

Chapter 120: Thrust and Trust

"The spear serves both as a striking and throwing weapon. Today, we will focus on its striking capability."

Kazuki grasped his spear firmly and raised it with both hands.

"There are three basic techniques. In order of importance: the thrust, the grapple, and the cut. Each has several variations."

"Why in that order?" Priam inquired.

"Because the spear is primarily designed for thrusting. It's a destructive weapon, capable of felling an enemy with a single blow. That's the thrust."

Kazuki's spear briefly vanished and its tip reappeared a meter away. Priam carefully watched the movement.

"However, the other two techniques are equally important, especially against a serious adversary. Its long shaft makes it an interesting weapon for parrying and then for tripping, throwing, or destabilizing an opponent. Hence the importance of the grapple. Finally, even though they're not superb cutters, it's still not to be neglected."

Priam nodded. He had rarely used the spear's ability to unbalance or control an opponent. All this time, he had not fully explored his weapon's possibilities. Priam realized the importance of receiving instruction from a master. Another advantage was that he could ask questions.

"So, I'm going to unlock three skills, but what is the role of **[Spear Strike]** in all of this?"

Kazuki groaned upon hearing the question.

"It's a System aid that does you more harm than good. At least, that's how I see it."

The hoplite's hesitation was understandable; the System was a new tool. It was up to them to discover its intricacies. Nevertheless, Priam was not satisfied with this answer; he needed precision.

"How so?"

"Imagine you want to learn how to dance. You watch a few videos, practice on your own, and unlock **[Dance - Common]**, a general skill. It helps you keep up with the music's rhythm and coordinate your movements. But a dancer who has learned just one dance and has the associated skill - a common rank - will be better than you in their discipline."

"I didn't take you for a dancer."

"There are many similarities between dance and combat," Kazuki replied with a smile. Priam would bet that the hoplite was an excellent dancer. "In my opinion, **[Spear Strike]** prioritizes generality over specialization."

"At higher ranks, the difference will become more and more pronounced," Priam added, and Kazuki nodded. "It doesn't stop there," Priam continued. "You mentioned three different skills, while I only have one. A generalist can progress faster, but in the end, the specialist will have more attributes and potential..."

"Exactly. But I suppose you can't specialize in everything," Kazuki concluded.

"No... But I want to specialize in spear handling. **[Spear Strike]** will become redundant with my new skills. Did this happen to you?"

If they were correct, **[Spear Strike]** was a mix of various skills that could be learned with a spear. Priam doubted that the System would allow him to increase this skill in addition to the others.

After all, each level allowed him to gain knowledge, automatism, attributes, and potential. If he could level up skills that did the same things, he would receive multiple rewards for the same action.

Priam did not yet understand the System's mechanics, but he was pretty sure it was impossible to have a cake and eat it too...

Kazuki shrugged. "No, I directly unlocked rare and epic spear skills."

"... Good for you. I know it's possible to merge multiple skills into one. The reverse should be true as well," Priam theorized.

"Dismantling a general skill into several specialized skills?"

"Seems logical."

"I hope so."

Otherwise, Priam would be slowed down by a suboptimal skill. He refused to accept that possibility. Promesse deserved to be wielded by an exceptional fighter. *At worst, I'll use my Potential to forget my skill... Damn it!*

Priam did not have so much Potential that he was willing to sacrifice it for nothing.

"Can you show me a thrust again? I'm going to try to dismantle my **[Spear Strike]**," Priam requested.

Kazuki assumed a stance, with both hands on the spear's shaft about eighty centimeters apart. Priam concentrated to not miss any of the warrior's movements. He was by far the best spearman Priam had ever seen, and he intended to absorb all of his knowledge.

"The thrust has two main variations. The first requires stable and static hands. The thrusting force will be generated with the arms. The movements of the hips and torso are more stable, making them less easily displaced."

Kazuki's right foot unfolded, and his spear pierced the air. "The result is great penetration force but limited range and speed."

[Eidetic Memory] didn't miss a beat of the warrior's demonstration. Kazuki's attack was simple but powerful. No energy was wasted, and the majority of his muscles were involved. The result was a perfect attack.

The warrior returned to his initial position. "Second thrust, known as the *Pzarth*."

Priam frowned upon hearing the unfamiliar word. Sensing his student's uncertainty, Kazuki summoned his helmet. An illusion was projected, and Priam understood. The *Pzarth* was a game that resembled billiards. Kazuki continued his explanation.

"In this thrust, you start by targeting your opponent and then the rear hand pushes to quickly propel your spear. It's a fast attack with a longer range than the first variation, but it allows your opponent to unbalance you if they parry or knock aside your spear."

Kazuki demonstrated, and Priam was surprised by the attack's range. A spear was a long weapon, capable of reaching three meters, and many opponents could be caught off guard by its reach.

Without his heightened perception or his Domain, this kind of attack would have defeated him outright.

"Your turn."

Priam assumed the position, took a deep breath, and copied the first movement. His dexterity and Micro gave him incredible control over his body. Despite the difference in muscle distribution between him and the hoplite, Priam found a way to emulate the attack on his first try.

The power originated from the lower part of his body and traveled up his legs before being amplified by the movement of his pelvis and then his shoulders. His muscles tensed like springs before releasing. The attack sliced through the air with terrifying force.

"Incredible," he murmured.

"Not bad," Kazuki acknowledged. The System seemed to agree.

*The user has reached a certain level in a specialized skill. General skill already unlocked.
Reading user's intention...*

*Do you want to learn **[Spear Thrust - Common]** by disassembling **[Spear Strike - Rare]**?
Attention: **[Spear Strike]** level will decrease.*

Yes!

You have gained the skill: **[Spear Thrust - Common]**.

[Spear Thrust] - The first spears were created by humans over 300,000 years ago. The thrusting spear accompanied your ancestors, allowing them to triumph over fierce beasts. Your heritage is massive; it's up to you to rediscover and perfect it.

Attack summary: pierce your enemies with the pointed end. Multiple times if necessary.
STR +1

Your experience in **[Spear Strike - Rare]** level 6 is incorporated into **[Spear Thrust - Common]**.

Update...

[Spear Thrust] level 1 > 16

[Spear Strike] level 6 > 1

Unchanged POT. Unchanged attributes.

Kazuki recognized Priam's smile.

"I suppose we were right. Now, your movement was good, but it can be improved. Pay attention to the position of your hands on..."

*

Level Up: **[Spear Strike]** Lvl 17,18,19,20

STR +4

Kazuki wasn't just a trainer. He was a tyrant.

Thrust.

Beneath the elysian suns, Priam sweated. Drops of sweat trickled down his arms, finding their way between his fingers and the wood of the spear. His wet hands clung to the shaft, refusing to slip. His forearms trembled, exhausted from the past twenty hours of training. During this time, Priam had released his grip six times. He had sworn there wouldn't be a seventh.

Thrust. The spear, simple and barely more than a thin stake, surged forward. Priam's right foot moved to stabilize him. Bringing the spear back, he spun it and assumed a defensive posture. His Domain warned him of a pebble hurled by Kazuki behind him. Shifting his weight onto his left foot, Priam managed to dodge.

A bead of sweat rolled along the weapon, falling onto the grass. Priam's enhanced perspective allowed him to notice this detail and a thousand others. According to Kazuki, it would never be enough. In a war, there would be millions of details to observe.

But it was a start.

Thrust. Priam attacked the air again, piercing it with all the fury he could still muster. A fury that was beginning to wane. Over the last twenty hours, he had pushed his limits.

The first ten hours had been relatively straightforward. His vitality granted him inhuman endurance. Despite the enormous amount of energy consumed by his powerful muscles and his brain's calculations, Priam had kept up.

The eleventh hour saw the first mistakes.

Thrust. Priam had been annoyed when he fell for the first time. Despite his inhuman attributes, it was still possible to suffer cramps. He had to use **[Three-Headed Hydra]** to regenerate his body.

Thrust. In the thirteenth hour, his focus began to wane. Night had fallen hours earlier. It was challenging to continue training when the ominous presence of an evil moon loomed over him. The terrifying cries of nocturnal predators regularly distracted him. If they were attacked again...

Thrust. Priam had sought motivation. His debt to the dead he had caused. The fear of death. His love for his family. His desire for freedom.

At the eighteenth hour, his motivation dwindled in the face of fatigue. Priam had wanted to quit. A human body was not made to undergo such intensive training. Sensing his weakness, Kazuki had asked Sphinx to increase the gravity around them.

His friend complied. She had quickly mastered her power, and Priam understood the difference between them. His race, High Human, was Tier 1. The Sphinxes were a Tier 3 race. If he didn't train harder, he would be left behind. That was out of the question.

To save face, out of pride and anger at this unfair world, Priam had persevered. Beside him, Kazuki continued to train.

Thrust. The gravity had doubled, then tripled. Sweat on his hands caused him to lose his grip on the spear. Kazuki had had nothing to say; Priam had retrieved it on his own.

Thrust. Priam finally understood the difference between a thrust and a strike. He didn't just mindlessly attack. Micro and Domain helped him analyze every movement, every position. The System didn't reward mindless repetition of a task. This kind of active skill required the user's intention to be improved.

Thrust. All this time, Priam had handled his spear like a child holding a wood branch. That's why he hadn't unlocked the skill before Kazuki's training.

Thrust. The attack was now imprinted in his body. His muscles, overseen by his dexterity, moved almost on their own. Priam had unlocked the common skill and brought it up to level twenty. Up to a simple but perfectly executed attack. Kazuki hadn't allowed him to improve it to the higher rank.

Thrust. The air vibrated, violently pushed by the power of a High Human with more strength than skill. That had changed during the last hour.

Exhausted, Priam had started to make adjustments to his skill again. Level twenty was not perfection. He had discovered that it depended on the situation. At full power, a thrust utilized his muscles and energy to the fullest. With an indestructible spear, the attack was straightforward and direct.

Thrust. However, his spear was made of young, green wood. His muscles were tired. His hands were wet. His focus was uneven.

Thrust. Priam's mind then relied on Micro. His blood flow had slightly changed, favoring the critical muscles. Some of his nerves were now used only periodically. Priam optimized everything that could be.

Thrust. A pebble appeared in his Domain. Its trajectory and speed predicted a violent collision with the back of his head in a few moments.

Taking advantage of the momentum from his last attack, Priam's feet pivoted. Turning around, Priam now faced the pebble. He didn't think to dodge. Mechanically, perfectly, he assumed his position. It was now second nature to him. He had attacked more than once per second over the last twenty hours.

For the hundred thousandth time, Priam used a thrust. His muscles aligned, his eyes narrowed, his will sharpened, transcending his fatigue.

He thrust.

The spear exploded, and the pebble was reduced to dust.

*New upgrade available for **[Spear Thrust]** upgrade.*

Refusing to succumb to fatigue, Priam checked his notification.

***[Spear Thrust]** has reached level 20, its maximum level as a common skill. Depending on your background, three upgrades are available:*

***[Great Thrust - Rare]** - General upgrade. No future upgrade possible. Potential Cost: 5*

***[Many Thrust - Rare]** - You master several thrust variations. Future upgrades possible. Potential Cost: 10*

***NEW - [Inlassable Thrust - Rare]** - Thrusting is as natural for you as breathing. Don't stop now. High upgrade potential. Potential Cost: 20*

"Did you get it?" Kazuki asked.

Priam grunted.

"Perfect. Validate it and go to sleep. We'll resume tomorrow."

*

You have gained the skill: [Inlassable Thrust - Rare].

Priam opened one eye and gazed at the radiant ceiling of Log-a-rhythm. No attack or calamity had roused him from slumber, a fact that surprised him. All was quiet. Chuckling at his own wariness, he opened the other eye and sat up.

His new bed was a cushion of exceedingly soft leaves. Circular, his room was just large enough to stretch out. The warm, smooth wood underfoot was a delight to his bare feet. The room was modest in size, but utterly isolated from the rest of Log-a-rhythm. Priam cherished his privacy.

Quickly, Priam donned the outfit prepared by Boss, all the while surveying the walls. They projected a panoramic view of the clearing and the river that ran alongside. Outside, the day was still high. The suns would remain visible for another five hours. Neither Priam, Kazuki, nor Log-a-rhythm understood the celestial mechanics of Elysium. Days currently lasted just over a dozen hours, and nights about fifteen.

Darkness was gaining ground. *A problem for the future me.*

Priam smiled as he spotted Sphinx slumbering atop Blueberry, who was also sleeping. Kazuki and Louis were training by the river, and Mirscella was nowhere to be seen. The thief must be honing her stealth.

Only his father remained, and Priam's eyes widened upon spotting Alain. He was currently chiseling rocks into blocks.

After grabbing a bowl of sap, Priam rejoined his father in the clearing.

"Hey, Papous!"

The focused old man delivered one more chisel strike before turning his smiling face towards his son.

"Hey there, champ! Sleep well?"

"Like a log. Some sap?"

"With pleasure. Lucky I'm fond of fruits and this sap," his father remarked.

Priam grimaced. "I know. I'm planning a foray soon to try and diversify our diet."

"That would be good," Alain confirmed as he rose.

Priam gestured to the stone blocks. "What are you up to?"

"I'm carving these stones into blocks for a new project," replied Alain, reaching for the bowl of sap extended by Priam.

"That's nice, but you know we can't build structures too conspicuous yet? If a monster happens to wander by, it'll find that suspicious..."

Alain finished his gulp before responding. "It's for your inner world. I know you've got a lot on your plate, so let me help."

"Oh? You've got me curious now."

His father had been an architect and an engineer. His expertise had allowed him to construct several houses with his own hands. Between Log-a-rhythm, monster attacks, quests, rivals, outings to find samples for his tree, and his training, Priam had barely a second to himself. Yet, it was foolish not to make the most of every advantage.

"Your world is growing according to **[Measure]**. Slowly, but it's growing. In Elysium, there are many dangers, but the density of aether and natural treasures make the adventure worth it. I thought using it as a secure base and a garden might be interesting."

The argument struck a chord. Priam already had Log-a-rhythm, but that base was static. With Concepts Archipelago, he'd have everything at his disposal.

"Concepts Archipelago is growing slowly..." The news pleased Priam. The more space he had, the more valuable the talent. "Indeed, it's a stroke of luck to have this Talent. But there's barely a meter of earth encircling a pond. I don't see where you plan to build a structure or cultivate a garden."

"You can open a portal, can't you? What's stopping you from filling your pocket space with earth?"

"The earth will fall to the bottom of the world."

"...Before accumulating and rising back to the level of the pond. As the world expands, you'll just have to periodically add more earth - or something else. I might even create underground bases to save space."

The idea greatly appealed to Priam. Instinctively, he had thought to use concepts to increase the size of the floating island. But rather than waiting for distant concepts, there were mundane solutions. Plus, it would give his father something to do. Alain detested idleness.

A smile spread across Priam's face.

"That's a fantastic idea! If you've already thought all this through, I suppose you want to create a building to live in?" he asked, motioning to the stone blocks.

Alain shook his head, tossing the empty bowl toward Log-a-rhythm. The container disappeared into the trunk, directly absorbed by the magical tree.

"No, I was thinking of wooden buildings for habitation. The stone is to expand your world."

"Concepts Archipelago feeds on aether, not stone," Priam remarked.

"I know, and I was thinking of siphoning Elysian aether by opening a semi-permanent portal to your inner world."

"Interesting, but I don't see how that relates to stone."

"It's to create an empty structure underground that could house the portal. I'll inscribe a first rune to fortify the structure - if a beast crosses the portal, it'll be trapped and won't be able to harm your world. A second rune will suck the aether from this pocket and disperse it into your world."

Priam's eyes lit up as he listened to his father. "If it works, the portal will be secure, and Concepts Archipelago will reuse the aether overflow to increase its size."

"And the surplus will increase the aether density in your world, essentially making it a mini and safe Elysium."

"It's pure genius!" exclaimed Priam. If his father was right, he could have a world within him. The advantages were obvious: trapping an enemy too tough to defeat, transporting his friends, pilfering resources, creating a garden, conducting experiments...

Alain burst into laughter. "You would've thought of it too if you'd had a moment to spare."

"Still, you're the one who came up with it," Priam smiled. "Nevertheless, how do you know these two runes?"

"How do you learn new skills?"

"With a teacher, a blueprint, or by... sacrificing your Potential?" Priam said hesitantly.

"Money is meant to be spent or to grow. The same goes for Potential. I'm not a warrior, but a builder. That's the kind of thing I enjoy, and it allows me to push the limits of my skills and learn new ones. If I push them far enough, I'll have a net gain of Potential," Alain grinned.

Priam opened his mouth before closing it. Everyone had their own path. Not everyone was cut out for monster bashing - which was a good thing. If his father had chosen a path that pleased him, who was he to stop him?

"What can I do to help, Dad?" he asked.

Alain pondered for a moment. "I'll need tools, nails,... basically metal. Cement too, for the joints. As for the runes... I'd need some thread to practice before inscribing them. I tried drawing in the earth, but imperfections create too much loss."

Priam turned to Kazuki. The hoplite was training. Priam was supposed to practice with the spear today, but nothing was stopping him from testing his new thrust in the field. It was the perfect time to see if the spiders would appreciate it.

"I'll get you some thread," Priam promised.

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

PHYSICAL:

Strength 330 (+10)

Constitution 477

Agility 309

Vitality 469

Perception 538

MENTAL:

Vivacity 294

Dexterity 365

Memory 99

Willpower 557

Charisma 414

META:

Meta-affinity 288

Meta-focus 213

Meta-endurance 165

Meta-perception 81

Meta-chance 213

Meta-authority 12

Potential: 992 (+7)

Tier 0

[He Who Eludes Death] charge: PRIMED.

[Tribulation]: Two Tribulations pending.

Future Tribulations delayed until:

Time: 178 days 19 hours 56 minutes 18 seconds.