

Chapter 226: Press F for the Geneva Conventions

"Now, the million-dollar question: why should I keep you alive?"

"Why would you kill me?" Ève asked. Her mental voice betrayed genuine confusion. "Your real enemy is Sumstreh."

"I plan to offer a group rate to everyone involved in Sphinx's imprisonment."

A joyless laugh echoed across the mental bridge. "You think I had a choice? He asked me to bring him another rival. According to the Guardian of Secrets, you were the only one with a chance to resist him. I'm sorry I threw you under the bus, but you were the perfect candidate."

Eve hadn't intended to strengthen Sumstreh by providing him with another compliant rival.

"What about Sphinx?"

"... I would have preferred another option, but it was my last chance. If I hadn't obeyed, I would be dead. Sphinx was regrettable collateral damage."

For a brief moment, Priam hesitated to smash Ève's head against the wooden bathtub. He had to activate **[Emotional Discipline]** to regain control.

"Sphinx has been a prisoner of the Fallen for thirteen days. She has spent half her life in prison!"

Under his anger, his cloak of flame began to flicker, and the room's temperature rose.

"Trading the freedom of two people for a chance to stay alive was the choice I had. You might have refused to submit, but I'm no saint."

"Neither am I," Priam replied, remembering his early Tribulations. "Unfortunately for you, vengeance speaks to me more than justice. You harmed my friend, and you will die for it."

"Maybe, but not today."

Priam raised an eyebrow. "You think I wouldn't dare to kill you?"

A sneer resounded. "Killing this clone and thereby dissipating her divine mark would put Sphinx in danger."

Priam's hearts skipped a beat. *What?!*

"Explain," he said, preparing to use **[There is No Heaven]**. If Ève was some kind of lich who could possess other bodies, he wouldn't let his rival's soul escape.

"Sumstreh captured my original three days after her arrival in Elysium. She barely had time to use her survival reward to resist their soul manipulation. I'd rather not go into details, but what's in front of you is a disposable shell."

Having survived three days, Priam had received Log-a-rhythm and Kazuki's temperance die. Apparently, the System had also saved Ève.

"Yet I sense your Domain. You have a soul."

"A soul that serves me without being mine," corrected Ève's clone. *"If you had wanted, you could have done the same with your subordinate."*

Priam stifled a curse. He could indeed have turned Jasmine into the avatar of his system and then possessed her body without her death directly impacting him. If Ève had done something similar, the body in front of him was only as valuable as she deemed it. *Damn!*

"Swear on your Potential that you have been telling the truth since the beginning of this conversation and will continue to do so until the end."

Priam hoped Ève was lying. Otherwise, the situation would become complex.

"What a waste of Potential... I swear on my Potential that I haven't lied to you since the beginning of this conversation and will remain silent rather than do so for the next hour."

When the System descended and then withdrew without punishing his rival, Priam grimaced. Ève was capable of using the Potential of the soul she manipulated. *But how?! Did the true owner agree with her actions?*

Lvl Up: [Mind Bridge] lvl 4

META (Affinity) +2

META (Perception) +1

There were more urgent matters at hand.

"As long as you remain in Log-a-rhythm, do you have the possibility to communicate in any way with Sumstreh, your original, or anyone else? In the past, present, or future."

"You're the paranoid type, aren't you? Well, with the Necromoon up in the sky, I'm limited. I have no way to communicate with Sumstreh—except by dying. They will sense the dissipation of the divine mark. My original will also be informed. I can't communicate with anyone else."

"Will the original be informed of more than your death?"

"..."

Frowning at the lack of response, Priam realized the clone might be able to pass on a final message to the original before dying. He also noted that, for some reason, his rival had not created a direct link between the original and the copy. *Lack of Potential or lack of trust?*

"Let's recap: this isn't your true body, nor your true soul. What is it then?"

"This knowledge won't help you to kill Sumstreh."

"But it will help me kill Ève."

His vendetta against his rival wouldn't end after he killed just a clone. A good enemy was a dead enemy.

"Your intimidation game is pathetic," Ève's clone sighed. "I'm already willing to cooperate with you to kill Sumstreh and save your precious little Sphinx."

Internally, Priam seethed. The bitch who manipulated his friend thought she had control of the conversation, and it infuriated him deeply. The dragon within him roared, and Priam forgot about the Geneva Conventions.

With one hand, he seized the clone's right index finger and pulled. With a squelching noise, the ligament gave way and the bone followed. Sap had already regenerated his rival's vocal cords, and she used them to scream at the top of her lungs.

Calmly, Priam observed his macabre find before tossing it into the bath. "Your nails are sharp and curved... You took this body from an Aelbes, didn't you?"

"Fuck you!" Ève's clone screamed hoarsely. Still blind, she was desperately trying to put her finger back in place.

"I see you've found your voice and lost your arrogance."

"If you think I'll give in to torture, you're wrong!"

"I'm not going to torture you," Priam replied. The only person he liked to torture was himself. "I'll even consider your alliance proposal. You know why?"

"Go to hell—"

His kinetic proficiency blocked the sound wave, and Priam seized another finger with his Domain. The threat subdued the clone.

"I repeat my question: do you know why I'll consider an alliance between us?"

"... No."

"Because I'm pragmatic," he acknowledged. "Sphinx's life is precious, and that's all that matters to me. If I have to put up with you a few more days to increase her chances of survival, so be it."

Unleashing his Aura, Priam put pressure on his prisoner. "However, if anything goes awry, I'll detonate an H-bomb in Sumstreh's lair, resurrect my friend with a Colosseum's reward, and unleash the tribes on your other clones. Got it?"

According to the Phoenix Prince, the Wheels of Reincarnation were quite traumatic, which was the only reason it wasn't his main plan. Rose had been fortunate to die in another universe.

"...Got it," his rival replied, her throat tight.

"Now, let's get down to business. Why do you need my help?"

None of his rivals were weak, and Priam was sure Ève was no exception. Just looking at the puppet before him made that abundantly clear.

Pressing her injured hand against her burned chest, Ève's clone cleared her throat. "Our dear god has fallen, but they're far from being idiotic. Both my original and Sphinx are prisoners in their Domain. They could kill them in a fraction of a second. Our only chance to save them is to work together, you from the outside, me from the inside. If the original goes all-out, she could distract the Fallen for a few seconds."

Mentally, Priam raised the danger level of his rival. That she could neutralize a Tier 4 in their own Domain was terrifying.

"And you? I mean, this clone."

"I can smooth relations between you and the tribes and spy on the Fallen."

Thanks to their trade agreements, Priam didn't think he'd have trouble with the Gaeserts and Snaherts, but the Aelbes were a thorn in his side. After a minute of reflection, he raised the most important question.

"How can I be sure your original won't try to double-cross me by kidnapping Sphinx after Bastard falls?"

"You have a better chance of defeating me than a Tier 4," Ève pointed out.

"You're trying to flatter my ego," Priam smiled coldly. "But you're not wrong. Fine, let's ally to free Sphinx—and slay Bastard. But I'll need some guarantees..."

"I can swear on my Potential—"

"Not enough," Priam interrupted. "I need a stronger guarantee. I'll implant a sub-system in you."

Ève's clone recoiled before hissing, "I won't accept something so intrusive!"

Priam was surprised by the reaction. He expected a refusal but not to see her hiss like a cat—an inherited reaction from the possessed female Aelbes.

"It'll just be a surveillance system capable of killing you at any moment," Priam ironically reassured her. "It will observe your actions without reading your thoughts or memories."

"... An intelligent kill switch."

"Indeed."

"... I suppose it's better to die after the Fallen falls than now," the clone said after hesitating for a few seconds.

From her tone, Priam understood that if he didn't kill her, Ève would. Yet the clone accepted her death to help the original. Faced with loyalty as terrifying as it was artificial, Priam shuddered.

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Lvl Up: [Priam's System] lvl 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

VIVA +15

MEM +15

META(Authority) + 15

Lvl Up: [Ideal Aether Perception] lvl 12, 13

META (Affinity) +6

META (Perception) +12

Lvl Up: [There is no Heaven] lvl 5

WILL +9

Spending the clone's Potential to implant a sub-system had been excellent for increasing the skill level. Priam had even taken the opportunity to observe her soul. What he saw confirmed the clone's story.

As a Fire Champion, he had an extreme affinity with the Fire Concept. A glance at the clone's soul's first layer had been enough to find a fire resistance rune. Whether it was **[Fire Resistance]**, **[Heat Resistance]**, or **[Thermal Resistance]**, Priam wasn't sure of the name of the skill, but he was sure of one thing: it was of common rarity.

However, he had purchased **[Grand Fire Resistance - Rare]** for Ève using his own Sun points. This confirmed that the clone's soul was different from their last encounter.

"I can barely sense the presence of the kill switch," the clone declared, closing her eyes.

"I hope for your sake that Bastard won't detect anything."

"Why would they search the soul of a clone when they can search the soul of the original?"

Priam didn't bother answering the rhetorical question. It was in Ève's interest that the Fallen detect nothing. Fueled by **[There is no Heaven]**, the sub-system was trigger-happy. At the slightest problem, the clone's soul space would be annihilated.

"Now onto the final step: the spiritual link."

"You're really going to cut off a piece of your soul to watch me?" It was clear that his rival's clone was intrigued by the possibility.

"Are you worried about me?"

"Until the original is free, your safety matters to me."

Priam chose not to respond.

One of the methods to maintain a remote connection with his sub-systems was to create a spiritual link. More reliable than a quantum link, it would allow Priam to see through the clone's eyes from anywhere, ensuring personally that she wouldn't betray him—or that she would die trying.

This security was partly why he had agreed to leave the clone alive. Even without reading her memories or thoughts, prolonged observation of the clone's actions and skills would give him an idea of the original's capabilities and weaknesses.

Once Sumstreh was dead, it would be time to avenge Sphinx.

Placing a hand on the clone's head, Priam reiterated the instructions. "You don't move, you don't use your aether or any skills, and you leave as soon as your sub-system tells you. Is that clear?"

Priam didn't know exactly what would happen once his soul was damaged. In the worst-case scenario, he would fall into a catatonic state, and his add-on would detonate his soul to activate **[He Who Eludes Death]**. At that point, he didn't want anyone around.

"Crystal clear," Ève said, settling cross-legged in the sap-filled bathtub.

Closing his eyes, Priam connected to his Potential. Taking a deep breath, he activated **[There is no Heaven]**, forming an energy blade in his soul space. His aether proficiency allowed him to carefully manipulate the tool and bring it closer to his soul. Despite a gut-wrenching premonition, he thrust.

The knife pierced the outer layer that supported the common skills. The sphere began to leak aether, enlarging the fissure and destabilizing the membrane. The spiritual wound worsened rapidly, plunging Priam into incomprehensible pain. It felt like every nerve in his body had been stabbed. His eyes became blind, his ears deaf, and his hearts stopped beating.

Only Micro prevented him from screaming and losing consciousness. The spiritual suffering was insane, and the blade froze. He couldn't go any further. Damaging his soul far surpassed the horror of all his deaths combined.

For the first time, Priam's impressive will faltered. Operating on the quintessence of his being was beyond his strength. It felt like amputating a precious part of his ego, and nothing justified that. The body could die, but not the soul. Continuing would betray everything he had ever believed in. He would lose his identity.

As tears of blood streamed down his cheeks—**[Homo Elysian Obsession]** mirrored his soul's damage on his body—Priam thought of Sphinx. She had bravely entered a Fallen's territory thinking she was saving him. Could he really waste a chance to save his friend?

His absolute memory conjured an image of the child as she stood between him and Sumstreh.

A terrible feeling of cowardice washed over Priam, and he screamed. Gathering his courage, he made the hardest decision of his life. *Finish the job, then kill me*, he asked his add-on. If he couldn't hold the knife's handle, he could at least give it to someone.

Lvl Up : [True Will] lvl 8

WILL +18

CHAR +9

The blade advanced again. The torture quickly reached a point of no return, and Priam lost his senses. Regretting his choice, he instinctively chose a way to end the pain. His add-on had to neutralize him as he prepared to detonate his body, Log-a-rhythm, and part of Oasis to end his torment. The pain was driving him insane.

The last thing he felt was his body slipping away from him as Micro deactivated. The Supremacy needed a soul to exist.

A few moments later, his soul fractured.

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*Congratulations, you are dead! Your Talent **[He Who Eludes Death]** brings you back to life once a day.*

Number of deaths: 22

Your soul is whole once more.

*Synergy detected with your talent **[Homo Elysian Obsession]** and your Titles **[Three-Headed Hydra]** and **[Life is Hard; I'm Harder]**. Your body and spirit are rebuilt and will be more resistant to what killed them:*

WILL +5

***[Pyro - Concept]** - Natural Affinity +10% (83%).*

*Lvl Up: **[Revelation Resilience]** lvl 25, 26*

MEM +6

META (Affinity) +6

META (Authority) +6

*Lvl Up: **[Fire Champion Physique]** lvl 4, 5, 6*

VIT +9

CONST +9

META (Endurance) +9

*Lvl Up: **[There is no Heaven]** lvl 6*

WILL +9

*Lvl Up: **[Adaptive Golden Meridians]** lvl 4, 5*

META (Focus) +6

META (Endurance) +12

*Lvl Up: **[Priam's System]** lvl 8, 9, 10, 11, 12*

VIVA +15

MEM +15

META(Authority) + 15

POT -500

Title won!

[Soul Scarred - Gold] - The soul is the quintessence of life and death, the vessel of your ego as it sails towards the Zenith. Yours has suffered damage yet has not yet joined a Wheel of Reincarnation.

In addition to the obvious consequences, a scarred soul has a chance of becoming apocryphal. If you reject death, only an Aether Baptism can heal you fully.

One way or another, the High Tribulation will deliver you from your sufferings.

META (Endurance) +10%

META (Chance) +20%

[Tribulation]: Five Tribulations pending.

Future Tribulations delayed until:

Time: 160 days 5 hours 12 minutes 3 seconds.

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

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Priam opened his eyes under the dim light. With a grunt, he struggled to sit up. He felt no physical or spiritual aftermath, but his mental state was... disturbed. Despite **[Homo Elysian Obsession]** and **[He Who Eludes Death]**, his last death had shaken him—more than all the others combined.

The pain had been spiritual, so his absolute memory hadn't recorded it in every detail. However, Priam wouldn't soon forget the primal terror he had felt. He had committed a sacrilege that the mere mention of made him sick. All he had to do was close his eyes to remember the knife piercing and cutting his soul, his ego, his personality, his memories and his experiences.

Knowing he would resurrect hadn't helped him rationalize the horror for a moment.

Pushing aside the shame, Priam looked around, sighing in relief as he felt the reassuring presence of Log-a-rhythm.

"I ain't ready to do that again," he murmured, condensing his mist around him. After a few seconds under cold water, he opened his eyes again and dried himself with a flame capable of melting tin. He instantly felt Pyro's new proximity. His affinity had jumped by ten percent—twice as much as usual.

Why?

Curiosity pushed aside the abjection, and Priam opened the System log.

His add-on had cut off a piece of his soul, then merged it with the sub-system hidden in Ève's clone's soul space. As his soul fell apart, he had immolated it directly in Pyro's flames. Unlike his previous suicides, the pressure hadn't caused his soul space to explode—which explained the absence of dilation of his Domain—but the Concept had burned the inside of his soul directly.

In Priam's opinion, it wasn't worth it.

What lifted his spirits was the connection linking him to the sub-system implanted in the clone's soul. Unlike his link with Jasmine, he didn't feel the young woman's emotions and couldn't read her thoughts.

However, he could observe her actions in real-time.

Better yet, the presence of a part of his soul allowed the sub-system to perceive the aether. Taking advantage of his vivacity's evolution, one add-on process monitored the outside world, and a second analyzed the clone's soul. It had already begun copying the runes of common skills found on the first layer.

Priam smiled, seeing that his gamble was already starting to pay off. Blinking, he reconnected to his own body and stepped through a portal to his new training room. It was time to focus on himself.

"Assistant, let's get Heavenly Dragon!"

Training regimen.

1) Physical capabilities:

- *Purchase traps to accelerate the development of physical resistances. Priority to the Gravity Trap.*
- *Unlock the remaining two Tortures and use your various rewards.*
- ...

Seeing the harrowing suggestions put forth by his system, Priam smiled. It was time to soar!

*

Status:

PHYSICAL:

Strength 620

Constitution 991 (+12)

Agility 608

Vitality 932 (+16)

Perception 760

MENTAL:

Vivacity (D) 552 (+36)

Dexterity 622

Memory 716 (+64)

Willpower 1 134 (+57)

Charisma 661 (+15)

META:

Meta-affinity 681 (+17)

Meta-focus 393 (+6)

Meta-endurance 494 (+62)

Meta-perception 321 (+15)

Meta-chance 274 (+44)

Meta-authority 150 (+36)

Potential: 13 727 (-423)

Tier 0

Sun points: 763 954 (+1 590)

[He Who Eludes Death] charge: OFF. Reloaded in 4 hours 37 minutes 44 seconds.

[Tribulation]: Five Tribulations pending.

Future Tribulations delayed until:

Time: 160 days 5 hours 10 minutes 57 seconds.

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