

Chapter 205: Ideal Prerequisites

Maya bit her lip. If Wang Lin was right, then the factions had no choice. Forcing a ban would be like hindering the will of the Seven. A surefire way to die.

"Calypse Daccantz... Is he going to do something?"

"He already did something," the colonel replied. "Something blatantly foolish, as he's vanished. Elysium's residents are deemed the soldiers of the Seven. The System won't let parasites attack its fighters—weak as they may be. I'd wager he's been conscripted."

Conscripted... Sent to Elysium with no return ticket—except during System events.

"Forgive me if this question is out of line, Colonel, but... Shouldn't a Tier 5 be above this kind of error?" Maya asked. It wasn't advisable to question Tier 5s—true gods—but their superior seemed chatty.

Wang Lin burst into laughter, surprising the two humans. "I guess it's odd for you. Our stats are so high that our vivacity and certain Talents prevent us from making such errors theoretically." Maya perked up. Tier 5s' abilities were seldom discussed.

"In practice, two things can lead us astray," Wang Lin explained. "First, the gap between our Charisma and Willpower. The higher the Charisma, the stronger our emotions. The higher our Willpower, the better we can control these emotions. Memory and Vivacity play a minor role in that."

"Memory?" Maya asked. She'd taken a crash course on the System, but attributes were covered briefly.

Wang Lin added another log to the fireplace before inhaling the silvery smoke. "It's an attribute not to be overlooked as soon as the soul supersedes the brain. You'll learn more if you become a Major or spend your contribution points. Regardless, depending on their build, some Tier 5s tend to succumb easily to their emotions. Karmic manipulators like Daccantz are known for that."

"Like the Sphinxes," Kenzo commented. They'd heard stories about that mythical clan. These usually rational beings were feared for their legendary and immutable tempers.

"Like the Sphinxes," Wang Lin confirmed. "Daccantz would have simply attacked without waiting to confirm Arnold or Priam's location... That seems unlikely. What's possible is that one of his enemies concealed the rivals' location. Half of his possessions were absorbed by a minor god named Viracocha. I believe you know him."

"He was the god behind humanity's Threat," Kenzo spat.

"He must have blessed your Champion and then used that connection to disrupt Daccantz's probes. He protected the System's investments in Elysium while trapping one of his enemies. A cunning fellow."

"The Seven must realize he's been using them!" Kenzo exclaimed before realizing who he was speaking to. "Apologies, Colonel."

Wang Lin smiled, more amused than angry. "It's all right, Kenzo. We Mercenaries are passionate folks. To answer you, the Seven are more or less omniscient; of course, they understand what's happening. However, Viracocha played by the rules. Using the laws of the universe to gain an advantage is a sign of intelligence and is encouraged."

Maya grimaced. Viracocha becoming more powerful thanks to Priam was terrible news. Wang Lin's aura shifted, and she refocused.

"These tidings have made me chatty, but I didn't summon you for that. Your results so far have been exemplary, and your reward is here: a personalized race upgrade."

In addition to honing powerful martial skills, Maya had spearheaded recruitment campaigns on Gaia, the capital of the Hope Sector. Utilizing her charismatic personality and showcasing her skills, she'd convinced over a thousand humans to enlist with the Mercenaries.

"Thank you very much, Colonel," Maya replied, tilting her head. She could feel the Tribulations breathing down her neck, and the new thresholds would allow her to establish a solid Tier 0 foundation. Maya wasn't about to sell her future to speed up her progression. "Have you found a way for us to remain... human?"

Consulting the information provided by the Mercenaries, Maya had discovered numerous rituals and elixirs capable of enhancing the human race. However, these evolutions diluted their humanity. Becoming a half-ogress or replacing her flesh with metal repulsed her. After discussing it with Kenzo, she'd turned down a first free race evolution.

Wang Lin nodded. "The Mercenaries are interested in your racial Talent. Our scientists have collaborated with humans to attempt to purify it during evolution. The first positive result was confirmed this morning."

The Mercenaries didn't bother with bioethics when progress was at stake, but Maya had ensured the test subjects were willing and well-treated. The Mercenaries had improved their genetic code and provided them with rare resources.

"It's encouraging, but isn't it a bit early to offer us a racial Tier up?"

The colonel smiled, revealing teeth capable of chewing steel. "Normally yes, but this evolution isn't unprecedented and has already been validated by the System. A shame because our scientists were counting on the discovery of a new race to achieve an Achievement. Unfortunately, your Champion has already been there."

With a snap of his fingers, the colonel conjured the hologram of a naked man and woman. Their proportions seemed perfectly suited for combat.

"Maya, Kenzo, let me introduce you to the High Human standard."

*

"I remember the thrill of receiving Achievements left and right," said the phoenix, a nostalgic tone in its voice.

"I wouldn't mind some tips on earning more," Priam grinned as he watched the bird descend from the sun of his inner world.

"You know I can't give you that kind of knowledge. Even if I could, there is merit in discovering things for yourself. You're doing just fine; keep pushing your limits and accomplishing feats, and the Achievements will come."

Priam reclined in the grass near the central pond of Concepts Archipelago. The rays of the miniature sun warmed him, and he smiled. Only a gentle breeze was missing to turn his inner world into a true paradise.

The phoenix landed beside him. "You seem indecisive. Matters of the heart?"

"Pardon?"

"You've got dead cells from a female on your body. With your flame coat, the only way that could happen is if your skins came into contact."

"We—" Priam paused. Throughout his conversation with Esmée, he'd worn his mist and flame coat. The magical garment—in his opinion—was quite stylish, but he was essentially naked underneath. *And I offered her my arm. I hope she didn't take me for a pervert...*

"Everything was going fine until you pointed out that I might need to buy clothes for certain occasions," Priam grimaced. "But I'm indecisive about something else. I received a Revelation Token, and I'm not sure how to use it," Priam admitted.

"What rarity?"

"Epic."

"Not bad. What are you torn between?"

Priam explained his current dilemma to the phoenix. He didn't want to squander such an interesting reward.

"Do you really think there's no chance I can reach an ideal upgrade with [**Aether Manipulation**]?" Priam asked.

"None. I know the prerequisites, and there's at least one you won't be able to achieve quickly. Elysium is a land of opportunity, but you're too constrained by time."

It was bad news for Priam. The Phoenix Prince had been aware of the prerequisites but hadn't managed to unlock the ideal upgrade.

"You're talking about mastering Aether manipulation? I have the option to purchase puzzles at the Auctions. I thought of solving them and then reselling to buy more. By spending my Potential, my mastery will increase rapidly."

"That's a good idea, but I was referring to more... absolute prerequisites," the phoenix grimaced.

Priam pondered the various prerequisites he'd encountered. Some required mastery of Concepts or Supremacies, while others demanded feats or experiences. Fire Champion Physique even had demands concerning his bloodlines.

Taking a few deep breaths, Priam massaged his temples. Not knowing the answer was bothering him. He could accept the impossibility of acquiring the ideal upgrade—he'd discovered the System just over a month ago—but not the ignorance.

"You're curious as a cat." The phoenix seemed to read his thoughts.

"Except I've got multiple lives."

"That's a phoenix joke," the bird chuckled before perching next to Priam. "Back to your problem, using the Token on **[Aether Manipulation]** isn't a bad idea. Knowledge of these prerequisites isn't useless."

Priam furrowed his brows before smiling. "You think I can sell this knowledge?"

"Or trade it with your rivals, the tribes, or your civilization. Moreover, just knowing these prerequisites will help you move in the right direction, reducing the time needed to acquire the high upgrade."

With eyes closed, letting the sun caress his skin, Priam pondered the phoenix's words. It was a good suggestion, but wasn't there something better to do?

"If this information is valuable, why not select **[Ideal Aether Perception]**? The prerequisites for a legendary ideal skill must be even rarer."

The phoenix let out a hilariously caw. For a moment, it looked like a fiery crow.

"When you used the Ace Merit to enhance **[Aether Perception]**, the Seven descended to modify your soul, right? Do you really think you could reproduce their modification?"

Priam's eidetic memory reminded him of the omnipotent consciousnesses that had descended to elevate his soul. They had altered its shape, volume, and density while keeping his personality intact. Could he reproduce their work? The answer was obvious.

"Not even with infinite time and resources. Modifying my soul seems dangerous."

"Wise answer. Neither my bloodline nor my Immortal mother could help me achieve that goal. After my failure, I reached Tier 1 in time to upgrade **[Ideal Aether Perception]** thanks to a Merit. That's what most Aces who can do, and you'll certainly do the same." The phoenix locked eyes with Priam. "The prerequisites for **[Ideal Aether Perception]** are useless for most races. Knowledge means nothing without power."

Even knowing the prerequisites for **[Ideal Aether Perception]**, Priam could never perfectly modify his soul himself.

"Too bad. I had one last reserve: the Token can show me all possible legendary skills. Knowing that the System gives **[Moon Mist]** to all who become **[Moon Lords]**, perhaps that's the key to dominating the second Reunion and taming the mutation hidden in my eyes. Depending on the System's opportunities, maybe it's a good idea to choose this skill?"

"Possible," the phoenix acknowledged. "Probable even. But **[Moon Mist]** will only be useful during the next Reunion, and by then, you'll have other chances to discover **[Moon Mist]**'s prerequisites."

Priam squinted at the phoenix's cryptic statement before bursting into laughter. "I guess the rewards from the Colosseum are getting interesting."

The phoenix remained silent, and Priam took that as confirmation.

*Lvl Up: **[Revelation Resilience]** lvl 5*

MEM +3

META (AFFI) +3

META (AUTH) +3

"No point in lingering," Priam decided upon noticing his latest notification. Some people kept trying to glean information about him.

Raising the Token, he activated it.

***Revelation Token - Ideal Prerequisites (Epic)** used.*

Choose a skill to see its ideal upgrades.

[Aether Manipulation].

[Aether Manipulation - Rare] has only one ideal evolution: **[Ideal Aether Manipulation - Epic]**.

Prerequisites:

- *Domain II*
- *Meta(Affinity)(evolved) > 1,000.*
- *Meta(Focus)(evolved) > 1,000.*
- *Meta(Endurance)(evolved) > 1,000.*
- *Advanced mastery of Aether (click for details).*

"Damn."

Reading the prerequisites, Priam understood he wouldn't obtain the ideal upgrade of **[Aether Manipulation]**. To become a Tier 1 before the next Reunion, Priam had devised a tight schedule, incompatible with the ideal upgrade.

Domain II would trigger the timer for his High Tribulation. Surviving his Tribulations, he could choose, like Kazuki, to postpone his High Tribulation by three months. That created a multitude of problems.

Moreover, increasing his three meta attributes would trigger at least two new Tribulations. Priam would then be forced to face a quintuple Tribulation without the Heavenly Dragon—he needed **[Aether Manipulation - Epic]** to begin tempering his body—nor the Colosseum's best rewards. *That's suicide.*

Even if Priam managed to accomplish this feat, the Phoenix Prince had spent ten years training to acquire advanced mastery of Aether and had failed. Could Priam surpass it in three months?

Taking a deep breath, Priam made peace with himself.

"I won't achieve this ideal upgrade." Saying these words, he accepted the truth.

"The path to the Zenith is long. A solid foundation is crucial, but you can always tweak it later," the phoenix comforted him. "I've—"

Priam gently interrupted. "I'm not a kid. I know I can't have it all in life. What matters is learning from mistakes. At Tier 1, I'll succeed in getting the ideal upgrade for this skill," he swore, clenching his fists.

The phoenix shook its head before smiling. "If you have the time."

"I've got so much to do that I've got to make concessions. But I don't plan on being tossed from one crappy situation to another all my life," Priam retorted. "When Bastard will be buried, when Sphinx will play with me, and when I've stabilized Oasis, I'll follow my own path."

Life was full of surprises and opportunities, but Priam didn't need anyone to force him to explore it.

Casting another glance at the prerequisites, he grimaced.

"... The prerequisites concerning the meta attributes are insane." Will was his only attribute over a thousand. "I guess my draconic Talent can't evolve three attributes?"

"Given the purity of your bloodline, no. I'm not even sure if I'd advise you to evolve any of those meta-attributes; they're not necessary for the high upgrade."

Now that Priam knew the prerequisites, the phoenix could speak freely about them.

"But will they increase my learning speed?"

"Not as much as certain mental attributes."

This sounded like a new clue, and Priam pondered. *Memory to gain a sort of muscle memory for aether manipulation? Willpower to focus on a task? Vivacity to understand faster? Charisma if the evolution allows to charm aether?*

"One more question for the Guardian of Secrets," Priam sighed before sitting cross-legged. "The high upgrade won't unlock on its own. Esmée gave me some exercises to increase my ability to manipulate aether. Might as well start now."

The phoenix perched on his shoulder, its warmth heating Priam's cheek. Without **[Fire Champion Physique]**, his skin would have melted in moments.

"Before meditating, you should prepare your environment," it advised. "It'll save you precious time. You have two advantages compared to me. First, Elysium: the aether is dense and pure... Well, when the Necromoon's not around. Log-a-rhythm filters the aether, and so does Concepts Archipelago. In your inner world, every second of training is as useful as a minute on Gaia."

After several days of siphoning, the density of aether in Concepts Archipelago was close to that in Elysium.

"Gaia?" Priam didn't recognize the name.

"The capital of the Hope Sector and where I trained when I was young," the phoenix replied. "Your second advantage is Concepts Archipelago. Don't forget, your Talent can absorb Concept fragments to modify the environment."

"Do you have something in mind?"

"It depends on the fragments sold by the Sun Shop. For example, a Logic fragment could infuse the Concept into a delimited area. Anything that enters will see its logic buffed. Concentration, Patience, Tranquility, etc., you can fill your gaps and strengthen your strong points in this world."

"Is there a limit?"

"That's for you to find out."

Priam's eyes sparkled as he opened the Sun Shop. It was finally time to exploit the main asset of his inner world.

*

Status:

PHYSICAL:

Strength 557

Constitution 860

Agility 552

Vitality 840

Perception 714

MENTAL:

Vivacity 509

Dexterity 587

Memory 441 (+4)

Willpower 1 028

Charisma 631

META:

Meta-affinity 524 (+4)

Meta-focus 350

Meta-endurance 354

Meta-perception 221

Meta-chance 230

Meta-authority 51 (+3)

Potential: 9 979 (+3)

Tier 0

Sun points: 318 892 (+469)

[He Who Eludes Death] charge: PRIMED.

[Tribulation]: Three Tribulations pending.

Future Tribulations delayed until:

Time: 164 days 17 hours 12 minutes 7 seconds.

Next thresholds: 6 attributes > 600 / 3 attributes > 900