

Chapter 240: Deadly Copulation

The Dragon's Way helped Priam's cells and soul absorb the draconic essence flowing through his veins.

Lvl Up: [Friction Resistance] lvl 19, 20

AGI +2

As his body and soul transformed, the experience made Priam reflect on the different paths that could lead to Tier 10. Cultivating the Three Heart Supremacies elevated the self by increasing attributes and aligning the body, mind, and soul closer to the Zenith. Micro, Domain, and Mastery—each method was different, yet Priam knew they were pure and complementary.

A more dangerous but vast path was that of the Concepts. To change the world, one had to understand and integrate it. It was dangerous for the ego because drawing closer to an idea was no trivial matter. Getting too close to Fire would get you burned, just as whoever tastes Freedom would seek to break their chains. Concepts changed your way of thinking, so it was crucial to avoid practicing those not aligned with your true nature.

That was without even mentioning the influence of those walking the same path as you. Nonetheless, despite its pitfalls, it was a viable path, as proven by the Seven.

A last alternative was the perception, understanding, and manipulation of aether. The primordial energy was the source of everything and defied the rules. Beginning, end, concepts, ideas, logic, and even entropy had no hold on the eternal essence; at least, that's what Priam had been told.

Unlike the other paths, mastering aether required a medium. One had to use runes—a structure that had meaning for the aether, that resonated with it—which could take an infinite number of forms and concepts. A sigil drawn in the sand was as valid as a spoken incantation or the specific vibration of an atom... and easier to replicate than creating a constellation.

Runes, the alphabet of aether, were as infinite as the fluid they allowed one to manipulate, but some creatures had almost managed to comprehend them. The most famous were the dragons.

Where most mythical races created cores and fulcrums, the supreme race had the innate ability to inscribe runes directly onto their souls. This power allowed them to manipulate reality directly.

A fantastic power that the System had managed to democratize.

Priam had recently understood the true nature of skills: a rune or a ritual etched onto one of the layers of the soul. Besides being a shortcut to manipulate reality, these sigils perfected the self's trilogy: body, mind, and soul. This improvement was gradual and better known as "leveling up."

Several methods existed to level up one's skills. The most common was to train hard and consciously. The System and runes then helped with the regeneration of muscle fibers after work, guided the repair of microfractures in the bones, oriented body growth, perfected muscle memory, and optimized brain synapses.

Priam hadn't yet fully understood what leveling up and upgrading a skill entailed for the soul, but the result was clear. The user learned and progressed faster and better without the System replacing the effort; it simply maximized the results obtained.

Leveling up corresponded to better proficiency and the attributes gained by the user. Achievements, Titles, Quests, or Colosseum rewards could also level up skills, but all these methods had a common point: these gains were not simply given by an omnipotent entity, they were earned, untainted by a bloodline or Concept.

Each level-up was thus a new step towards the Zenith: a miracle in line with the policies of the Seven Grand Concepts, which refused to corrupt the inhabitants of their world.

Chewing the last piece of the defeated beast's heart, its barely controlled energy coursing through his body, Priam understood why dragons were so feared. The similarity between their Way and that of the System meant their bloodline was also capable of conferring level-ups. It was marvelous because it meant every draconic adversary was a potential source of raw power.

It was perilous because the more Priam ascended, the more appetizing he would become to those who shared his bloodline.

"Let them come," he smiled.

As he used his mist and Domain to rinse off the draconic blood, part of Priam's attention checked his notifications.

[Friction Resistance] has reached level 20, its maximum level as a common skill.

Depending on your background, two upgrades are available:

[Great Friction Resistance - Rare] - General upgrade. No future upgrade possible.

Potential Cost: 5

[Smooth Scales - Rare] - You possess draconic scales and the essence of an amphiptere flows in your veins. High upgrade potential. Potential Cost: 20

Priam hesitated for a moment to accept a high upgrade. Could he unlock an ideal upgrade with his unique build? *Maybe, but it will be hard.* He hadn't even unlocked a standard upgrade, not having worked hard on this resistance. **[He Who Eludes Death]** and **[Kinetic Control]** might eventually help him reach insane speeds in a fluid, maybe even explode in flight like a rocket re-entering the atmosphere, but would that be enough?

Moreover, Priam was reluctant to die like that. His constitution was too close to twelve hundred, which would be a death sentence. Plus, he had been alive for almost four days—a

record so far—and one of Elysium’s chain quests was to survive. Log-a-rhythm’s seed had been his reward for surviving three days, so Priam anticipated the next milestone: a week.

“Too bad, I would have liked to see what happens when you only unlock ideal upgrades for a skill,” he murmured as he validated the upgrade.

*You have selected the skill **[Smooth Scales - Rare]**.*

POT-20

***[Smooth Scales]** - Friction is the resistance that one surface or object encounters when moving over another. Your draconic scales act like a lubricant, allowing you to partially ignore this force. You lose less speed due to interactions with your environment. This skill has other advantages that will not be listed here to keep this description kid-friendly.*

AGI +3

A layer of spectral scales appeared on the surface of his skin, bringing a smile to Priam’s lips. Thanks to **[Ideal Aether Perception]** and his constitution’s milestones, he could see that his new resistance only applied to his draconic scales; a protection he could invoke and banish at will. In short, he could switch between a mode with friction and one without. *This could be an interesting trick...*

While studying his new skill, Priam noticed another important point by reading the option description. He had obtained a high upgrade for two reasons: he possessed draconic scales and had absorbed the essence of the amphiptere. By extrapolating a bit, one could think that the draconic essence had been integrated into **[Friction Resistance]** because it was one of the winged serpent’s main characteristics.

“Depending on the species of dragon I hunt, I’ll get a corresponding reward,” mused Priam. By targeting specific monsters, he could fill his gaps. “Better yet, I could get better upgrades. If I had absorbed the essence of a Tier 2 amphiptere, it would certainly have counted as a prerequisite for an ideal upgrade.”

Priam had to clench his abs to avoid bursting out laughing. This was excellent news! Of course, it was dangerous, but between this discovery and his **[Life is Hard; I’m Harder]** Title, he now had two free prerequisites for the ideal upgrade of all his common and rare resistances. The day he became the ultimate juggernaut was no longer so far off.

The chirping of a bird outside pulled Priam from his reverie. Counting your chickens before they hatch was stupid.

“I need to verify that killing and absorbing the draconic essence of other amphipteres can increase the level of **[Smooth Scales]**. If it’s true, then I need to find them all.”

The skill boosted his agility, an attribute far from the next dangerous threshold—nine hundred points. The resistance effect would allow him to fly and swim faster, which would surely be instrumental in his future hunt against the Terrors of Valaryth.

“Absorb the essence of amphipteres and other draconic species, track and kill the Terrors, use their cores as trophies for Heavenly Dragon, then survive my Tribulations. Sounds like a plan,” Priam smiled. After a final glance at the carcass beginning to attract flies, he cautiously exited the building.

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It took Priam nearly two hours to find a second amphiptere. Whether draconic species were rare or the monsters had slaughtered each other before he arrived, they were few and far between.

His dream of quickly maxing out **[Smooth Scales]** shattered, Priam focused on his hunt. The winged serpents left little trace. **[Ideal Aether Perception]** couldn't detect their aether, and **[Sense of Smell]** failed to catch their scent—understandable for airborne monsters.

Eventually, Priam started searching for large buildings with wide entrances. After all, amphipteres weren't small and needed double doors to enter their lairs.

This led him to a grand amphitheater near the city's heart. Seeing the main gate busted open, he grinned and entered through a side door. After navigating a long corridor, he arrived at a room overlooking the stands. Priam's superhuman perception and high vivacity let him count ten thousand seats in under a second. *Call me Rain Man...*

Finely carved pillars and lifelike statues hinted at the builders' aesthetic sense. It wasn't the grandest stadium Priam had ever seen, but for a small city, it was impressive. The structure was designed for the entire population to gather, be it for sports, games, or politics—Priam couldn't tell.

All this paled in comparison to the massive amphiptere having its breakfast in the arena's center. The draconic beast was using its claws to butcher what seemed like a cow or bison. It appeared occupied but regularly lifted its head to check its surroundings. Seeing it ready to enable its scales, Priam was sure that the beast's instincts weren't dulled by **[Homo Elysian Predation]**. The warrior watched for several minutes, observing the wary opponent and looking for a pattern in its surveillance. *If I can't kill it in one strike, our fight will alert the entire region...*

As Priam pondered his next move, his add-on suggested a solution. No plan survived contact with the enemy, but some were safer than others, and Priam decided to bet on this one.

Using **[Phantom]**, he retreated and exited the building. Surveying the facade, he focused on Micro and **[Climb]**, one of his first skills. With a grin, he leapt nearly eight meters high and nimbly scaled the structure. A more powerful jump would have caused vibrations in the ground, and his primary goal was stealth.

Reaching the roof in less than two seconds, he faced stone bars radiating towards the arena's center like spokes on a bicycle wheel. Between each beam, a tarpaulin provided shade for spectators. It was surprisingly well-preserved, but Priam didn't trust it to hold his weight.

Taking a deep breath, he mentally mapped the city before dashing along the beam ahead. He ran nimbly, holding his breath. Forty meters long, the beam ended in an open circle. The former light well illuminated the arena's center and allowed the amphiptere to take flight. Reaching this point, Priam executed a swan dive.

Like the protagonist of a famous video game franchise, he plunged into the void, Promesse in hand. Below him, the alert amphiptere lifted its head, eyes blazing with hostility. Its scales shimmered with a spectral sheen, and thinking it was the predator, it opened its maw to swallow the impudent intruder.

Discovered, Priam didn't hesitate to slow his fall with kinetic mastery and readied Promesse. In a fraction of a second, he aimed at the gaping maw and threw.

His resilient meridians trembled in sync with the shockwave. The air tore where the spear passed, slipping between two fangs to strike the beast's palate. Its inner jaw, unprotected by scales, exploded. Priam landed in a roll as his adversary collapsed like a puppet with cut strings.

Turning to admire his work, Priam saw Promesse's tip protruding from the creature's skull. His bound weapon merged with the ambient moisture to reappear in his hand, and Priam sighed at the enormous beast.

"I wonder if I'll unlock **[Butchery]**..."

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With his bloodline roaring in his ears, Priam grilled the draconic heart over a fire. To avoid alerting nearby creatures, he had lit it manually. What had troubled him upon arriving in Elysium was now trivial for the Fire Champion. A Concept was more than the ability to alter reality; it was an intimate understanding of the idea behind it.

The massive vital organ sizzled over the flames as Priam endured the call of his bloodline. The Dragon in him demanded he devour the heart raw, but the human found that repulsive.

"No one, not even my own power, will dictate my actions." Seated on the arena's sand, Priam repeated the mantra to affirm his resolve. If he hadn't used his Potential to seal **[True Will]**, the skill would have undoubtedly leveled up, given how hard it was to resist. However, his willpower was too close to triggering a sixth Tribulation to risk it.

When the scent made his stomach growl, Priam gave in and devoured the still-rare meat in a few bites. Chin dripping with blood, he smiled as he licked his fingers.

"I'm not sure if it tastes like duck or chicken, but it's delicious!"

Glancing at the enormous carcass, he opened a passage to Concept Archipelago and stored it there. If an unseasoned heart was this good, Blueberry could work wonders with the rest.

Moments after closing the portal, Priam felt a surge of energy gathering in his stomach. As his digestive system absorbed the meat's proteins, acids, and fats, his bloodline consumed the hidden draconic essence.

Lvl Up: [Smooth Scales] lvl 2, 3, 4
AGI +9

Satisfied, Priam allowed himself a few minutes of rest to rinse off and retaliate against those who continued to spy on him. Then, after covering the fire with sand, he stood. The hunt was far from over.

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Lvl Up: [Smooth Scales] lvl 5,..., 22
AGI +54

Lvl Up: [Phantom] lvl 19,..., 26
AGI +24

Lvl Up: [Art of Movement] lvl 32, 33
AGI +2

PERC +2
DEXT +2

Lvl Up: [Climb] lvl 11, 12
AGI +2

Lvl Up: [Revelation Resilience] lvl 47, 48
MEM +6

META (Affinity) +6

META (Authority) +6

Lvl Up: [Broad-spectrum Vision] lvl 7, 8
PERC +2

Lvl Up: [High Aether Manipulation] lvl 5, 6
META (Affinity) +6
META (Focus) +6
META (Endurance) +6

For two days, Priam scoured the city from its outskirts to its center. In total, he hunted down and killed a dozen amphipteres. As his stealth and other skills improved, the kills became easier. Moreover, he took great pleasure in feeling his agility increase; not only did it boost his speed, but it also made his movements more fluid and enjoyable.

So, in high spirits, Priam roamed the city, devouring the power of his enemies while reorganizing his meridians. The city ruins piqued his curiosity, and he spent some time trying to understand what had happened here. Unfortunately, the few visible frescoes depicted events that were hard to comprehend and likely predated the inhabitants' exodus.

After several hours without finding prey, Priam headed toward the city's heart, where two buildings on a hill dominated the landscape. Deciding to save the best for last, Priam entered a small temple and faced a problem.

A pair of amphipteres were there, clearly in the midst of a romantic ritual. *Killing them both at the same time would be tricky.*

Hesitant to attack, Priam waited for the perfect moment for almost five hours. Just as he began to lose patience, the two monsters started mating. The male introduced its hemipenis

into the female's cloaca, and Priam lost it. He had been celibate since the Tutorial, and his non-existent sex life couldn't bear the sight of two winged serpents getting it on.

Readying Promesse, he positioned himself to skewer them both and fired. His spear decapitated the male, but its natural scales deflected the attack, missing the female.

Pushing its partner's corpse aside with a wing, the enraged survivor attacked Priam with its tail. The temple wasn't spacious, and Priam struggled to dodge. Each tail strike was powerful enough to break his bones twice over, and he relied heavily on his ability to ride the mist to stay alive.

Lvl Up: [Matrix Dodge] lvl 9

AGI +2

DEXT +1

For ten minutes, the winged serpent's scales resisted all his physical attacks. As Priam hesitated to summon his flames or lure the monster outside, a voice echoed in his head.

"Need some help?"

"Jasmine?" answered Priam while avoiding a tail strike.

"The very one. The Princess sent me to fetch you because the mutation is finished. Your egg is about to hatch, and you need to be there for the baby to imprint on you."

"Alright, but I'm a little busy here. Got a plan to kill this thing? Its scales are immune to all my kinetic charges and high-frequency barrages."

"Easy."

Before Priam could ask what she meant, Jasmine dropped from a shadow on the ceiling and landed on the monster's head. The creature's shadow roiled as the assassin drew a dagger.

The blade plunged into the spectral scales, ignoring them completely, and pierced the draconic beast's skull. The execution had taken less than a second.

"What the fuck?!"

Jasmine leapt as the body collapsed behind her, laughing at Priam's shocked expression.

"Did I catch you off guard?" she winked.

"How did you do that? My attacks can pierce a bank vault's door, and they couldn't even scratch this thing's scales!"

Jasmine shrugged. *"I guess I'm just that strong."*

"... Okay, you're mighty," Priam replied, amused. *"Can you tell me your secret now? Is it your dagger?"*

“It’s Legendary quality,” Jasmine admitted, twirling her weapon. “But it’s mostly my new Legendary skill, **[A Shadow of Their Former Self]**. I can temporarily nullify buffs. Without its draconic scales and with a Legendary dagger, it wasn’t hard to pierce this snake’s brain—especially since you had its attention.”

Priam frowned but accepted the explanation. Jasmine was a glass-cannon assassin who could easily take down an unsuspecting enemy. In return, her build made it impossible for her to handle giants and left her vulnerable to a sniper or vigilant duelist. Their strengths were different, and he had no right to be jealous. Yet, he was a bit.

“It’s pretty arrogant of you to think you could be better than me at my specialty,” Jasmine snorted, as if reading his thoughts.

“Touché. Alright, I’ll harvest the heart of the one I killed first, and we can go,” Priam sighed, heading toward the male he had decapitated.

“And the other one?”

“It’s your kill, do whatever you want with it,” Priam replied, shrugging. The laws of the Dragon wouldn’t reward someone else’s feats.

“I’ll leave it here. I respect my dagger too much to plunge it into those entrails. By the way, why is the male’s penis out? You didn’t interrupt them during...”

“Don’t ask questions you don’t want answers to.”

Jasmine remained silent for a moment before grinning.

“... He who wanted to fuck got fucked. Funny.”

Priam shivered, offering a silent prayer of apology to the winged serpent.

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Status:

PHYSICAL:

Strength 707

Constitution 1 105

Agility 773 (+143)

Vitality 1 040

Perception 766 (+5)

MENTAL:

Vivacity (D) 570

Dexterity 656 (+3)

Memory 842 (+10)

Willpower 1 163

Charisma 692

META:

Meta-affinity 795 (+15)

Meta-focus 409 (+6)

Meta-endurance 617 (+9)

Meta-perception 339

Meta-chance 274

Meta-authority 216 (+6)

Potential: 13 607 (+64)

Tier 0

Sun points: 1 478 906 (+11 290)

[He Who Eludes Death] charge: PRIMED

[Tribulation]: Five Tribulations pending.

Future Tribulations delayed until:

Time: 153 days 18 hours 47 minutes 10 seconds.

Next thresholds: 12 attributes > 600 / 6 attributes > 900 / 1 attribute > 1 200