Wanderer 98

Chapter 98: Tests

Percy had several goals for this particular clone.

Though exploring the cosmos was arguably the most important tool in his arsenal – and by a huge margin – he'd decided to take a short break from that, to test other potential uses for his ability.

Naturally, the first thing he wanted to know was whether he could create local clones on Remior. He could imagine several scenarios where that would be handy – whether it was because he found an interesting body worth possessing, or because he needed another assistant to aid him back home.

But there was more.

If his only goal had been to possess that Starry Worker, he wouldn't have aimed his torso towards the sky. Instead, he could have launched his soul fragment directly at the creature – much like he'd done to the egg when creating his familiar. However, he hadn't done that. That was because Percy wanted to check one more thing.

'Can I return to Remior like this?' he wondered, scanning the sea of souls surrounding him.

His reasoning was simple. He might not always have access to the body he wanted to take over. It would serve him well if he could learn to navigate in this state better, developing a way to accurately reach a more distant target.

'I can't tell up from down like this though…'

While outside a body, Percy had a very distorted sense of time and space. Two seemingly nearby souls might not even be located on the same world as one another. But he did have something he could use as a makeshift compass.

'What happens if I focus on my main body?'

In all his previous expeditions, Percy had gazed outwards, searching for a suitable host while ignoring the ethereal cord linking him to the rest of his soul. Yet, the connection was always there, constantly trying to draw him back. Its pull kept growing stronger and stronger, until it became irresistible. So far, he'd only ever treated this phenomenon as a nuisance at worse, or a timer at best – indicating how long he had to complete his mission. Not today though. This time, he was going to approach his main body on purpose.

'Let's do this slowly. I don't want it to suck me in completely.'

Percy only allowed himself the most fleeting of glances. And it was a good thing he'd held back too. The moment his attention even brushed by his own soul, it attracted him far more forcefully than any foreign entity ever had. Percy felt the familiar glow enlarge in his mind rapidly, as he did everything in his power to halt his movement.

He desperately fought against the connection, willing with all his strength to accelerate the exact opposite way. So lost was he in that frame of mind, in fact, that he didn't even register he had succeeded, until much later. By the time he regained awareness, he noted he wasn't moving, though the cord was even tenser than before.

'Is it because I approached my body, or because more time has passed?'

Either way, he couldn't afford to waste another second. Glancing at his own soul was no longer an option. He was far closer than before. If he did that again, he'd be absorbed for sure. Instead, he tried something else. Drawing some of his stashed mana, he pushed it into the ethereal cord. It flowed through it without any resistance, leaving his control.

Nothing happened for a while. Yet, when Percy was starting to think he'd failed, a trickle of soul mana poured into him.

'It's more than a trickle… this… it's too much!!'

His main body had already saturated the clone before cutting it off, so it couldn't fit much more. It only took him a moment to replenish the minuscule quantity he'd sent away, as well as any other traces he'd

lost over time. The rest, he had to release outside, in the empty expanse between worlds, wasting it. But that wasn't important. The only thing that mattered was what this meant.

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'Success! I'm in range of my main body!' Percy would have grinned if he could.

While the ethereal cord allowed him to communicate and even transfer mana over vast distances, it wasn't without limit. He'd only ever managed to use it like that with Micky, who had never been more than a few miles away from him. As for his clones, Percy had never successfully sent them any mana before. The moment they left his body, they had always been on their own.

Consequently, he couldn't even tell what the maximum range was. For all he knew, it might only stretch as far as the distance between his house in the settlement and Micky's hunting spot on the second level of the Spire. Or it might cover all of Remior and then some.

'Now what?'

Percy was a bit stuck. He couldn't get any closer, nor did he dare to send a message. He was afraid attempting to communicate with his main body was more likely to draw him in, which was why he'd opted to send mana instead. He couldn't move away either, as it still took a lot of effort to maintain his current distance.

Thinking of something, he focused outwards once more, as the sea of souls manifested in his periphery. He could try approaching a different host to escape from his main body's pull.

Of course, he wouldn't actually do that. After all, that would only waste his previous efforts. He had a better idea. As his mind brushed over the souls, he searched for one in particular. He knew it had to be close!

'There!'

He found it. It was the only healthy soul besides his own that didn't reject him. If anything, this one also exerted a pull on him, though it was much weaker than his main body's. Naturally, it was Micky!

There was no cord connecting him to the familiar, as all his wisps were linked to his main body – not each other. Still, he felt it was possible to possess the crow if he wanted.

'The wasp must be somewhere between the two.'

He didn't dare to look at them directly, to avoid being pulled, but he could tell their general direction. That said, locating the Starry Worker wasn't exactly trivial. In the material world, his main body and his familiar were standing next to each other, with the insect right alongside them. However, this wasn't the material world. A straight line there wasn't quite as straight in the world of souls.

'Still, there has to be SOME correlation…'

Percy sensed hundreds of souls where he expected the bug to be. He'd have to go through them, one by one. Most of them he could easily ignore, as they were too healthy. It helped to know his target was on the verge of death. Of course, it wouldn't be the only one that met the criterion. This was the Fungal Spire, where lots of people spent all day hunting bugs.

'The rest should be above Orange…' he remembered.

Other people hunted in the upper levels. While Percy had struggled to tell the souls' grades apart back when he began using his bloodline, he'd improved a lot since then. Having sent out dozens of clones already, he was confident he could tell the Starry Worker apart from its stronger cousins. And sure enough…

'There!'

The soul was fading, on the verge of fizzling out. Since he'd taken care not to injure the bug too badly, it could only mean he'd spent too long looking for it.

'Let's hope it's still functional.'

Without missing a beat, he concentrated on his suspected target, accelerating towards it. The very next moment, he found himself in a familiar situation, stuck inside a foreign vessel. Though this one wasn't as crammed as usual. Much of his host's soul had already evaporated, leaving him ample space to move about.

Carefully reaching out to the creature, he soon discovered two things. First, he was semi-positive this was indeed a Starry Wasp, thanks to the few foggy memories he managed to access. Though he'd have to properly bond to it before he could confirm it was an Orange variant – and the specific one he'd meant to possess. Second, the dying insect was in a delirious state, making negotiations a little tricky.

'Wake up, will you?! I'm trying to help you!' he said, leaving out the part that all of this was his fault in the first place.

The good news was he was an expert at getting through to beasts by now. Most of his hosts fell in this category, so he'd had plenty of practice placating them. Simple-minded creatures as they were, it was all about honing into their instincts and desires, telling them what they wanted to hear. Usually, this meant promising them food or shelter.

It took him a couple minutes, but eventually he succeeded. Well, it certainly helped he already knew what the bug wanted – to escape from his familiar's clutches! After establishing the preliminary connection to his host, he stretched his soul wisp, touching as many of the soul fragments as he could, before releasing all the stashed mana. Naturally, he didn't care about the expenditure this time. His main body was here to top him up if necessary – a luxury he wasn't used to!

Once he finished patching everything up as best as he could, he finally managed to tap into his host's senses. The insect's vision wasn't that great – much too blurry for his liking. Still, he couldn't complain about what he saw. Standing in front of him, was the most handsome man he'd ever laid eyes upon.

'Hello Percy!'