

## Chapter 111: Back to the Past

Like every day for nearly two weeks, Gabrielle walked from dawn till dusk. Her constitution wasn't the sturdiest in the clan, and her feet were suffering. As an apprentice apothecary, she had a few tricks up her sleeve for self-care. Nevertheless, the rarest ointments were reserved for severe injuries.

What Gabrielle's body craved most was time to recover. Time that the Gaeserts clan didn't have.

The gentle grasslands had gradually given way to stony frontiers. Elysium's locals referred to regions near the sky as the *frontiers*. A few days prior, Gabrielle had finally caught sight of the boundaries of the floating continent she was born on.

Knowing that the land beneath her feet was situated kilometers above the sea was one thing; actually seeing it was another. Gigantic rocks, each biome stranger than the last, hung in the air, drifting slowly above an endless ocean.

Gabrielle and her clan had already traversed several peculiar biomes, a consequence of their proximity to the frontiers. They were the result of abandoned fragments of concepts. When a fire elemental extinguished after a failed Tribulation or a fight, the nature of the landscape changed...

According to the clan's elders, even the tiniest islands were saturated with concepts. A whole ecosystem of monsters thrived there, gradually reinforcing the fragments over time. Gabrielle had no desire to cross an island steeped in a fire concept. A volcanic explosion might be beautiful, but it was dangerous.

That was the reason for their exodus. The clan's destination had been cleansed by the Influence System of such fragments, preparing for the Champions' arrival. A zone with low aether density, devoid of concepts and monsters. A paradise.

Leaning slightly to her right, Gabrielle observed the void and the ocean far below. The water sometimes gave way to land. As strange as it seemed to her, some islands were stationary, anchored to the seabed and surrounded by water.

*Islands that don't float... How peculiar.* Apparently, these islands were known as trading platforms with the denizens of the ocean's depths.

*Someday, I'd like to meet the ocean peoples,* Gabrielle thought. "Ouch!"

Uttering a curse, she hastily lifted her foot. Upon inspection, a sharp stone had pierced her worn shoe. *Once again...*

The young girl studied the guilty stone. Resembling glass darker than the night, obsidian was a terribly sharp rock. It was harvested by the clan's warriors to fashion arrowheads. Gabrielle and Mama Apo used them for surgical operations. Obsidian was sharp enough to pierce the skin of most warriors. Without it, how could a Tier 0 like Gabrielle hope to overcome the enhanced skin and constitution of a Tier 2?

The shape of the obsidian was uninteresting and devoid of concept. Gabrielle tossed the useless fragment into the void. *If it hits a monster's head, maybe I'll unlock a skill*, she mused with a smile.

Pausing for a moment, she wrapped a bandage soaked in antiseptic around her foot and resumed her journey. She preferred to endure the pain than ride in a cart.

Children half her age walked, refusing the ease. Gabrielle was nearly an adult and would have preferred absorbing an insect's core rather than seeing disappointment in the eyes of the younger ones. Suffering was a crucial part of Gaeserts' education. Life was precious in Elysium; suffering reminded you that you were alive.

Gabrielle turned away from the carts and scrutinized the ground, hoping to find a rare herb. All in vain. No organic resources were to be found in this desert of black stones. The winds that blew made sure any blade of grass audacious enough to grow was instantly annihilated. That was one of the reasons standing too close to the edge was dangerous. If a gust pushed her over, no one would save her from the plummet of several kilometers that awaited.

Lost in thought, Gabrielle didn't notice Broli until the boy gave her a friendly shoulder bump. She jumped, letting out a yelp.

"If you walk any slower, we'll never get there before the Necromoon's Wrath. I can carry you if you want," he offered, oblivious to his friend's misplaced pride.

*How can this fool be so quiet when he weighs as much as three boars?!*

Pretending to dust off her attire - a futile endeavor - to mask her startle, she replied, "I can walk. Maybe I don't have feet as sturdy as yours, but I make up for it with an iron will."

Broli chuckled.

"You're mistaking having willpower for being stubborn. No one's asking you to walk. You're just wasting bandages and shoes. Don't compare yourself to me; I've developed the soles of my feet!" the boy boasted.

*Why is he proud of that?*

"Too bad you didn't have time to develop your brain..." she murmured.

"Hmm?"

"Nothing. When are we getting there?" she asked, glancing ahead at the column. The clan was spread out in a line nearly five hundred meters long. The warriors and huntresses ensured their safety, but Gabrielle worried. Mobility in Elysium was paramount, but if they ventured into the territory of a beast too powerful...

The boy took a few seconds to respond, contemplating. "Honestly? I'm not entirely sure. The huntresses found a bridge, but the next island is dangerous."

Gabrielle straightened up instantly. "What kind of bridge?!"

"A basic one, just a series of rocks, more or less, floating between the two islands," the young man sighed.

"Oh... I would have loved to cross a bridge created by a light concept. Can you imagine a rainbow bridge?"

"Do you have a resistance to light?" Broli asked, surprised.

"No, but it would have been amazing. Maybe I would have been baptized..." One of Elysium's fundamental laws required islands imbued with a concept to create a bridge to neighboring islands. These bridges broke when the islands drifted too far. The clan's elders recounted that it was possible to be baptized by the fragments and thus develop an affinity for the concept.

"Mama Apo will baptize you when you're ready."

"...So are we taking the bridge?"

Broli shook his head at the change of subject.

"I don't think so. Each rock is spaced at least fifty meters apart, and the wind can be strong at times. No big deal for a warrior or a huntress, but for the rest? Even if they carry us, I can't see them jumping while carrying carts."

Gabrielle nodded. Abandoning carts filled with provisions, potions, ointments, and bandages was out of the question.

Broli looked around. They were nearly at the rear of the column, walking alongside the draft animals. Sensing that nobody was listening, he lowered his voice to whisper to Gabrielle.

"There's another way. A titanic tree has fallen, allowing passage to a small island that would bring us closer to our destination. However, Cerdà detected a Tier 4 python there."

"This is madness!" Gabrielle exclaimed.

"Lower your voice! It's impossible for our clan alone, but the chiefs of the Snaherts and Aelbes came to discuss an alliance with my father. Depending on their discussion, a raid will be launched."

Gabrielle tensed at the mention of the Snaherts. *The murderers of my parents...* Sometimes, in her dreams, she saw them. Her father's hand was massive, enveloping hers. She felt profoundly safe in those moments.

"You know I don't like them, but we have no choice," Broli sighed. "A Tier 4 would decimate our warriors. I can't even imagine the power that beast must possess..."

Gabrielle shook her head. "I'm thinking about the clan first. If it's the only way... Tell your father to be careful. Who will go?"

"Don't worry," Broli smiled. "My father, the shaman, Cerdà, and my great-grandfather will go fight if the raid is confirmed. The others would be a burden."

Gabrielle's second shoe chose precisely that moment to give out. Another piece of rock scratched her foot, and the young girl didn't even have time to bend down before Broli lifted her.

"That's enough. If you keep damaging your shoes, you'll arrive barefoot. It would make a bad impression."

"If we ever arrive..."

"Don't say that. After this island, we'll be almost there. No more than a week's journey before we reach the portal's location. Who knows, we might even see those famous Champions!"

A titanic roar shook the air. The monstrous python had anticipated the raid.

\*\*\*\*\*

Around Priam, the darkness was supreme. His enhanced eye perceived nothing - his other eye was still blind. **[Three Headed Hydra]** had managed to restore his arm, and the Merit of **[Tribulation Wyvern Heart - Silver(Gold)]** had regenerated his main heart. His other wounds had naturally healed.

Priam had prioritized his limb to regain a normal appearance - declaring himself Champion while missing an arm might have raised concerns during his address.

That was now the least of his worries. A more significant problem occupied his mind: he no longer sensed his internal world. The connection with his father and friends was severed, and concern washed over him.

Priam tried to use Micro to halt the production of cortisol - the stress hormone. A moment later, he widened his eyes. The Supremacy wasn't responding.

*What the...*

There was a problem. In an instant, Priam recalled all his deaths and all he had gone through to get to this point. Invoking the pragmatic part of his consciousness, Priam analyzed the situation.

He should have arrived in Elysium in an instant. The portal was aptly named; it wasn't teleportation. At least, that's how it happened on the way there. From there, three scenarios were possible.

In the first one, the System was waiting for all humans to pass through the portal before distributing the Reunion's rewards. That was the most likely case; all he would have to do was wait. The second was that he wasn't allowed to bring people into Elysium, and the System or one of the moderators were trying to find a solution that didn't involve tearing apart his world.

The third...

**"How peculiar... Your alien Talent doesn't manipulate your luck, does it? Is it just a coincidence?"**

A voice resonated in the infinite space. Priam shivered upon hearing it. His brain fainted, and only his heart, blessed by the Tribulation, continued to beat. Instinctively, his draconic instinct summoned his Domain. Unlike Micro, the Supremacy responded, and a bubble of calm surrounded him. The god's influence waned and Priam's mind reconnected.

"V... Viracocha," he stammered. The god's aura prevented him from thinking clearly. A primal terror stirred within him. Part of him wanted to scream and rebel, but the divine influence crushed him.

The power difference was too significant.

**"Disturbing a god is a dangerous endeavor. That being said, you have nothing to fear at the moment."**

Upon hearing those words, Priam's mind shuddered.

"Wh..."

**"Don't force yourself to speak or fight. You'd only hurt yourself, and the System wouldn't allow it. I am here... to bless you,"** the voice chuckled.

Priam trembled. He didn't want the god's blessing.

**"Originally, I was aiming for your father... Too bad, it will be the brother and sister. Receive my blessing, Priam. With a bit of luck, it will cost both of us dearly."**

The divine aura vanished. Priam's brain reconnected, and his first heart began to beat again. His body would have collapsed if he hadn't been floating in space.

After a few seconds, Priam gritted his teeth and clenched his fists. His nails dug into his skin, drawing blood. *I am WEAK.*

His anger flared. How dare this god try to attack his father and sister?! What did this blessing mean? A bit of power now, and his soul would join Viracocha's paradise upon death? *If that's the case, he'll be disappointed...*

The System finally activated, redirecting his attention.

***End of the Reunion.***

***Congratulations on your survival!***

***First Quest: Soon to be reunited?***

***The threat has been revealed to all of humanity.***

***The leader and generals of the Revenants have been eliminated.***

***The Revenant Champion has renounced.***

*64% of the original Revenants are dead.  
87% of the converted Revenants are dead.*

*Humanity has mostly triumphed over its threat.  
Congratulations!*

*Rewards for humanity:  
Free Attributes +10  
Free Skill Points +5  
Personal Reward - Revenants' elimination:  
POT +32*

*Additional Rewards:  
During this first community event, humanity achieved some feats:  
84 Achievements - Bronze  
5 Achievements - Silver  
2 Achievements - Gold  
1 Achievement - Legendary*

*Free Attributes +8  
Free Skill Points +5  
POT +200  
One solar day ahead in the next community event.*

*Title received!*

**[Champion - Humanity (Tier 0) - Bronze]** - *You are the First of your race. Guiding all of your kin in this new universe, you strive to avoid traps. The task is arduous, but you have the power to save many lives.*

*So many of your people are counting on you. Poor things...*

*You detect the presence of humans close to you.*

*CHAR +10%*

*Talent received!*

**[Blessing of Viracocha - Bronze]** - *The minor god Viracocha has entrusted you with a small part of his affinity for death. Increases your charisma with the souls of the departed. Warning: this may provoke the wrath of their master if these souls are already controlled.*

The veil of darkness tore, and Priam felt the blue grass beneath his feet.

Three suns shone in the sky, a cool breeze brushed his cheeks, and the leaves of Log-a-rhythm shimmered. It was his home.

"Geka Eaz."

\*

*Status: (Average value for a Homo sapiens male before integration: PHY 10 / MEN 10 / META 0)*

*PHYSICAL:*

*Strength 317*

*Constitution 448*

*Agility 304*

*Vitality 465*

*Perception 521*

*MENTAL:*

*Vivacity 282*

*Dexterity 345*

*Memory 72*

*Willpower 464*

*Charisma 410 (+26)*

*META:*

*Meta-affinity 249*

*Meta-focus 183*

*Meta-endurance 161*

*Meta-perception 77*

*Meta-chance 207*

*Meta-authority 12*

*Potential: 1011 (+232)*

*Tier 0*

***[He Who Eludes Death] charge: PRIMED.***

***[Tribulation]: One Tribulation pending.***

***Future Tribulations delayed until:***

***Time: 180 days 0 hour 38 minutes 8 seconds.***