

## Chapter 95: Statistically, they will die. Concretely...

Bechar crossed his arms, obviously annoyed by Priam's arrogant smile.

"Not bad, but the year's not over. Seeing an outsider take first place will set the competition alight."

"Hum," Priam harrumphed. "They've seen nothing yet. I have more Tribulations coming up, a good opportunity to finish first of the decade, right?"

"You should aim for the century," Bechar quipped.

"The millennium. Give me six months," Priam declared. He meant it.

The answer left Bechar speechless before he burst out laughing. "Okay, I'll take that bet. In any case, bravo to you. It's an impressive result," conceded the changeling.

Priam puffed up his chest, and Bechar shook his head. "Don't let it go to your head. Right now, you're soaring, but you mustn't run out of steam. Opportunities and resources will get scarcer and the competition tougher," Bechar warned him.

"Don't worry, I have enough stimulation in Elysium. For example, despite my superior rank, I'm sure Arnold is still stronger than me."

Priam recalled his encounter with the Var Elegis. **[Eidetic Memory]** was a bit hazy because his perspective at the time was so poor, but Priam remembered the attack that had killed him. Arnold had moved terribly fast. *His attributes must already be around two hundred and fifty...*

The Var Elegis must have improved since then. Despite this, Priam was confident. The gap between them had narrowed thanks to his efforts. *I'll be back, Arnold...*

When silence answered, Priam looked up. Bechar was looking at him seriously and... embarrassed.

"What's going on?" he asked.

Bechar sighed before speaking up. "Can you tell me how you earned this rank? The Achievement reward depends partly on one's rank, and... I'm interested," he explained.

Priam hesitated when he heard the question. He suspected that this kind of request was taboo. Of course, as a System employee, Bechar couldn't hurt him or force him to tell the truth. However, **[Tribulation Hunter]** and **[He Who Eludes Death]** had to remain secret for as long as possible.

Priam attempted a half-truth. "I got quite a few bonuses because the System has just integrated humanity..."

Bechar shook his head. "The System grades you according to the difficulty of your Tribulations and your various bonuses and maluses, yeah. But above all, it looks at how well you complete your Tribulations. According to you, Arnold is stronger than you and has probably finished his Tribulations faster. Yet you're ahead of him, even though you're both part of a civilization."

Priam reacted to the last sentence. "What do you mean by that?"

Bechar hesitated, then turned to the center of the room. He pointed to the miniature Moon orbiting the Earth. It suddenly grew larger, and Priam hurriedly stepped back.

"It's an illusion," Bechar reassured him. The scoundrel turned to hide his laughter.

Fascinated, Priam observed the Moon that housed the Reunion. Massive, it housed a myriad of cities, arranged in circles of eight domes. At the center of each circle was a mark resembling a stylized animal head.

"Are these Earl's locations?" he asked.

"There are three for each group of eight domes," confirmed Bechar.

"These are the most powerful Nobles?" If he could improve **[Moon Earl]** by the end of the Reunion...

Bechar laughed. "There are Marquess, but you're too weak."

"... Where?"

"On Earth."

Priam remembered the drake he'd seen flying when he'd reached the Moon's upper atmosphere during his battle with the eagle. His new instinct trembled with impatience. *If I kill this monster, I'll improve my draconic bloodline...*

The monster would undoubtedly make mincemeat of Priam, but his curiosity demanded an answer.

"Where's the portal to get there?"

Bechar burst out laughing. Seconds later, as Priam began to take offense, he apologized.

"Sorry, but it's just that... The System isn't that nice. You want to go to Earth? Then fly. There's no air in space, so you won't slow down. It might even give you a Title."

Priam opened his mouth before closing it again. The idea seemed ridiculous but... Reunion wasn't a prison or a sandbox. He could go anywhere. *Maybe with **[Kinetic Control]**...*

Priam grimaced. The distance between the Earth and the Moon was about 384,000 kilometers. Light took just over a second to travel that distance. Reunion had less than three days left, so he would have to fly at more than 1.5 kilometers per second to reach it before the end. *Hard, but not impossible.*

Bechar, seeing Priam in deep thought, interrupted him. "You might be able to do it, but... can you survive without oxygen?"

Priam grimaced. It was indeed an important detail. Space travel wasn't just around the corner.

"Killjoy. No Earth, for now then. But that doesn't answer my question. Why would being part of a civilization affect my rank?"

Bechar ran a hand through his hair... before realizing his human form was bald. He grunted, and a moment later, a mass of hair sprouted on his head a moment later. The changeling had no problem with baldness. "I just know that the System treats beasts and beings belonging to a civilization differently. Don't ask me the specifics."

The changeling turned to the Moon hologram. "Look," said Bechar, pointing to one of the marks. It represented a roaring lion. When the changeform's finger touched it, an image appeared, and Priam recognized Safamu finishing his Tribulation. Seconds later, he would die by Priam's hand.

"He was an Earl with attributes far superior to yours. Yet he only triggered one Tribulation. The reason is that beasts have more permissive thresholds. That's one of the differences. If you must know, the threshold also changes according to race. Without it, some mythical creatures would face several Tribulations in their mother's womb. Or in their egg."

"That's unfair," remarked Priam. Safamu looked majestic in the picture. A few seconds later, he would be dead. *I had to take every chance I could...*

Bechar shrugged. "Wild beasts have no ancestors to guide them. They rarely have the opportunity to buy resources or skill blueprints. Above all, there are few of them to awaken superior intelligence and therefore make the most of the System."

"Yes, but they gain attributes just by getting older," Priam remarked. Safamu had been immensely physically powerful, and Priam found it hard to imagine the Earl doing pull-ups and push-ups.

"Their bloodline helps them, yes, but it's the same for you, right? You've absorbed Dragon blood, Phoenix blood and... there's something else. Naturally, they'll strengthen your body in the long run."

Priam thought again about his new race. *As soon as the conversation's over, I'll look at it.*

The image continued to move, and soon Priam saw Safamu confronting a man and a woman. The lion fought them off, only to be killed moments later by Priam. Promesse pierced the boss, leaving behind a trail of carnage.

"He had managed to withstand his Tribulation, and yet..."

Bechar nodded, "Tribulations are a System tool to concentrate resources on the most powerful warriors and craftsmen. However, wars and assassinations cause the most deaths in this Universe. By far."

The video looped at the beginning of the Lion's Tribulation, and Priam frowned.

"Now that I think about it, he survived his Tribulation. So did I, and so did two other Elysians. That's a lot," Priam remarked.

Bechar snorted. "It's called a survivor bias. You're a monster, so you made it. We'll see what you say in ten years when millions of humans will have died. In Tier 0, the first Tribulation has a mortality rate of 99%. The next ones are around 90%. You can do the math."

"So many deaths..." lamented Priam. "It makes you wonder how it's possible to reach Tier 5."

Bechar shrugged. "There are billions of humans. With your reproductive capacity, if you develop well, you'll produce a Tier 5 every century or so. Think of the number of civilizations in the sector. Think of the number of sectors. That's not counting your Racial Talent, which is really powerful..."

Priam took a moment to do the math before nodding. Bechar was right. But if he was... "There should be many Tier 9s in the Universe by now."

"Bah. Most Tier 5s don't age anymore and have got what they wanted. Why should they fight to become Tier 6s?" questioned Bechar.

"So they don't lose everything if a Tier 6 wants their resources, knowledge, or empire?" retorted Priam. "Because eternal life without surprise, danger, or novelty is boring? Out of curiosity? Out of ambition?"

Priam didn't want to die, but his desire for power was not solely dictated by fear of death.

Bechar took a long look at Priam before replying. "These are good reasons for you, Priam. Maybe for humans in general. But not all races think like you. Take an earthworm and turn them into a god. Will they want to explore the cosmos in search of loose, element-rich soil? They might. But when they find it, they'll remain an almost immortal earthworm, happy to enjoy simple pleasures."

Behind Bechar and the image of the Moon, the Earth was still spinning. Priam thought about the changeling's words, and this one made sense. Humans were curious by nature. Not all races thought alike.

"Still, there should be plenty of Tier 7,8 and 9. Is there?" Beings capable of destroying entire galaxies... Priam didn't like being at the mercy of that kind of power.

If he had to be honest, he was mostly curious. He was already impressed by his powers at Tier 0. What were the limits of a Tier 9?

Bechar shook his head. "There's a Tier 8, sent by the System, who presides over the sector, but I don't know of any others. There aren't that many, but we're a young sector..."

Priam almost asked another question but sensed that Bechar had more to say. "The fear of death eventually paralyzes us, but also the psychological side of Tribulations. Yours has caused many deaths and... It's not a coincidence."

Priam nodded. He suspected as much. Clearly, the System wanted to change his state of mind, or at least make him mentally stronger. A tragic experience was the best way to make a human grow up, but nobody wanted to experience that. After all, it was also the best way to break a soul.

Above all, it didn't take away all of his responsibility. People died because of his actions.

"Finally, there's something else. The more Tribulations you pass per Tier, the further away the thresholds of the following Tiers are. Most Tier 5s in the sector have passed the minimum possible Tribulations per Tier. Three, three, two, two, one. That's the optimal ratio to reach Tier 5 and help your faction for eternity."

"However, they're too weak to survive the transition to Tier 6. They have no momentum left," Priam realized.

"Exactly," agreed Bechar.

One piece of information had caught Priam's eye. "When you say you have to pass as much Tribulation as possible through Tier, you..." Bechar interrupted him.

"I can't say more to a Tier 0, so don't look at me like that."

Priam frowned. He would try as much Tribulation as possible, of course, but he would have liked to know why...

"If I understand correctly," he continued. "Only the crème de la crème de la crème can attempt multiple Tribulations per Tier, and that's up to Tier 9?"

"Seems logical to me," Bechar pouted. Priam realized that the changeling had no idea. The shapeshifter was much stronger than Priam but wasn't a Tier 5. *Tier 4? More like Tier 3...*

Bechar seemed to hesitate before continuing. "As I said, if you could explain how you achieved such a high rank, it would help me with my next Tribulation..."

Priam remained silent as he made his decision. The changeling had been a great help, both in learning Micro and in answering his questions. Understanding the System that now governed his life seemed important.

"I can't tell you everything because I have secrets," Priam announced, and Bechar nodded. "But I have theories, and we can discuss them. I think my rank was great because I managed to do something almost unique..."

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"You want me to kill him?" asked Louis.

"No... Not yet, anyway. I won't give him the joy of being a martyr. It would sully my son's image."

Alain was a patient man. At eighty, patience was a useful quality. After all, before the System, it would take him almost twenty seconds to get down the stairs. Even so, the situation was beginning to bore him.

Part of the city was in ruins, and some inhabitants had been wounded. This number was relatively low, thanks to a joint effort by many factions and individuals. A few thousand were slightly injured, and a few hundred were seriously wounded. Hundreds were missing, with no family or friends to identify them.

The death toll had risen to one hundred and eight, and some were still between life and death.

The figure could have been much higher, but human cooperation had saved many lives. Unfortunately, this cooperation was coming to an end.

"Priam must be judged by the people. He must swear an oath of protection to humanity!" shouted a man blocking the entrance to the Ducal Palace. The crowd in front of him was silent. After all, his son had saved more than a tenth of the people present. The population had seen him fight and sweat for them.

"These Tribulations are his fault! The dead cry out for vengeance. He is the author of your tears!" The rant went on and on, and Alain's anger mounted.

"Are you sure?" offered Louis. "I can't stand his voice..."

"... I'll take care of it," replied Alain.

"Rule by fear, that's his plan! Rise, you who suffer so much, and expose his crimes!"

Alain had heard enough. He walked over to the man and grabbed his wrist. The man turned, surprised, and his surprise increased when Alain swept him off his feet.

Abruptly falling to the ground, he let out a cry of pain. Alain looked down at him.

"Excuse me, but my memory is failing. Can you remind me where you were when my son was lending a helping hand to these people? How? I can't hear you... Besides, who are you?"

Louis laughed. Insulting a son in front of his father was a bad idea.

\*

*Status: Race change detected. Please read the notification regarding attribute calibration.*

*[He Who Eludes Death] charge OFF. Reloaded in 22 hours 41 min 7s*

*[Tribulation]: Tribulations are coming.*

*Time: 182 days 23 hours 14 minutes 20 seconds.*