

Chapter 221: Will is a Blade. Charisma is a Key

Perched in the branches of a tree, its leaves beginning to fall, Jasmine was keeping a watchful eye on her prey. Despite the putrid stench of the beast below, she remained still, shrouded in shadows, waiting for the opportune moment to strike.

Her hunt had begun a quarter hour prior.

As the corrupted ones fell inert, most of Oasis' residents ventured from the safety of their stronghold to farm Sun Points. After dispatching several dozen lifeless beasts, Jasmine opted to leave the easy points for others. She wasn't one to take down hordes of weak monsters. Her forte was to end single elites.

Thus, she trailed the Necro Envoy to a nearby valley. The battle against Arnold and the two locals had been harrowing, and the creature inhabiting Mirscella's body appeared to be in dire straits. However, a necromancer never fought alone.

Every minute, a score of necro elites joined the fray, only to meet their demise moments later. Their sacrifice merely served to deplete the assailants' aether and would not save the Necro Envoy. Still, the creature showed no signs of despair. Jasmine could recognize prey, and the adversary had not yet assumed that mindset.

It was evident that the Boss believed it could survive by leveraging the infinite horde at its disposal—particularly the mini-Bosses.

Jasmine was convinced that more potent corrupted beings awaited the opportune moment to enter the fray. Surveying her surroundings, she pinpointed prime ambush locations. Slowly but surely, the Necro Envoy was approaching one of them.

Utilizing a Shadow corridor, it took only minutes for Jasmine to traverse the valley and reach the ambush site. Then came the task of locating the enemy. The crimson light of the Necromoon obscured the aether—thus confusing magical tracking abilities—but the assassin possessed mundane skills honed through years of training. It took her no more than thirty seconds to pick up the mini-Boss's trail.

Humanoid in form, the necromantic creature was the size of an adolescent but stood out with its attire. Its straw hat and fabric cloak suggested it possessed more than mere instinct. None of the undead she knew cared for their attire, yet the creature's headwear had undergone recent repairs. Judging by the odor emanating from its wearer, they occurred post-mortem.

It was challenging to assess its exact level without identifying it using **[Recognition]**, but certain enemies could detect those kinds of skills. Jasmine's assassin instincts, honed through experience, whispered that the monster was a Tier 2 high noble, likely a Viscount. Precisely the kind of opponent she sought.

Her hand closed slowly around her dagger. The weapon cost her nearly fifty thousand Sun Points and was of low epic rarity. Before attaining Marquess status, it was the best blade the assassin could buy. If all went well, that would change in a matter of seconds.

The creature trembled, and seeing her enemy growing impatient, Jasmine focused on her heart. A silent pulsation resonated within her chest, and the shadows grew even more welcoming. For a moment, the Shadow Champion glimpsed a potential evolution. A superior Concept, purer than shadows. If Priam was terrifying in his versatility and Kazuki followed the Spear's path, Jasmine's path lay with the Shadows... and what lay beyond.

The next second, **[One Mind, One Blade]** silenced the epiphany. The assassin's path was bloody, and distractions were dangerous. Jasmine's attention narrowed on the monster below, her body tensing. Her breath became imperceptible, her pupils contracted, and her heart rate slowed. She was in the zone.

After an uncertain amount of time, the battle drew near, the shockwaves rocking the nearby trees. The corrupted readied itself, unaware of the impending threat above it. *The mantis stalks the cicada, unaware of the oriole behind...*

The party was about to begin, and Jasmine cloaked her blade in a fearsome Aura. Following his quadruple Tribulation, Priam had received **[Horseman of the Apocalypse - Legendary]** and chosen Conquest. Jasmine had opted for Death. Her attacks became harder to dodge and wounded the souls of her enemies.

The assassin's instinct roared a fraction of a second before her opponent leaped toward Laepa.

Overclocking her two legs, Jasmine burst forward, her shadow trailing behind her. **[Homo Elysian Predation]** erupted, drowning her opponent's instinct. Simultaneously, the assassin's Domain telescoped with that of her adversary's... without arousing suspicion. Her Shadow Concept infused her sphere of authority, making her Supremacy nearly undetectable in addition to concealing her presence.

Extending a hand clad in dark energy, the undead prepared to strike at the Gaesert's back. Jasmine was quicker. **[Apex Huntress's Eye]**. Her blade, augmented by her Aura and Dagger Mastery, shot toward a chink in the corrupted's guard.

The Tier 2 necro only became aware of the ambush when the weapon slid between its hat and cloak. Sensing death approaching, it twisted in mid-air, attempting to evade, but the dagger had already penetrated its neck. Roaring in rage, it tried a feeble counterattack, but Jasmine had already shifted places with her shadow. An assassin was entitled to a single strike.

Reappearing in the branches of a tree a hundred meters away, Jasmine listened intently.

An explosion rocked the forest, and the young woman smiled as she read her notification. Her epic dagger had just detonated inside the corrupted. With a master like Priam, she knew there was no such thing as overkill.

"A fifty-thousand-Sun-Points explosive dagger against ten thousand Sun Points, a Marquess Title, and a Legendary Achievement. Worth it," Jasmine smiled as she purchased a new dagger five times more expensive. She weighed it in her hand, striking the air to get familiar with it before vanishing once more.

The hunt was only just beginning.

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The Necromoon's light briefly blinded Priam.

"Where am I?" he grunted, struggling to rise. Dizziness caused him to stagger, and he fell back, clutching his head. It nursed one of the most abominable headaches he had ever experienced, which, coming from Priam, meant something.

Activating Micro, he dulled the pain and sighed in relief as he saw his vitality already stabilizing his brain. *Did I take a blow to the head?* he wondered, scanning his surroundings for an enemy. Nothing had changed except for an unnatural pile of corrupted a few meters away.

"Who's there?" he asked, squinting.

"Your sexy guardian angel," replied a young woman emerging from the shadows.

"Jasmine. Was I attacked?"

"By basic undead. Promesse was protecting you, but I decided to stay nearby just in case a real enemy showed up."

Priam noticed that some corpses bore the telltale signs of violent destruction, unmistakably caused by his spear. His add-on had protected him before Jasmine arrived.

"Thank you." His spear propelled by his system could protect him from a few Tier 0s, but worse things lurked in the woods.

"That's my job. What happened?" asked Jasmine. "The aftermath of the battle against the giant necro?"

"I—No. I won fairly easily." Priam summarized his fight. "... Then I wanted to see if I could detect who was trying to gather information about me."

"Seems like a calm activity, yet it feels like you've just wrestled with a titan."

"Give me a second to check something," said Priam, opening his notifications.

Lvl Up: **[Revelation Resilience]** lvl 14

MEM +3

META (AFFI) +3

META (AUTH) +3

Memory exceeds 500 points. First milestone reached. Congratulations!

Synergy with [Eidetic Memory] detected...

Would you like to evolve the Talent?

...

[Eidetic Memory - Bronze] becomes [Ultimate Sensory Memory - Silver]!

[Ultimate Sensory Memory - Silver] - Your eidetic memory is no longer limited to sight and hearing: you remember all sensory stimuli with absolute precision.

This Talent is a tool that supports and complements your Memory attribute. Thus, your sensory memory is stored in this Talent, but its storage capacity is limited by your attribute and your cerebral organ.

Note: Only your mundane senses are affected by this Talent (sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell, balance, proprioception, thermoception, nociception, chronoception,...).

Title upgrade! **[It's over 1,000! - Silver] becomes [All-rounder - Gold]!**

[All-rounder - Gold] - You have reached the first threshold in every physical and mental attribute at Tier 0. More than an achievement, it's a sign of someone who accepts no weakness.

A solid foundation often implies slow progress, but not for you. Your life is a (system-assisted) speedrun...

Bonus: +30% to the attribute of your choice.

You have selected Memory.

MEM +30%

Lvl Up: **[Thick Blood]** lvl 2,..., 9

VIT +24

Lvl Up: **[Necro Resistance]** lvl 11

VIT +3

WILL +3

META(END) +3

Lvl Up: **[Revelation Resilience]** lvl 15, 16, 17

MEM +9

META (AFFI) +9

META (AUTH) +9

Lvl Up: **[Echolocalisation]** lvl 20, 21

PERC +4

DEXT +2

Event: Necromoon

Second wave:
Victory!

You defended your home against a horde of corrupted and a necro Envoy!

Reward:
400 Sun points

Feat: *The necro giant was vanquished.*
Bonus Reward:
200 Sun points
24 hours of respite

POT -1 529

[Tribulation]: *Three attributes above 900 were detected in Tier 0.*

*A fifth **Tribulation** is coming.*
Time: 162 days 0 hour 13 minutes 4 seconds.

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

"Bordel de merde..."

The last thing Priam remembered was accepting the evolution of **[Eidetic Memory]**. His add-on filled in his memory gaps.

*[Alert, host loss of consciousness. **[He Who Eludes Death]** not primed.*

Diagnosis: Severe overheating of the cerebral organ.
Level of danger: deadly.
*Probable cause: Insufficient memory to store the data transferred by **[Ultimate Sensory Memory]**.*
Probability of host death without system intervention: 99.9%

Action:
*Use the bonus of **[All-rounder]** to increase the host's Memory attribute.]*

The data flow transmitted by his new Talent had been too much for his brain, resulting in overheating the cerebral organ. His system had to choose the Memory upgrade to keep him alive. Priam was torn between the shame of nearly dying in a stupid way and the sadness of not having **[He Who Eludes Death]** primed to experience a new death.

The report from his add-on wasn't finished, and Priam continued reading.

[Diagnosis: Cerebral overheating.
Level of danger: deadly.

Probable cause: Creation of too many synapses per second in the cerebral organ. Requires an increase in Vitality to create new brain connections.

Action:

*Use **[Echolocation]** to detect nearby corrupteds and eliminate them to activate the Conquest attribute boost.*

Diagnosis: Decrease in brain activity to a reasonable level. Multiple cerebral hemorrhages. Level of danger: medium.

Action:

*Free use of Potential to stimulate **[Thick Blood].***

Reading his system's report, Priam sighed before massaging his temples. Seeing Jasmine's confused expression, he explained the situation to her.

"Your brain almost melted because you evolved **[Eidetic Memory]** without thinking about the consequences?" the young woman asked in a tone betraying her real thought: *are you stupid?*

"I didn't think the System could be dangerous."

"The System only provides customer service when it comes to rewards. Spontaneous evolutions and voluntary modifications aren't always beneficial, otherwise it wouldn't have allowed me to use my own Potential to help you implant a surveillance sub-system in my soul space."

"That makes sense. I was stupid," Priam admitted.

"We all make mistakes; the important thing is not to repeat them," Jasmine shrugged. "More importantly, are you confident about your quintuple Tribulation?"

"To be honest, I was considering training for a month and triggering a quadruple Tribulation just before the tribe tournament. Right now, I'm confident about enduring a triple."

"... You're in deep shit."

"That's the understatement of the century," Priam groaned. "And another hundred and fifty points in Willpower would trigger a sixth Tribulation... The equivalent of a game over."

Even with Heavenly Dragon, the rewards from the Colosseum, and six Legendary skills, Priam was certain he would die facing a sextuple Tribulation. This thought ignited a cold anger within him. He didn't fear death, but he refused to die like an idiot.

Jasmine stared at him for a moment before approaching him. "You'll survive."

"I didn't know you were a seer."

"I'm serious. You're too proud to accept defeat and too free to accept the embrace of death. You'll find a solution, no matter the cost," she said, locking her gaze with his.

No matter the cost. The phrase resonated in Priam's mind. He didn't need to close his eyes to see locusts tearing apart human corpses. His second Tribulation hadn't killed him, but it had reaped hundreds of human lives.

"They died so I could survive."

"Are you ashamed?" Jasmine asked, understanding his train of thought.

"No," Priam replied. "I believe that was the purpose of those early Tribulations. To show me that I prioritize my freedom over the common good."

"According to the Guardian of Secrets, the early Tribulations test the power of our desires. Your freedom, my survival, Louis' control of his body... Our desires propel us along the Zenith Way, and that's why the System tests us."

Those who lacked strong desires couldn't find the drive to reach the Zenith—and were therefore useless to the Seven Concepts.

Priam nodded. "What about the ones that follow?"

"The Guardian wouldn't answer," the young woman shrugged. "So, what are you going to do?"

"I'd like to finish what I started, but the tribe representatives..."

"They've already left," Jasmine informed. "The fight didn't end well. The huntress used a technique to decapitate the Necro Envoy, but it wasn't enough. Arnold fired some kind of plasma beam to vaporize the rest of the creature, but the dragon-man Breathed to deflect the attack—he didn't have a direct line of fire on the Necro Envoy. When the explosion dissipated, it had vanished, and Laepa was gravely injured."

Priam was momentarily stunned by Vysharratjekto's monumental stupidity. "You... It managed to escape because of a botched kill-steal attempt?!"

Jasmine grimaced. "I tried to catch it, but to no avail. Laepa wasn't in a condition to track it, and Arnold ended up attacking the big snake. I thought he was going to kill it, but after a few exchanges, the Tier 3 agreed to pay compensation."

"Vysharratjekto is even more stupid than me," Priam groaned. "With allies like these, we don't need enemies..."

"Look on the bright side: when the Necro Envoy returns, we can kill it ourselves," Jasmine smiled.

Priam summoned a faint smile. "I guess. Did they say anything before leaving?"

"They each left a crystal with an explanation."

"I see. Arnold?"

"Discussing technology with the hoplite in Oasis. He doesn't seem in a hurry."

Priam hesitated for a moment before nodding. "Then I'll finish what I started."

"Okay! I'm going to work out," Jasmine replied as she moved away. "Otherwise, my butt will get saggy..."

"Your butt is fine," Priam said, naturally glancing at the designated spot.

"And how do you know that?" Jasmine asked, turning around and arching slightly. Priam blushed, grunted, and looked away.

"Go train!"

"Yes, boss!" the temptress chuckled.

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Upon introspection, Priam realized he was serene. The recent events were working against him—he had a quintuple Tribulation on his hands and a Necro Envoy plotting his demise—but he no longer expected any bad news.

With his hearts racing, Priam realized impatience mingled with his serenity. He had always been motivated by challenges. Nothing but a deadline or a competition could make him work at a hundred percent of his capacity. The Tribulations were the ultimate exam, and their shadow urged Priam to improve himself.

Smiling, Priam delved into his Domain, observing the scrying probes continuing to bombard him. Determined to understand them, he freely tapped into his Potential to do so.

Failures followed, but Priam didn't let himself get discouraged. Splitting his attention with his draconic vivacity, he commanded his add-on to bombard the nearby corrupted. The Conquest attribute bonuses began to accumulate, and Priam kept trying.

He failed a thousand times and tried again, slightly altering his approach. Initially, he used a form of abstract telekinesis, but the packets of aether slipped through tiny gaps like small shrimps in a wide-meshed fishing net.

Priam then opted for cages created by his Domain. These barriers effectively trapped the aether packets. It was progress, but the probes tended to get corrupted when he tried to manipulate them; his aether poisoned them, and then the probe dispersed, polluted beyond hope.

POT -313

After hours of experimentation, an epiphany induced by his Potential revealed the beginning of a solution: ordering the aether.

If his skill could bend the ambient aether to his will, it should be able to do the same for controlled aether. Guided by his Potential, Priam projected his formidable will into **[Aether Manipulation]**. The high attribute dominated the probe, forbidding the foreign energy from merging with his own. Simultaneously, Priam pushed back the ambient aether, isolating the captured packet.

The probe trembled as a foreign will struggled against Priam's domination. Showing no mercy, Priam's will sliced, destroying his opponent's control. The ghost of a scream echoed before fading. His foe was far, and his will was pressurized by Priam's Domain. It stood no chance.

"That'll teach you."

A few seconds passed, and the probe stilled, imprisoned and functional. Satisfied, Priam allowed himself a smile before starting to study it. According to **[Ideal Aether Perception]**, it was the creation of a low Tier user, and no Concept was involved. Only the affinity of its creator still possessed the scrying device. Using his will like a scalpel, Priam peeled it until a too-brusque maneuver destroyed it.

His hearts perfectly calm, Priam turned his attention to a new packet. He had an embarrassment of choice, with millions assaulting him constantly.

He dissected a hundred probes, increasing his precision and aether proficiency before reaching the skills' cores. As expected, multiple runes were hidden there. Priam copied them and attempted to influence them. The runes trembled before yielding, shattering into useless shards.

POT -559

Priam tried the experiment again and again, refining his precision and increasing his mastery. Progress that should have taken weeks for a genius was achieved in a few hours as he consumed his Potential without restraint. Yet, the identity of the probe creators and the other secrets they held remained beyond his reach.

POT -1 792

Without becoming discouraged, Priam learned to wield his willpower to dominate and dissect the probes. Alas, the attribute was a weapon: perfect for accessing a vault but unsuitable for retrieving the contents intact.

It wasn't impossible, but Priam felt he was far from having the finesse required for it.

"But I don't have to use my will," he murmured after one of his streams of thoughts paused to take a step back and assess the situation.

All attributes had their strengths, and if a blade weren't adapted, he would use a key.

Since crossing its first threshold, charisma had the ability to infuse his Supremacies. Dissecting yet another probe, Priam withdrew a portion of his will and imbued his Domain with his charisma. The attribute approached the runes before contacting them. The sigils trembled, confused, and Priam pushed.

The runes exploded into a shower of aether. Instead of degrading, the fluid rushed toward charisma's outstretched hand. Ecstatic, Priam used his Potential to translate the hidden data within the aether and then sent it toward Memory.

POT -403

A flood of information flooded his mind, and Priam roared. He had pierced the secrets of divinatory magic, and his enemies would never be anonymous again!

You have gained a new skill!

*

Status:

PHYSICAL:

Strength 620

Constitution 979

Agility 608

Vitality 916 (+46)

Perception 760 (+5)

MENTAL:

Vivacity (D) 516

Dexterity 622 (+2)

Memory 619 (+121)

Willpower 1 051 (+4)

Charisma 631

META:

Meta-affinity 615 (+15)

Meta-focus 387

Meta-endurance 432 (+4)

Meta-perception 288

Meta-chance 230

Meta-authority 96 (+12)

Potential: 14 127 (-4 717)

Tier 0

Sun points: 1 182 954 (+2 840)

[He Who Eludes Death] charge: PRIMED.

[Tribulation]: Five Tribulations pending.

Future Tribulations delayed until:

Time: 160 days 14 hours 12 minutes 22 seconds.

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