly reassuring, but Percy had no choice but to trust him.

“Wave begins. May your challenge be successful!”