

Chapter 204: Chaos Theory

[Auctions:

- *Galaht Puzzle (Legendary/T0) - Territory: Klogash/Wanderings Islands - A puzzle crafted from the bones of a Prince from another universe. Its legendary difficulty and numerous solutions make it a prime tool to challenge your mastery of aether manipulation.*
Current bid: 719 411 Sun points. Auction ends in 2 782 hours.
- *Penumbra Brain-Teaser (Mythic/T0) - Territory: Penumbra Bastion/Penumbra Hell - An aether puzzle created by Penumbra for their students.*
Current bid: 3 562 418 Sun points. Auction ends in 62 153 hours.]

Lvl Up: [Priam's System] lvl 2

VIVA +3

MEM +3

META(AUTH) + 3

Priam sighed as he perused the list generated by his add-on after analyzing the items offered at the Auctions. There were many puzzles designed to hone Aether Manipulation skills, but most were disappointingly ordinary.

"Ymir?"

"Lord Priam," the merchant responded, drawing near.

"Is it normal to have so few aether puzzles?"

The merchant nodded. "These kind of puzzles are meant to enhance the skills of young individuals. Selling them would be sacrificing the new generation. Only a desperate faction would offer such items... or the seller could be a powerful outsider who can disregard local authorities."

Priam raised an eyebrow at the latter part of the statement. "Are you saying I can find out who is selling what on my territory?"

"With Merchant V, you can see all Tier 0 items valued at less than two hundred fifty thousand Sun points that have been sold or purchased at the Auctions," confirmed the merchant.

Priam found this information intriguing. It would certainly prove useful if Oasis welcomed passing travelers.

"What about Tier 1 items?"

"All those valued at less than one hundred thousand Sun points."

"I see..."

"If I may, I think more puzzles will come," Ymir said. "As the necro-event progresses, the settlements, tribes, kingdoms, and cities under the influence of the Necromoon will be in danger. They will eventually sell their most precious belongings for better equipment or a chance at survival. Just wait a little, and such treasures will become commonplace."

Priam grimaced. He didn't have the luxury of waiting for the Necromoon to devastate entire populations. His goal was to reach Tier 1 before the next Reunion, which made for a tight schedule. *Heavenly Dragon, Tribulations, Colosseum, then High Tribulation.*

Seeing Priam's expression, Ymir offered advice. "If you don't like waiting, you could also make an announcement. These Auctions are governed by supply and demand. You'll surely get responses if you offer a rare item or a hefty sum."

Priam conjured a piece of ice in his hand. In the center, Sumstreh's fulcrum shard absorbed the light.

"...Put this up for auction in exchange for aether puzzles or methods to enhance aether mastery. No sale until I've evaluated the exchange. I want to consult the Guardian of Secrets to learn more about the items offered to me."

"Your orders will be carried out," replied Ymir, taking the object carefully before placing it on the altar. It was absorbed, and Priam received confirmation from the Sun Shop. As long as no one destroyed the Forum and the altar, the fragment would be secure. Even Ymir couldn't touch it.

"Are you looking to improve **[Aether Manipulation]**?" Esmée asked.

"Indeed." Priam saw no point in hiding it. "Can you assist me?"

"Perhaps. My people have spent centuries manipulating aether without the aid of the System. I have some exercises that might interest you."

"What do you want in return?"

"A favor. If I ever find myself in trouble and you can save me without it costing you much, do it."

Priam assessed Esmée. The princess had seen through his nature. Instead of cultivating a professional relationship, she was doing him a favor to become his friend.

"I accept," he smiled.

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Lvl Up: [Revelation Resilience] lvl 4

MEM +3

META (AFFI) +3

META (AUTH) +3

"Are you sure you don't want me to accompany you? The forest is dangerous."

"You're a trouble magnet," Esmée smiled. "Without you, I'm sure to find my way easily. Besides, if my brother sees you coming, he'll think I'm trying to kill him."

"Isn't that the case?" Priam winked.

Esmée stuck out her tongue without responding. Priam's heart raced as he returned her smile. After a few seconds of silence, he coughed.

"You still have a week of free auctions."

"I'll be back before the end of the week. Bye," said Esmée, executing a curtsy. With one final smile, she crossed the barrier.

A dozen corrupted beings lunged at her. Priam almost intervened before sighing. The revenants were constantly tripping over each other, each attack injuring one of their own rather than their enemy. Some stumbled over roots, while others collided with low branches while leaping.

As if she were Fortune's daughter, Esmée walked straight ahead while her enemies fell at her feet, powerless to even touch her clothes. *What a cheater...*

When Esmée disappeared, Priam returned to camp. The first thing he noticed was Blueberry. The bear gave him a thumbs-up. Intrigued, Priam approached.

"Is there a problem?"

"Not at all, I'm happy for you."

"...For Esmée?" Priam guessed.

"A bear without a mate is a weak bear. It pained me to see you all alone. I might have preferred Jasmine, but it's your choice."

"I... So many things are wrong with your statement that I don't know where to start. Do you realize you're as single as I am?"

"Do you see a female bear around here? Neither do I. If I could find a partner, I would have already done so."

"We'll find one on Earth," Priam said. He owed it to his friend. "You will fatten her up with your cooking."

"I hope so. By the way, has your female already left? The mating was quick," Blueberry mumbled, looking at the merchant's tent.

"I'd prefer we call her Esmée. She's not my female, and we didn't mate," Priam grimaced.

"I know, I'm teasing you. But admit it, you like her."

Priam rolled his eyes before smiling, amused. "Yeah, but for now, it's just a possibility. We both have issues incompatible with a relationship. She's magically controlled by her family, and I don't know to what extent she's trying to manipulate me into helping her."

"Not everyone is Claire. Esmée doesn't smell of lies."

His rival's power could certainly deceive Blueberry's nose, but Priam's draconic instinct agreed with the bear.

"That's what I think too," Priam replied before furrowing his brows. "Were you listening to us?"

"I have nearly three hundred in Perception, and you were talking in the middle of the base. Except for Rose, Muyri, and Alain, I reckon the whole camp heard you."

Priam blushed slightly before sighing. "I'll keep that in mind for next time."

"You're already planning for next time?"

"You're impossible. You know I've got a packed schedule and clearly no time to invest in a relationship. The last one went south, and I don't want a repeat."

Blueberry started trembling, and Priam realized the bear was chuckling. "Funny how you're talking to me, but you're the one you're trying to convince. Either way, her favorite dessert was caramel. Now, scoot over, I gotta flip the skewers before it burns," said the bear, focusing on his barbecue.

Amused, Priam shook his head as he walked away. His conversation with Esmée had been a delightful moment of respite, but the world hadn't stopped turning. **[Revelation Resilience]**'s level-up proved that his enemies still had him in their sights. *Time to get back to work.*

In his hand, Priam summoned a token about five centimeters in diameter. Its coppery color seemed to absorb the rays of the Necromoon.

[Identification]

[Revelation Token - Ideal Prerequisites (Epic)] - A System reward that reveals the various prerequisites for an ideal upgrade for a common, rare, or epic skill. If multiple ideal upgrades exist, the user must choose one of the skills.

Note: Different prerequisites can lead to the same skill. The Token reveals interesting equivalences for the user.

Lvl Up: **[Identification]** lvl 13

MEM +1

The System hadn't fooled him. Now, the million-dollar question was: which skill should he reveal the prerequisites for? **[Aether Manipulation]**, knowing full well that a phoenix didn't give him a snowball's chance in hell of unlocking the skill? **[Moon Mist]**, to acquire a legendary skill that synergized with his Mist Concept? **[Priam's System]**, his assistant, which was one of his greatest strengths—and also a potential weakness? Or one of his epic resistances to anchor the fulcrum of Heavenly Dragon and attain a perfect temperance?

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Maya and Kenzo were quickly ushered into Colonel Wang Lin's office. Large enough to host a ball, the room was strikingly adorned with lifelike statues. They lined both sides of the red carpet that led to the center of the room.

Rumor had it that these weren't mere statues. Some claimed each one was a former enemy of the colonel, turned into artwork by a taxidermist. This could explain why meeting their gaze sometimes sent shivers down Maya's spine.

The colonel had never denied it.

Catching sight of a face contorted in a scream from the corner of her eye, Maya decided the rumor was likely true. Their superior couldn't confirm it because some bodies belonged to powerful factions. For a mighty mercenary to defeat a young scion was acceptable. Parading their corpse was an insult.

So, the colonel was playing with fire, careful not to cross the line. Maya found it a fitting description of his character. Bold, calculating, and merciless with his enemies, his irreverent nature prevented him from taking himself too seriously with his own allies. That was why, despite his questionable taste in decor, most of his subordinates appreciated Colonel Wang Lin.

As they finished traversing the statue forest, Maya and Kenzo caught sight of an enormous desk covered in ice sheets. While humanity used electronic mediums to store information, phoenixes had chosen ice crystals. Using their bloodline, they cooled water with precision, creating precise molecular arrangements. The vibration of the water molecules changed depending on the purity of the bloodline, preventing semi-phoenixes from decrypting the coded information.

That was one reason why phoenixes forbade the dissemination of their bloodline outside their clans. When a mixed-blood was discovered, they were captured or killed. Rare exceptions were made, such as Colonel Wang Lin.

The two humans greeted the half-phoenix, half-titan, who was currently in humanoid form. Without his metallic skin and fiery wings, he could pass for human. The Tier 5 didn't use his original form out of politeness; it was hard to have a conversation with a fifteen-meter-tall being.

"Maya, Kenzo, come closer," smiled the colonel. Despite his rank, his tone was friendly, almost amiable. It was the camaraderie of the Mercenaries that had persuaded the two

humans to enlist. "Four Legendary Achievements in less than a month, all announced. It's no longer pride; it's arrogance."

"I'm not sure Priam is familiar with the customs of Sector Hope," grimaced Maya. "I'm almost certain he's using these Achievements to give hope to humanity."

"I always forget he's a newbie," sighed Wang Lin. "Unfortunately, his ignorance is making enemies for him."

"I thought the ban on Achievements' announcement only applied to factions," said Maya. "To prevent bright young lords from being assassinated and the faction's capabilities from being known."

Wang Lin sighed, tossing a log into the fire burning in the gigantic fireplace behind him. The smoke rose magically toward him, and he inhaled it. Phoenixes were the biggest smokers in the sector.

"The ban only applies to factions because an individual without a faction isn't supposed to be able to acquire these Achievements. Even if he can, he's quickly enlisted by a faction. That's not possible here because Priam and his rivals are in Elysium... which annoys a lot of people."

"This ban is stupid," grunted Kenzo. "It stifles competition among the youth. It would create fierce rivalry if they were allowed to announce their progress to the world."

Wang Lin's smile now resembled that of a fox. "That's on purpose." Seeing Kenzo's puzzled look, he explained. "Factions don't want to give their young stupid ideas. Just before summoning you, I received information: Calypse Daccantz's descendant died during a quintuple Tribulation at Tier 0."

Maya's eyes widened. "A quintuple... That's madness."

"It's dangerous but not impossible. The young Daccantz was supposed to take over from his ancestor, a Tier 5 whose soul is crumbling. Resources, experiences, opportunities—the young Daccantz received everything. A foundation as optimal as his is more costly than raising half a dozen Tier 4s, yet the System didn't deem him worthy," said Wang Lin, shrugging. "Calypse Daccantz is angry at Priam."

After a few seconds of silence in memory of the dead, Kenzo asked, "I fail to see the connection with Priam?"

"According to our intelligence, he and his rivals have accumulated a dozen Legendary Achievements and one Mythic Achievement in less than two weeks," revealed the Colonel. "They're already being called the golden generation—people are talking about nothing else. Imagine the frustration of some arrogant young masters when they're forbidden from publishing their Achievements."

Flames shot out of the colonel's nose, and Maya understood he was laughing. For an orphaned mixed blood, the frustration of those born with a gold spoon in their mouth must be hilarious.

"Young Daccantz bit off more than he could chew by trying to create a feat," Maya summed up. "But not all young lords can be that foolish."

"Some are quite clever and know their faction is holding them back by forbidding them from attempting Mythic Achievements. They're shaped to be powerful but not too much. The monsters at the top don't want to be ousted from their thrones," spat Wang Lin. "But it only takes a few factions to agree to loosen the reins on their prodigies to set off a chain reaction. If the new generation includes Mythic Achiever, other factions will have no choice but to allow their own geniuses to attempt feats."

"Many will die," commented Kenzo.

"Indeed. A hundred will fail, but one will survive, and their success will overshadow the dead."

Wang Lin's smile turned fierce, and Maya understood what was about to happen. All the sector's geniuses were about to engage in a race. The coming years would see the birth of an atmosphere of intense competition.

"Not all factions will be able to create Mythic Achiever," Maya pointed out.

"Indeed, and they will fall in a century or two," smiled Wang Lin. "Others will take their place as Aces rise, shaking up their own factions. Sector Hope has been quiet for too long. This new era will benefit the Mercenaries."

Maya frowned. "All because Priam and his rivals are announcing their Achievements? It seems disproportionate."

Some factions had existed for millions of years. It seemed ridiculous to think that the arrogance of a few Tier 0s could shake them.

"Priam and his rivals are a sign of change desired by the Seven," replied the Colonel. "Sector Hope stagnates because the powerhouses want to maintain a status quo that suits them. It's incompatible with the System. A Universal War is brewing, and They ask us to prepare."

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Status:

PHYSICAL:

Strength 557

Constitution 860

Agility 552

Vitality 840

Perception 714

MENTAL:

Vivacity 509 (+4)

Dexterity 587

Memory 437 (+11)
Willpower 1 028
Charisma 631

META:

Meta-affinity 520
Meta-focus 350
Meta-endurance 354
Meta-perception 221
Meta-chance 230
Meta-authority 48 (+6)

Potential: 9 976 (+7)
Tier 0

Sun points: 318 423 (+444)

[He Who Eludes Death] charge: PRIMED.

[Tribulation]: Three Tribulations pending.

Future Tribulations delayed until:

Time: 164 days 17 hours 26 minutes 16 seconds.

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