

## Chapter 203: Priam is a Sure Bet!

"Ymir," greeted Priam as he entered the merchant's pavilion. "I trust that all is well?"

"Everything is well, Lord Priam," smiled the elf as he stepped forward, clad in a Roman toga that showcased impressive bulging muscles. It was clear the merchant knew how to handle himself. "I see you've brought someone along."

"Indeed. Ymir, meet Marquess Esmée, one of my rivals and a distinguished guest. Esmée, this is Ymir Saharn, a wandering merchant who's settled in Oasis."

"Pleasure, Merchant Ymir," said Esmée, nodding respectfully. "Hope our trade dealings will prove fruitful."

"Likewise, Marquess," replied Ymir, clasping his hands. "Looking forward to doing business with you." He then turned to Priam. "I reckon you're here for the Auctions?"

"Indeed."

"If you would be so kind as to follow me."

The merchant led them to the center of his tent, where an altar as black as obsidian rested. A holographic screen floated above, displaying many items.

"You can place your items on this altar and set a price," explained Ymir. "The item put up for Auction is then stored and will be transported by the Secret Network if purchased. Sun points will be directly added to your account; no need to come collect them. Buying works the same way."

"Excellent," replied Priam.

"What's the altar's level?" inquired Esmée.

Priam turned to Ymir, clueless about what she was referring to.

"Rank I," Ymir turned to Priam to explain. "Currently, I'm a Tier 0 Merchant of Rank I for the Sun Shop, which limits the number of items of different Tiers you can auction simultaneously."

"Nothing's free in this world, eh?" grumbled Priam. Esmée suppressed a smile. "How many items can you auction at once?"

"At Rank I, ten Tier 0 items or one Tier 1 item. Each subsequent rank multiplies this number by ten, while each Tier takes up ten times the space of the previous Tier," explained the merchant.

As Priam furrowed his brows, his add-on translated the merchant's words into a chart.

*[Merchant Rank T0 - Auction Details:*

*Rank I - 10 T0 items / 1 T1 item*

Rank II - 100 T0 items / 10 T1 items / 1 T2 item

Rank III - 1,000 T0 items / 100 T1 items / 10 T2 items / 1 T3 item

...]

"For a small community like Oasis, Rank II will do for now unless you want to sell high Tier items. This limit mainly impacts kingdoms and powerful factions that sell billions of items daily," commented Ymir.

"Or small factions selling mighty items," grimaced Priam.

"Not necessarily. If you were Tier 2, your Sun Shop would have connected you with a Tier 2 merchant, who could have auctioned ten Tier 2 items from Rank I. The equivalent of a thousand Tier 0 items."

Priam sighed. It made sense and wouldn't have affected him if he wasn't trying to sell an item out of his league. No Tier 0 was supposed to acquire a treasure as rare as the one he borrowed from Sumstreh. *Guess the System wants to discourage that kind of generosity...*

Glancing at Esmée, Priam decided not to inquire further. The princess didn't need to know he was in possession of a divine realm fulcrum's shard. *Which must be a Tier 5 item. So, I'll need at least Merchant IV to sell it, and Merchant V if I want to sell something else simultaneously.*

It was going to cost him a hefty one hundred eighty-five thousand Sun points. A sum he could afford thanks to his latest Achievement.

"I'll upgrade the altar's rank," declared Priam.

#### Sun Shop - Territory:

*Merchant II (10 000 points) - Summons a T0 Merchant... or increases Ymir Saharn's authority to Rank II. Requires Shop or Forum. **ACQUIRED***

*Merchant III (25 000 points) - Summons a T1 Merchant... or increases Ymir Saharn's authority to Rank III. Requires Shop or Forum. **ACQUIRED***

*Merchant IV (50 000 points) - Summons a T1 Merchant... or increases Ymir Saharn's authority to Rank IV. Requires Shop or Forum. **ACQUIRED***

*Merchant V (100 000 points) - Summons a T2 Merchant... or increases Ymir Saharn's authority to Rank V. Requires Shop or Forum. **ACQUIRED***

*Merchant VI (250 000 points) - Summons a T2 Merchant... or increases Ymir Saharn's authority to Rank VI. Requires Shop or Forum.*

*Sun points: 317,979 (-185,000)*

Ymir opened his mouth, glanced at Esmée, then closed it. The merchant nodded respectfully.

"One last thing: you can send a message to the seller if you want to buy an item instantly. Be careful not to use this functionality for remote communication, as the System will ban you from the Auctions."

"Understood," replied Priam.

"If you need me, I'll be close by," nodded the merchant before stepping away. Ymir wasn't dumb; he must have realized Priam had rare items or a large quantity to sell. In either case, the elf would earn a comfortable commission.

"I'm going to do some window shopping," joked Priam as he connected to the altar's terminal. He planned to wait for Esmée to leave before auctioning the fulcrum.

"Likewise."

A stream of data flooded Priam's mind before his system took control.

[Auctions:

- *Truth Serum (Rare/T0) - Territory: Klogash/Wanderings Islands - A serum concocted by Klogash clan alchemists from the venom of certain snakes. Capable of forcing a Tier 0 whose will hasn't crossed the first threshold to speak the truth for twenty-seven minutes. The subject then has a high chance of dying.  
Actual bid: 1 269 Sun points. Auction ends in 214 hours.*
- *Teleportation Scroll (Epic/T1) - Territory: Meenals/Death Trench - A scroll capable of teleporting a Tier 1 somewhere in the Death Trench from a nearby border.  
Note: with the Necro event, it's a creative way to commit suicide... Or to off your mother-in-law.  
Actual bid: 1 Sun point. Auction ends in 701 hours.*
- *Set of twin portals (Mythic/T0) - Territory: Pnothl/Sky Ring - Title says it all. Range: 100,000 kilometers. Capable of linking Elysium to a spatial pocket. Enchanted against spatial disturbances. Enchanted against temporal disturbances. (See complete list of enchantments).  
Actual bid: 7 699 652 Sun points. Auction ends in 60 000 hours.*
- *Legacy Core (Rare/T1) - Territory: Pnothl/Sky Ring - A core containing memories of a Tier 1 who survived 8 Tribulations at Tier 0 and 6 at Tier 1 and unlocked Mastery - Sword III. Note: Two ideal/mythic sword skills detected. If you're fated, they're yours.  
Actual bid: 2 412 683 Sun points. Auction ends in 1 573 hours.  
...]*

After a few minutes, Priam cursed Sumstreh. The Fallen had valued their fulcrum's shard at six million Sun Points. Either they had no idea of its true worth, or they had given Priam a tiny fragment of the fulcrum.

Priam hoped it was the latter possibility. That would give him one more reason to destroy the rabbit god.

*Now, let's see how much those puzzles cost. **[Aether Manipulation]**, here I come.*

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*Announcement to Humanity:*  
***Priam Azura unlocks a fifth Ideal Upgrade.***

Ignoring the notification, Maya deftly dodged, letting the opponent's blade pass within a hair's breadth of her skin. It was risky, but her combat instructor had insisted on prioritizing the economy of movement. "*Why take three steps when the thickness of a hair is enough?*" he had said. Maya had sensed wisdom in those words.

Her heart raced as the blade came back, and she evaded it once more. There was something terrifying and exhilarating about dancing so close to death. Micro could have prevented the adrenaline from coursing through her veins, but according to the Mercenaries, one shouldn't always suppress the body's reactions. The Supremacies lived up to their name: Micro was there to dominate. Rage and determination were the gates to enter the Zone.

Summoning an almost invisible thread with her Silk Concept, Maya let it wrap around her opponent's wrist. She stepped back, allowing the warrior to advance into her range.

Her adversary dodged all the nooses lying on the ground. Invisible to the naked eye, the amount of aether they contained made them visible to someone with over a hundred in meta perception.

In a roar, Kenzo brought down his blade.

*Carbon Concept. [Chain Mastery I].*

The second Concept altered the organization of atoms in Maya's silk, and Mastery further increased their resistance. The enemy katana cut through three threads before losing its momentum. The cable wrapped around the swordsman's wrist tightened, threatening to sever it.

With a graceful step, Maya slipped into her opponent's guard and passed a braided silk cord around his neck.

"Game Over," she smiled. With a mere thought, she could tighten the knot, decapitating her opponent. "Let's go clean up."

Kenzo's split lips stretched into a smile. "Gladly. I'm exhausted," the swordsman admitted, breathless. A bead of sweat rolled down his cheek at that moment. "My blade couldn't even cut through four threads."

Maya stretched before using her hands as fans. "It'll be easier once you've crossed the first Will threshold. Until then, Mastery is a taxing Supremacy."

Kenzo nodded as the silk threads in the training room vanished. Concepts could transform aether into matter but could also dissipate it. The conservation of mass and energy—Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed—was still true... At least locally. It lost its meaning on the universal scale due to the infinite quantity of aether.

"Did you read the notification?" asked Kenzo. "They'll summon us in a few minutes."

Maya sighed. "Our Champion continues to attract attention. It almost threw me off during the fight."

"We should go report. Our superiors will be interested."

Maya shrugged as she headed for the exit. "I guess—even though it's pointless. I'm sure one of our brethren has already sold them the info."

"I bet on Mercury."

"Cheater."

Kenzo grinned. "Anyway, I'm getting used to Priam's Achievements. Maybe I should try facing a Tier 2 as well?"

"You'd die," replied Maya as they exited the training room. The room, like the entire building, was reserved for human mercenaries. As a new civilization, they were entitled to two buildings: one for training, the other for accommodation. If their performance were deemed unsatisfactory, it would be taken away from them.

"Probably," laughed Kenzo. "Do you think Priam has a deal with a faction? All these Achievements are abnormal."

"I don't know," replied Maya as they walked down the wooded hallway. Before exiting, they passed a dojo and a gym. "But I doubt it. He seemed unwilling to sell his soul for a few pieces of information."

The two mercenaries arrived at a lush garden. The founder of the Mercenaries had always maintained a barrier between work and private life, and their guild had retained that mindset.

"Yet he continues to rise rather than falter," said Kenzo, stopping by a fountain to quench his thirst. "A lone guy can't climb that fast."

"The System is designed to snowball. An Achievement grants Potential, Tokens, and sometimes a Title or a personalized reward. Your attributes increase quickly, and your skills level up rapidly. By distancing yourself from the users' average, each of your actions becomes an exploit rewarded in turn. It's a virtuous circle from which our Champion benefits."

"Until the Tribulations."

"Until the Tribulations," confirmed Maya. The System encouraged geniuses by providing resources, opportunities, and rewards. But the final exam was brutal. How many Aces had died by going too fast too far? Sector Hope was young, but billions of shooting stars had already flamed out, leaving nothing but warnings in their wake.

"I hope he knows what he's doing," grumbled Kenzo as they entered humanity's second building. It housed the mercenaries' living space and lodgings—dormitories, apartments, and officers' quarters. "Humanity needs him. He's the only one who can prevent the factions from milking humanity like a cow."

"Him and Prometheus. The Spear and the Shield."

Heading towards their private quarters, the captain and her second crossed paths with a human team exiting the common room. A blond man, barely out of his teens, shouted when he saw them.

"Captain, did you see?! Priam did it again!"

"Yes, Luc, I saw. Judging by your joy, I suppose you won a bet?" asked Maya, amused.

"I sure did! I bet on three Legendary Achievements in less than a month at our guild's bookies," replied Luc before executing a little victory dance.

Kenzo whistled. "That must be a ton of cash."

"Millionaire before twenty," laughed Luc. "I could kiss the man. Betting on him is like playing the lottery, except I'm sure to win!"

One of his teammates rolled her eyes, and Maya understood it wasn't the first time Luc had said that.

"And what are you going to do with that money?" asked Kenzo. A million contribution points was a colossal sum—enough to ask the guild to power level him up to Tier 2. Nothing was guaranteed—the Tribulations made sure of that—but the required resources, knowledge, and experience were served on a silver platter.

"I'll bet it again on a Mythic Achievement, of course," smiled Luc. "If he wins, I'll be a billionaire."

Kenzo and Maya widened their eyes. "You're going to bet it all?!"

"The Var Elegis succeeded, didn't he? Our Priam can do it too!" exclaimed Luc before checking his ocular implant. "I have to hurry, or my odds will drop. Leader, Vice-leader," he greeted before running off towards the Mercenaries' Casino.

Watching their subordinate run off, Kenzo took on a thoughtful expression.

"Are you going to bet too?" asked Maya.

"Well... It's easy money, don't you think?"

Maya hesitated before sighing. "There hasn't been a Mythic Achievement for a Tier 0 in a century. This Arnold NetSky is a monster."

"But Priam is going to attempt it," replied Kenzo. "Tier 3... It's madness, but there are still five months until the next Reunion."

"... I'll bet half of my pay," said Maya. "If I lose, you and Luc are going to have a rough time."

"I'm not forcing you to... Is there a problem?" asked Kenzo as he saw Maya staring into space. Her expression was that of someone checking an ocular implant.

The captain of the human mercenaries sighed. "Colonel Wang Lin wants to see us. Let's quickly shower, we'll meet in the Hall of Glory in three minutes," ordered Maya as she entered her quarters.

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*Status:*

*PHYSICAL:*

*Strength 557*

*Constitution 860*

*Agility 552*

*Vitality 840*

*Perception 714*

*MENTAL:*

*Vivacity 505*

*Dexterity 587*

*Memory 426*

*Willpower 1 028*

*Charisma 631*

*META:*

*Meta-affinity 520*

*Meta-focus 350*

*Meta-endurance 354*

*Meta-perception 221*

*Meta-chance 230*

*Meta-authority 42*

*Potential: 9 969*

*Tier 0*

*Sun points: 317 979 (-184 877)*

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

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

***Future Tribulations delayed until:***

***Time: 164 days 18 hours 37 minutes 52 seconds.***

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