

Chapter 229: To breathe is to advance

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

Number of deaths: 23

*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:*

VIT +5

***[Pyro - Concept]** - Natural Affinity +5% (88%).*

[Assistant's Note

Incinerating the outer layer of the soul and the host's body using Pyro appears to enhance the affinity for the Concept without enlarging the Soul Space.

Upside: Acknowledgment of the Patron's warning regarding the High Tribulations.

Downside: No Domain development.]

*Lvl Up : **[Poison Body]** lvl 18, 19, 20, 21*

CONST +4

VIT +4

META (Endurance) +4

*Lvl Up : **[Asphyxia resistance]** lvl 14, ..., 22*

VIT +18

META (Endurance) +9

*Lvl Up: **[Revelation Resilience]** lvl 34, 35*

MEM +6

META (Affinity) +6

META (Authority) +6

*Lvl Up: **[Fire Champion Physique]** lvl 7*

VIT +3

CONST +3

META (Endurance) +3

Vitality exceeds 1 000 points. Second milestone reached. Congratulations!

Title won!

***[Breathless - Silver]** - Not content with just holding your breath, you have swapped out the oxygen in your blood for carbon monoxide. Is suffocation a death too slow for you?*

Your lungs are now capable of inhaling your aether.

Many diviners have been left breathless scrying you. Either you're that stunning, or your mist is invisible to them. You know the truth.

VIT +10%

META (Endurance) +10%

[Tribulation]: Five Tribulations pending.

Future Tribulations delayed until:

Time: 158 days 4 hours 3 minutes 37 seconds.

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

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Priam took a deep breath, then let out a sigh of contentment. Log-a-rhythm was airing out the room, and the refreshing forest air was a delight to his lungs. Even a Fire Champion wasn't obligated to appreciate the smell of smoke, especially when he was dying from it.

Once his lungs were filled with fresh air, Priam reread the last line of his Title.

"My misty pants are invisible to diviners?"

Depending on Priam's whims, his mist could be opaque or invisible to his enemies. Not being an exhibitionist, he had set the fog of his pants to impenetrable.

"It depends on the skill they are using and their Soul Tier. Visualizing certain concepts can be dangerous, and most diviners filter the information they receive. If you achieve Unity, they will have a harder time ignoring it."

With flushed cheeks, Priam realized that from the growth of **[Revelation Resilience]**, millions of strangers must have seen him naked.

"If that motivates you to put on fabric trousers, know that I share the vision of Concepts Archipelago's sun, and its rays penetrate your mist," the phoenix added, covering his eyes in mockery.

Priam furrowed his brow before shaking his head. "I enjoy the freedom of going commando. That doesn't mean I'm an exhibitionist—"

"Just a nudist."

"—and if voyeurs don't respect my privacy, that's their problem, not mine. Besides, you're in no position to talk; you're naked too."

"I am not naked; I am wearing flames!" exclaimed the bird, raising its wings to display its fiery feathers. "This shade of orange and these natural fire animations were a hit at the court during my last visit," it said, strutting like a peacock and displaying iridescent feathers that fan out into a magnificent fiery train.

Priam admired the mythical creature for a moment before furrowing his brow. "Wait a minute, those flames aren't natural?"

"They mimic fire very well, don't they?" boasted the phoenix.

"Yeah, but without them, you would look like a..." Priam let his sentence hang as he saw the phoenix's murderous glare. The young warrior shook his head to dispel the image of a majestic chicken his imagination had conjured.

"Let's get back to business. I suppose you've directly obtained **[Breathless - Silver]**?" the phoenix asked to break the awkward silence.

Priam cleared his throat before nodding. **[Bloodless]** had been a Bronze Title, and the young man had theorized that by going further than just suffocation—by replacing the oxygen in his blood with carbon monoxide—he would achieve a higher rarity. A successful bet.

"I got the Silver rarity and the attribute boost that comes with it. My vitality is catching up to my constitution quickly," he grimaced. "I just hope this second milestone will be interesting."

The phoenix shrugged. "Many people love it because it corrects some genetic errors and further slows down your aging. There is no short-term benefit unless you plan on taking a radiation bath."

"Don't raise flags," warned Priam. "I'm mostly afraid of triggering a sixth Tribulation by getting a powerful Title." That was why he wasn't rushing to unlock the last Torture. "Maybe I should upgrade my race again..."

"A Tier 3 race is the apex of what is achievable without modifying your aetheric code. Do you think you have the necessary knowledge to accomplish this feat?" From his tone, the phoenix didn't seem convinced.

"Not me," replied Priam. "But the brother of one of my rivals might help."

The hologram blinked before sighing. "Your many talents sometimes make me forget your shortcomings..." Priam gave him a puzzled look. "If you are not considered the primary contributor to the racial upgrade, you will not get the Primogenitor Title."

"Damn!"

"Better than dying, but I advise you to think it over," the phoenix concluded.

"Yeah, no," grunted Priam. "I'm not letting a mythical Title slip through my fingers."

He was ready to make sacrifices to ward off his Tribulations but not to sabotage his future. Plus, if Osiris became the Primogenitor of his race, he would gain power over him. The child didn't seem evil, but that was out of the question.

Disheartened, Priam opened his Merits.

[Trees of Merit](#)

[\[Tribulation Wyvern Heart - Gold\] - Tier 5: Locked. Requires a Legendary Title.](#)

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[Three-headed Hydra - Silver] - Tier 3: The poison in your blood now causes accelerated aging.

[Life is Hard; I'm harder - Gold] - Tier 0: Your resistances are even more effective.

[Mist Sage - Silver] - Tier 5: Locked. Requires a Legendary Title.

[Bloodless - Bronze] - Tier 1: Aether flows through your veins, elevating your body. LOCKED - Requires epic-grade temperance.

[Ace - Legendary] - Tier 2: Talented Candidate: Choose one of your Talents from the list and evolve it.

List: Aether Citizen, Promesse, Chimera, Spectral Familiarity.

Priam noticed immediately that the list of Talents that could be improved with the Ace Merit had changed. If previously he had the option to evolve Eidetic Memory, Ultimate Sensory Memory was not a possible choice. *Certainly because I'm far from possessing the necessary attributes to survive this evolution.*

It was interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it confirmed Priam's belief that the consequences of Merits couldn't be harmful. The System ensured the user's health when rewarding them.

Secondly, it meant that Priam might be missing out on some upgrades because he didn't meet the prerequisites. *A shame, but it was to be expected.*

"So, happy with the Merit?" asked the phoenix with surprising impatience.

Priam scrolled through his Merits to read the last one.

[Breathless - Silver] - Tier 0: First Breath, To meet the world: Your lungs are now capable of exhaling your aether.

9 Unused Merit Points.

"The Title along with its Merit will allow me to breathe my aether. The System is stingy with information... Can you tell me more?"

The phoenix nodded. "It is as basic as it is interesting: you can breathe your aether. In other words, if you find yourself unable to breathe oxygen, you can compensate by consuming your aether."

"So I can explore the depths of the sea or space without fear of suffocation," smiled Priam.

The phoenix raised a fiery eyebrow. "At Tier 0, your soul filters ambient aether very poorly, which implies mediocre regeneration. You will drain your aether reserve fast."

Priam activated the effect of the Title and felt his lungs itch. The unpleasant sensation disappeared the next moment, and a film of aether blocked the air from entering his trachea.

Focused on his body, he felt his aether circulating through his meridians, reaching both physical organs and the draconic organ to be transformed. The fluid changed affinity before being dispersed again in his arteries and meridians. His cells greedily absorbed this energy, and Priam felt his body ready to leap and run.

[Unknown energy detected. Analysis...]

Energy output higher than that provided by adenosine triphosphate (ATP). Optimization of chemical reactions in metabolism, locomotion, cell division, and active transport of chemical species across biological membranes.

Approximately 20% increase in physical attribute efficiency.]

"I feel like I'm in Olympic shape!" exclaimed Priam.

"It's no coincidence that most mythical races breathe ambient aether," the phoenix replied smugly.

The information was interesting, but Priam was preoccupied with his aether reserves.

*[Aether Reserve (META (Endurance) *1): 581/590]*

Forecast: Aether respiration consumes about 1 unit of aether/sec.]

"I have about ten minutes of autonomy," Priam grimaced. That was less than he thought.

"Ten?!" The phoenix seemed surprised before nodding. "Normally, a biological lung consumes ten units per second. Your draconic lung must synergize with the Title: you should buy the Merit."

Priam nodded. Even if the Merit didn't allow him to solidify his aether, the synergy with his draconic lung would improve his Breath. It was his ultimate attack, and it justified spending a precious Merit point.

[Breathless - Silver] - Tier 0: First Breath, To meet the world: Your lungs are now capable of exhaling your aether. ACQUIRED

[Breathless - Silver] - Tier 1: Second Breath, Second Wind: restores your body to its most exceptional form possible.

8 Unused Merit Points.

"Second Breath... A Merit Tree focusing on regeneration and resurrection?"

"Some say that the last Merit of **[Breathless]** allows perfect soul regeneration."

"It seems a bit disappointing," remarked Priam. "**[He Who Eludes Death]** or the synergy between Second Breath and **[Homo Elysian Obsession]** can emulate this power."

"Your racial Talent is powerful but Legendary; a mythical skill could create soul scars that wouldn't heal with Second Breath. As for **[He Who Eludes Death]**... I am not sure your

Talent restores your soul to its most exceptional form," the phoenix said after a brief hesitation.

"..."

The phoenix nodded. "It took me a while to notice because you're at the beginning of your lifespan, but it's more obvious now that your body and soul are linked. Your resurrections erase your beauty marks because your soul is virgin, but it doesn't touch the length of your hair."

"I'm aging," confirmed Priam. "I realized it after trading my lifespan several times for hydra regeneration. I feel deep down that my soul is growing older."

"I suppose that's not an oversight by your Patron?" the phoenix asked.

Priam just smiled. He had been entrusted with a mission, and his Patron had no desire to see him live an idle eternity.

"... Sorry for encouraging you to take a Merit that burns your lifespan."

Seeing the phoenix's flames dimming, Priam felt a pang in his heart. The hologram's sole purpose was to train him, and if its advice were bad, it felt worthless.

Priam brushed the excuse away with his hand. "You couldn't have known, and it doesn't matter. Letting my soul age is just a mechanism to prevent me from hiding in an isolated place while ignoring my promise. If my racial upgrades and vitality milestones could increase my lifespan, it's not forbidden."

The phoenix thought for a few seconds. "Then you must acquire **[Ageless]** and **[Senescence Resistance]**. That should allow you to abuse the **[Three-Headed Hydra]** Merit without getting wrinkles every time you activate it."

Priam nodded. "Those are medium-term goals. Right now, I need to solidify my aether, upgrade **[Aether Manipulation]**, and start my temperance."

Sitting cross-legged, Priam began to breathe slowly, focusing on his draconic lung. The organ was at the back of his throat and was not physical but spiritual.

Invoking **[Breathless]** and its Merit, Priam began to breathe. Taking a deep breath, he filled his lung with his own aether before exhaling slowly. The energy left his body through his nose and mouth and began to form a domain around him.

Drawing the fluid towards him, Priam breathed in again and refilled the spiritual organ. A few breaths later, the amount of aether in the draconic lung was such that the primordial mist naturally liquefied.

His soul must have considered that energy was no longer circulating in his body because his aether regeneration kicked in. After three minutes, Priam's lung contained more energy than his maximum reserves, and the space around him began to fill with his own aether.

Priam let his physical lungs breathe oxygen and focused on his aetheric breathing.

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Lvl Up: [Revelation Resilience] lvl 36, 37

MEM +6

META (Affinity) +6

META (Authority) +6

A sea of energy raged inside the training room. After hours of aether breathing, the atmosphere was saturated with Priam's aether. A part of his vivacity used this unique environment to train his aether proficiency. His progress was far from negligible, but Priam knew that the best was yet to come.

The second parallel thought focused on his draconic lung. Inside, a phenomenal amount of energy stirred. The notable difference from previous offensive Breaths was that the energy was pure—untainted by Concepts—and belonged entirely to Priam.

With closed eyes, the young man breathed calmly and deeply. Every drop of aether produced by his body was guided to his draconic lung. Some escaped into the room with each breath, but the majority remained trapped inside. Over time, the pressure increased, creating a compression greater than anything he was naturally capable of.

According to his add-on, the density of aether in his lung was fifty times higher than the most compact aether sphere he could create using his current aether proficiency.

The spiritual organ was under intense stress. Without the qualitative evolutions of meta endurance and **[Adaptive Golden Meridians]**, the lung would have exploded long ago. Despite this, the danger remained. Any mistake could trigger an explosion, blowing away Priam's life and a portion of Log-a-rhythm.

Taking a new breath, Priam inflated his lungs and smiled. He was nearing a limit. For the past few minutes, the liquid aether seemed to be solidifying.

The decisive moment came seven breaths later. The aether stored in his lung reached critical mass and froze, refusing to flow up his throat.

Priam took one last breath that triggered a chain reaction. Like a cloud of gas gathering under its own gravity to create a star, the fluid collapsed upon itself before compressing into a shimmering orb.

Feeling the tremendous power in the sphere, Priam burst into laughter.

"Solid aether in less than two days!"

New high upgrade available for [Aether Manipulation - Rare].

[High Aether Manipulation - Epic] - In your hands, aether changes shape and state. Rune weaver, core forger, and probe hunter, you break your chains, refusing mediocrity.

High upgrade potential. Potential Cost: 160

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Status:

PHYSICAL:

Strength 707

Constitution 1 105 (+9)

Agility 614

Vitality 1 040 (+108)

Perception 760

MENTAL:

Vivacity (D) 552

Dexterity 622

Memory 776 (+22)

Willpower 1 134

Charisma 661

META:

Meta-affinity 723 (+15)

Meta-focus 393

Meta-endurance 590 (+62)

Meta-perception 321

Meta-chance 274

Meta-authority 183 (+12)

Potential: 13 608 (+41)

Tier 0

Sun points: 680 926 (+608)

[He Who Eludes Death] charge: PRIMED

[Tribulation]: Five Tribulations pending.

Future Tribulations delayed until:

Time: 157 days 22 hours 17 minutes 51 seconds.

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