

## Chapter 196: He Who Conned the Gods

Eve jolted as one of her illusions heard the shout. *What lousy timing*, she thought, focusing her attention. She quickened her pace and entered the tribal encampment. The six guards paid her no mind, **[Scotomization]** forcing them to unconsciously reject her presence. Their immediate memory was rewritten, preventing them from seeing or remembering her.

Inside the camp, a child mounted on a pack animal stared at her. Ève grimaced, realizing she had been spotted. **[Scotomization]** had prioritized the guards to avoid awkward questions. Priam's yell had shattered her focus, allowing the child to catch a glimpse of her. Kids could focus on strange things, and she happened to be Eve's focus. *If she talks to me, I'm done...*

Reluctantly, Ève began to summon her aether.

"Tymile, look ahead or you'll fall!"

Her mother's call diverted the child's attention, and she turned with a clownish grace. Ève sighed in relief. She wouldn't have to trap the child in an illusion. At that age, the long-term consequences could be dramatic.

*What am I saying...* What kind of hypocrite worried about a child's brain development just before committing an act of terrorism?

The young woman continued on her way, all the while thinking about Priam. Was there a problem? As a fanatic following Sumstreh's orders, his issues probably involved the Fallen. If she failed to resolve them, her head would roll.

Yet, she couldn't join him right now. She had an attack to carry out, and the meeting of the Chiefs of the three tribes was the only time she could act. After that, the Tier 4s would disperse in the camp, making infiltration much more challenging. Her Talents, Titles, Merits, and skills synergized to erase her presence, but a Tier 4's Domain could detect her.

At their level, their mental attributes were sufficient to know the identity of every tribe member. An outsider like Ève, even disguised, would stand out instantly.

Quickening her pace, a fresh boar carcass on her shoulder, Ève continued down one of the main arteries of the camp. Around her, hundreds of tribespeople strolled, regularly exchanging dark glances. Now that their journey was over, and the most dangerous creatures were behind them, tensions were rising. Under the haughty gaze of the proud Aelbes, the strong Gaeserts despised the cunning Snaherts.

The grand alliance would soon come to an end.

With her face painted with Aelbes marks and her features slightly altered by her illusions, Ève looked straight ahead, passing by a Gaesert huntress and a young apothecary. The fighter didn't spare her a glance, busy calming the frustrated teenager.

"Laepa, let me at least search for some antidote among the local plants. The Snaherts will poison us when it's time to choose the best settlement location!"

"Certainly not. There are millions of corrupted outside; you'd get torn apart. And watch your words; we are still allies."

"Not for long," the teenager spat. "Old rivalries are resurfacing."

"Nonsense. The opinion of the powerful is the only one that matters."

"If two youths kill each other, the Chiefs won't be able to contain the clan's wrath. Sooner or later, it will explode."

Eve wholeheartedly agreed. She had been studying the tribes for days, learning their language, customs, and habits. Only a spark was needed to ignite a war. *And I could be that spark.*

The huntress sighed loudly. "That's enough, Gabrielle. I'll go fetch herbs while visiting the Champions. You find Broli and pacify his friends. The Chiefs are discussing a peaceful way to choose our future territories, and they wouldn't be pleased if a kid ruined everything."

Gabrielle sniffed. "The day the Snaherts choose a peaceful outcome, I'll kiss a dragon's ass."

"Language!"

Eve left the two tribeswomen behind and ventured into the Gaesert quarter. She had long thought about her target. The attack ordered by Sumstreh was meant to divide the tribes. Using poison, the Snaherts' weapon, to reach the Gaeserts was the idea she had settled on. In the long run, the political consequences would be the most interesting.

Passing by a large tent, Ève heard youthful laughter. *A nursery...* The most effective way to trigger a war was to target children, but she refused. Sumstreh controlled her life, not her thoughts. If she stooped to massacring kids, she would have to bear that weight on her conscience.

Selling Sphinx and Priam was tough enough without adding to it. Their sacrifice had been necessary, but Ève still had remorse.

Resuming her journey, she soon reached the kitchens. Placing the boar in front of a surprised apprentice, she smiled.

"A gift."

"This is the Gaesert mess hall, not the Aelbes'," he said respectfully. The marks on Eve's face designated her as a Tier 2 huntress—not too powerful to be recognized, not too weak to be easily accosted.

"One of your warriors saved my life during the journey. A gift to thank your fighters."

Instantly, the apprentice chef puffed up his chest. If the Aelbes were the most powerful, the Gaeserts were the most united. The glory of one reflected on the entire clan.

"I'll prepare it personally," smiled the teenager.

"Very well, but it's for your warriors. I treated it against necro-corruption, but one can never be too cautious."

The apprentice nodded, and Ève hoped he would listen. She didn't want the soul of a teenager weighing on her conscience.

Leaving behind a boar poisoned to the bone, Ève hurried to leave the camp. The First was waiting.

\*

*Lvl Up: [Ideal Aether Perception] lvl 2*

*META (AFFI) +3*

*META (PERC) +6*

Floating cross-legged just a few centimeters above the forest floor, Priam channeled several of his abilities. A delicate mastery of **[Kinetic Control]** allowed him to hover and regulate the ambient temperature. Simultaneously, **[Moon Mist]** concealed him from the senses of the corrupted creatures howling in agony less than thirty meters away. Priam understood their rage. In their shoes, burned by Pyro's flames, he would have howled too.

His call fifteen minutes ago had drawn hordes of enraged revenants. The Necro Concept strengthened them over time. Now, even the weakest among them could physically defeat Rose or Alain.

Yet, the fire inherited from the ancestor of phoenixes ravaged their ranks effortlessly. Priam advanced faster than the Necro Concept. As his fiery storm blocked the advance of the undead army, Conquest further fueled his flames. Priam was relatively sure that one of his meta-attributes intensified the fire, but he hadn't yet identified which one.

While his system exterminated the corrupted, Priam focused on the aether. The ideal upgrade of **[Aether Manipulation]** had changed everything. He now saw the currents of the fundamental fluid with the naked eye. The world was more beautiful, vibrant, and, above all, more complex. Previously, Priam perceived aether when it gathered in large quantities. Now, his Domain detected the thousands of minor flows constantly exchanged by objects.

Suddenly, a change caught his attention. A first wave of aether surged in his direction, followed by a second. The particles entered his mind, and Priam felt his focus diminish. His thoughts changed direction.

Alerted, Priam overclocked his agility and focused on **[True Will]**.

The manipulation began to slow down as Priam's defenses activated, and his thoughts accelerated. Someone was trying to corrupt his memory. *Eve? A member of the tribes? The Necro Envoy? Fuck, I have to remember that someone is trying to manipulate me. Record a memory backup.*

*[Creating a routine. Monitoring memory.*

...

*Routine failure. [Eidetic Memory] detects no falsification.*

...

*Routine failure. [Eidetic Memory] detects no falsification.*

...

*Routine absent.]*

Reading the reports from his add-on, Priam began to break into a cold sweat. His opponent was skilled enough to influence his system's behavior. Without **[Aether Perception]**, he wouldn't have even noticed the manipulation. *If I do nothing, I'm screwed!*

Opening his Potential, Priam immersed his mind in the flow of divine inspiration. Whoever his adversary was, he refused to lose control of his thoughts.

*Lvl Up: [True Will] lvl 7*

*WILL +18*

*CHAR +9*

*Will exceeds 1 000 points. Second milestone reached. Congratulations!*

*Title received!*

*[It's over 1,000! - Silver] - The first threshold could be a coincidence. Not the second. You like it when your attributes rise. When numbers go brrr.*

*It's a sign of great intelligence.*

*PS: This Title does not confer attribute bonuses. Take your Merit point and go.*

Quantifying his will was difficult, but Priam felt his thoughts gaining inertia with the second milestone. The enemy continued to gain ground, but not as quickly as before. Priam realized that it wouldn't change much. In a few seconds, he would forget the assailant.

When defense no longer worked, it was time to go on the offensive. Priam turned in the direction of the waves and bluffed.

"If you don't stop this quickly, you're dead."

Priam tensed. He would have preferred to attack with a Pyro Breath, but if his opponent was several hundred meters away, they would have time to dodge. In the event of no response, he would flee.

Twenty meters away, the mist swirled, revealing Ève. His rival seemed stunned.

"How?"

*This bitch!* With a thought, Priam recalled his mist, revealing a dome of flame. The temperature soared, and Priam internally smiled as he saw Ève start to sweat. His rival wasn't blocked—after all, she had managed to come—but she seemed uncomfortable in the furnace.

"I can ignore your presence, but not the aether you emit," he replied confidently.

It was false; outside his Domain, Priam's perception wasn't yet refined enough to detect his rival hidden by an illusion. That would come.

"...You're not the First for nothing. Did you summon me?"

"I need to talk to our god."

Priam had to suppress a cold smile when uttering those words. He hated Sumstreh, and showing deference to the Fallen angered him. On the other hand, the prospect of deceiving the god delighted him. *This buffoon will die by the hand he'll arm.*

Ignoring Priam's murderous thoughts, Ève nodded as she pulled a rabhorn from her satchel. Its white fur, fluffy tail, and cute horn concealed a mean Tier 1 monster.

"That's good; he wanted to speak with you too."

Seeing the creature, Priam ordered his system to activate the preparations. He hadn't expected to see the Fallen so quickly but had anticipated many situations.

His memory was rewritten in a fraction of a second. When the rabhorn's eyes lit up, Priam's ego had vanished.

\*

The young man bent his knee, sensing the arrival of a terrifying presence.

**"Priam, I'm glad to see that you continue to improve,"** Sumstreh's voice thundered.

"You ordered me to become a Prince, and I live to serve," the believer replied in a voice vibrating with veneration.

The rabhorn's lips stretched into a smile too perverse for such a cute creature.

**"See, Ève, you would be as happy as your rival if you accepted to let me mark your soul."**

"I'll stick with the leash you've so generously bestowed upon me," Ève replied before pointing at Priam. "He had something to tell you."

The rabhorn shook its head before turning to its faithful. **"Really?"**

"Yes, your Divinity. I discussed the best method to become a Prince with the Guardian of Secrets. Your humble servant would have great chances of reaching this rank by tempering his body with Heavenly Dragon. I used Ace's first Merit to obtain **[Ideal Aether Perception]**, but I would need help for the high upgrade of manipulation."

**"... Do you want my help to buy aether puzzles?"**

\*

Priam regained consciousness upon hearing these words.

*[High probability that Fallen Sumstreh is projecting his presence without being able to use his powers. No interaction with the divine mark detected.*

*Reloading host's original memory.*

*Dynamic modification of memory activated: Liar mode.*

*Host now believes in his lies.]*

"I beg your pardon if I ask too much, but I thought becoming a Prince was a priority," Priam said, looking at the ground. It was easier for him to hide his revulsion and anger by avoiding the glowing gaze of the rabhorn.

**"It's a priority if you can become one, but even in Elysium, Princes are rare."**

"I won't fail." Priam had no need to lie to utter that phrase. After a brief hesitation, he continued. "The most profitable investments are never without risk, but my Talent is powerful. With your help, I will become a Prince sooner or later. Let me be your weapon."

A long silence answered Priam.

**"Your divine mark doesn't respond. Is it purely the Necromoon's doing?"**

Priam hid a smile. Sumstreh wasn't really worried, confident in his own power. A fatal error. *First, the bait...*

"This may be linked to the Necro Envoy's activity?"

*Now, let's see if you bite.*

Sumstreh did not respond immediately, and Priam forced himself to remain relaxed. If the Fallen attacked, it would be now.

**"You speak the truth. What Necro Envoy?"**

Priam suppressed his joy. A huge computing capacity was useless when you were stupid. *It is almost too easy.*

"A Tier 3 Marquess who possessed the body of a soulless human. She is rapidly regaining her power and seems interested in Oasis and the surrounding areas."

Sumstreh's aura disappeared instantly.

**"Ève."**

"I was monitoring the tribes, I couldn't—" The rest of her sentence was lost in a scream. The rabhorn had just ripped out her tongue.

**"What good is your tongue if it can't inform me?"**

Sumstreh jumped, landing at Priam's feet. Despite the difference in size, the creature's implacable eyes made the situation terrifying.

**"You and Ève will attract the Necro Envoy's attention with the help of the tribes. Moreover, I want a ban on entering rabhorn territory. Do you understand?"**

"Yes, your Divinity!"

**"If I sense a single Tier 4 or the Necro Envoy approaching my Divine Kingdom, I will use the sphinx child as a karmic bomb."**

Priam kept his eyes fixed on the ground, his emotions imprisoned deep within his heart.

*Lvl Up: [Emotional discipline] lvl 9*  
*WILL +3*

Suddenly, some kind of black diamond fell to his feet.

**"A fragment of the fulcrum of my former divine kingdom. You should be able to exchange it for a quality aether puzzle at the Auctions. It's equivalent to six million Sun points..."**

A spasm shook the rabhorn, which collapsed to the ground.

***"Do not disappoint me."***

When his new perception assured him that the Fallen had left, Priam allowed himself a smile. He had felt Bastard's reluctance. The loss of the fulcrum's fragment pained him.

*That's how you steal from a god!*

The System agreed.

*Title upgrade! [Iconoclast - Gold] becomes [Iconoclast - Legendary]!*

\*

Status:

**PHYSICAL:**

Strength 557  
Constitution 860  
Agility 552  
Vitality 840  
Perception 714

**MENTAL:**

Vivacity 505  
Dexterity 587  
Memory 398 (+13)  
Willpower 1 028 (+30)  
Charisma 615

**META:**

Meta-affinity 430 (+4)  
Meta-focus 350  
Meta-endurance 354  
Meta-perception 221 (+7)  
Meta-chance 230  
Meta-authority 33

Potential: 5 268 (+9)

Tier 0

Sun points: 115 031 (+53 689)

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

**[Tribulation]: Three Tribulations pending.**

**Future Tribulations delayed until:**

**Time: 164 days 21 hours 53 minutes 48 seconds.**

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