

Chapter 88: The Innocents always suffer

Priam had never had a clear choice to make between surviving and saving New Earth. Simply, his actions had gradually led him down the way of survival. A path he now had to follow. He briefly questioned himself. Was it selfish to put his own life and his family's before others? Perhaps. But Priam understood this was his personality. He was beginning to accept the consequences.

Should he be ashamed? He didn't think he was a monster. A monster would have no qualms about killing people. For Priam, the lives of the dome's inhabitants were valuable. Enough to postpone Claire's death. She would live to see the end of his Tribulations. Of course, she would certainly try to escape or manipulate her loved ones. Priam's instincts told him she was born a century too late to manipulate Mirscella.

It was also his instinct that made him turn his head. Through the window of a house, Priam saw a father fending off locusts with a quilt. Behind him, a small child trembled.

The window exploded, revealing the shape of a human. Passing in front of the father, Priam stepped in. His Domain deployed like a barrier between the locust and the family of two. Instinctively, Priam triggered **[Kinetic Control]**. The locusts froze in mid-air. His skill required contact, but Promesse and Domain could circumvent this rule. It was the power of a Supremacy.

Despite the seriousness of the situation, Priam burst out laughing. He'd won. He was faster than the locusts, and his Domain made him invincible. He would survive his Tribulations.

"I... Who are you?"

Hearing the father, Priam's laughter stopped. He would survive, but how many would die? His Tribulation had become the Tribulation of millions.

"My name is Priam. I'm some kind of superhero," he replied, winking at the child. He couldn't have been more than three years old. Priam turned to the father.

"You had the right reflex to keep them at bay with a quilt."

The father took his son in a hug and shook his head. "No, I've already made a mistake. At first, there was only one. It bit me," he pointed to his right index finger. Or rather, the phalanx that remained. Priam swallowed, thinking the man in front of him would certainly live the rest of his life with two phalanges missing.

"I managed to kill it with a shovel while it devoured my finger. Two more bugs appeared."

"They multiply by dying."

"Indeed. I then tried to bury them under cushions. Unfortunately, several more came down from the chimney flue. I took Thomas with me and... You've arrived," finished the father.

"Thank you, sir," added the child.

Priam offered a faint smile of reassurance. "You'll be fine, don't worry. Just give me a few seconds."

Clearing his throat, Priam connected to his Lord's powers.

"People of New Earth. The locusts raining down on the city are multiplying as they die. Stay in your homes, avoid all openings and wait for help. The insects will be gone in about twenty hours."

The aether drain was severe, and Priam stopped. Looking at the father and son duo, he waved his hand. "Come, I'll take you to safety."

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On the way to the Palace, Priam observed the houses. The System had done things right. Most could withstand the onslaught of a small number of insects.

He had noticed that locusts attacked first and foremost by biting. Moreover, they tended to stay in groups. Once a certain number was reached, the swarm devoured its environment. Not even stone was spared. Nevertheless, their size was a handicap. Only a large cloud of insects could consume a house, for example. Many inhabitants would escape by staying in their cellars.

The problem was that a deadly rain had preceded the locusts. The skylights had all been blown out, allowing the locusts to penetrate many homes. In addition, their numbers were increasing due to the hole in the dome barrier - which was closing very slowly.

Catching an insect frozen between his fingers, Priam identified it again.

[Identification]

[Blade Hydra Locust - Tribulation touched] - A Tribulation-touched insect. Has the annoying property of creating two clones after death. Each death makes its clones more powerful than the original.

[Tribulation Hunter - Unique - Epic] - A locust possessing a concept fragment - Vengeance.

Each death strengthens the fragment, multiplying and resurrecting the insect. Its burning vengeance is mighty, but its destruction spares no one. The user of this concept exposes himself to a tragic death.

Time remaining: 20h 47 min 19 seconds.

Priam sighed and buried his hopes. He had entertained the idea of absorbing the power of the locusts into his second heart. Of course, a clone would have been too dangerous, but with potential, he thought he could modify this power.

Unfortunately, the vengeance concept seemed incompatible with [He Who Eludes Death]. If the two Talents synergized... He would have been invincible. His instincts told him this was not the case.

Affected by his misty Domain, Priam felt the vengeance concept trembling inside the bug. Closing his fingers like pincers, he exploded the exoskeleton. A second passed with no sign of resurrection. Priam smiled. The power of a concept was not absolute. *It can be fought with another concept. Supremacies could also be used against them.* At least, that was his budding theory.

Priam was now in a position to slaughter the locusts. Unfortunately, his Domain was a one-meter radius sphere, and there were tens of thousands of insects in the dome.

Hearing a shout, Priam sped up momentarily before turning to the father and son.

"Daniel, take your son and go into a house."

Nodding, the father lifted the child and quickly locked himself in the nearest house. The next moment, Priam was riding his mist.

Reappearing at the end of an alley, he watched a teenage girl run. Behind her, three locusts were in pursuit.

Priam leaped forward, clutching his spear. The cobblestones exploded under his acceleration, and he quickly caught up with the girl. The tip of Promesse skewered the three insects. Turning to the teenager, he ran a few meters to catch up. Grabbing her lightly by the arm, he forced her to turn around.

"You're safe now. Foll..." Mouth still open, Priam paused. The young woman must have been fifteen, and her features distorted by fear made her look even younger. Priam noted the presence of braces and freckles. Going further up, his heart sank. She was missing her left eye and part of her nose. *It's my fault.*

"Save Mommy, please!" she implored.

The call for help woke him up. His thoughts raced again, and Priam frowned. His mist covered the entire neighborhood, and no one was outside.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"I... House," she stammered, terrified as she pointed behind Priam.

Priam nodded. "Show me."

The teenager hesitated for a moment, tetanized. Perhaps her love for her mother helped, for she began to run in the direction from which she had come. A few seconds later, they stopped in front of a large red brick house. The sky-blue front door was ajar, and his mist was slowly penetrating the home.

Priam pushed open the door, beckoning the girl to accompany him. Thousands of locusts were flying in the sky, and one could have finished the job. He closed the door behind him and looked around.

Nothing moved. Priam's hearing was unaffected, and his sense of smell... A blood smell permeated the room. The source was on the second floor.

"Wait for me here," Priam asked softly.

Climbing the stairs quickly, Priam's heart sank. The staircase creaked at the fifth step, and a sound echoed back. Someone had heard it. *Or something.*

A small corridor awaited at the top of the stairs. On either side of it, two closed white doors concealed rooms. Priam's heart raced. He knew he had nothing to fear for his life but didn't know what he'd find here.

Priam stopped in front, observing the floor. Near him, the carpet had mopped a red liquid in front of the left door. The metallic smell was strong enough to be smelled by a normal human. Priam analyzed the scent. *Human blood.*

Lvl Up: [Sense of smell] lvl 10
DEXT +1

Priam placed his hand on the handle and turned. The door slowly began to open inwards. Barely ajar, Priam felt resistance; something was blocking the door. With a flick of his shoulder, he half-opened the door.

The room was blood-red. The scarlet color stood out against the yellow of the tapestry. The furniture was overturned, and the bed unmade. A dozen giant locusts were strewn about the room.

Priam stepped forward to see the rest. One of the windows was broken and had certainly allowed the creatures in. Priam closed the door behind him as the locusts stared silently at him. None were attacking, and the Earl understood why as he lowered his eyes.

The object that had blocked the door was a half-eaten torso. Only a barely recognizable leg was still attached. The skull had rolled away when he opened the door. Observing the body's position for a moment, Priam reconstructed the events. The teenager's mother had sat behind the door and stretched her legs towards a dresser, blocking the opening. The action had certainly enabled her daughter to escape.

The sated locusts now looked at Priam, as if hesitant. The Tribulation and their concept demanded vengeance, but they'd overeaten and couldn't fly easily. Their bloated bodies disgusted Priam. His knuckles turned white as he gripped Promesse. The next second, he attacked.

The insects exploded under the violence of the blows. The fight lasted only a second, and Priam wanted to scream with rage. These kinds of mobs represented no difficulty for him anymore. His wrath demanded an outlet, but no serious opponent presented itself.

In the distance, more cries were heard, and Priam turned to the corpse.

"Sorry... Your daughter will be fine, I promise."

Quickly opening the door, he stormed downstairs. The teenager hadn't moved, and was staring at him imploringly. Priam opened his mouth and hesitated. The girl burst into tears.

"I'm sorry... we have to go."

Nodding weakly, she followed him outside. On the doorstep, Priam looked up. His perception warned him when he was being watched.

There was an observer in the house opposite him. He had hurriedly backed away when he saw Priam look up, but the young man had spotted him. Priam's instincts kicked in.

"Do you know the man who lives here?" he asked.

The teenager nodded. "He's weird and scares me. He wanted to accommodate me and my mother, but she refused. She told me to stay away from him."

"Mmh..." Priam narrowed his eyes. The broken window was directly opposite the man's window.

"Wait for me a moment." Wrapping the girl in mist to protect her, Priam opened the peeper's door. He draped himself in mist and teleported in front of the man.

His instincts kicked in again. Without a word, Priam raised Promise.

"I... I... No, please!" cried the stranger. Priam stroked before teleporting back into the street. Anne had proved to him that one couldn't remain insensitive in the face of crime. If blood was to be shed today, it might as well be the blood of a murderer.

"Let's go." Priam guided the teenager to the house housing Daniel and his son. Knocking on the door, it opened instantly. Without a word, the four of them headed for the Palace.

A nearby howl rang out, and Priam gritted his teeth. He turned to Daniel, and the man took his son and the teenager by the hand, leading them to a nearby house.

Priam rode the mist.

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Guandi's day had started well. He had become one of humanity's first Viscounts and had witnessed an incredible Tribulation.

It was what followed that had gone wrong. His King had failed to obtain the Achievement and the Earl's Title. The thief had then unleashed his Tribulations, forcing their army to flee. Ordered by the Divine King Prometheus, he had then pursued the Champion to New Earth. Running for over a hundred kilometers in hoplite armor was great for his skills, but not for his mood. Especially when his heavy armor had lost its energy unit.

Once there, he realized that the difference in power between his squad and the target was... terrifying. Demoralized, he then noticed locusts descending from a hole in the dome barrier. The voracious insects must have realized the futility of their hunt, for most of them had abandoned the Champion for the inhabitants of New Earth.

Guandi had no intention of letting civilians die before his very eyes. So, for the past thirty minutes, he and his men had been defending groups of terrified innocents, bringing them to the Colosseum.

It was the start of their third round trip, and one of his men pointed south. Nodding, Guandi waved goodbye. The squad accelerated rapidly, dodging several groups of locusts.

A few hundred meters further, a covered market had been built in the center of a square.

"I hear noises inside. Screams," whispered Alban. The scout had excellent perception and was a valuable asset to their group.

"Let's go."

An insect approached Guandi as he slowed down. **[Mastery - Greatsword]**. The two halves of the locust fell, and Guandi's sabaton - an armor piece covering the foot - crushed it to the ground.

The Vicomte turned to the building's heavy door. On rails, the metal leaf could have withstood bullets. Placing a hand on the handle, he pulled without success. *Locked from the inside*. Raising his voice at the risk of attracting locusts, he shouted. "Open the door. We'll escort you to safety."

No response. "The screams have stopped. But... It sounds like they're muffled," Alban said, frowning. Not all monsters were insects. In a crisis, humans were capable of the worst and the best.

Guandi turned towards the gate and drew his weapon as he stepped back. Micro helped him optimize his strength and movement, allowing the heavy sword to shatter the metal panel. Advancing rapidly, the warrior observed his surroundings.

The indoor market covered some two thousand square meters. In one corner, a dozen people were crammed together. Among them were three children. One of the men was on the ground, subdued by a colossus resting on top of him.

With his hands behind his back and his mouth gagged, the prisoner looked at Guandi, his eyes imploring. The Viscount put on a neutral face, while his unit explored and secured the perimeter.

"What's going on here?" His authoritative voice made everyone tremble.

The colossus turned to a man in his forties. He stepped forward.

"My name is Rayan, and I'm a merchant for the Dawn Federation," he introduced himself.

Guandi had never heard of this federation, but that was hardly surprising. Millions of factions had invested in humanity. Prometheus' general remained silent. He was the one asking the questions, not the other way around.

His silence prompted the merchant to continue.

"We've been here since this morning. When the rain came, we stayed in this building because it's quite resistant. Unfortunately, the drops destroyed the ceiling glass," he explained, pointing to the skylights.

Guandi turned to look again at the covered room. Out of the corner of his eye, he analyzed the merchant's behavior. *He's nervous*. The man didn't have a clear conscience.

Reviewing the room once again, Guandi noticed a few disturbing details. Beneath the central shaft of light was a butcher's stall. Meat quarters still hung behind it, and the work surface was stained with blood. The metallic smell was strong. Too strong.

Guandi squinted. There was far too much blood. A bad feeling rose inside him, and he turned back to the trembling men and women before him.

"What were you planning to do with this man? And release him," he ordered, pointing to the prisoner who had been subdued.

The colossus hesitated, and Guandi dropped the tip of his sword to the floor. Under its own weight, the hoplite blade sank three centimeters into the paving. Swallowing, the giant slowly rose to his feet.

The man on the ground got up quickly and ran towards his savior. Pointing at the merchant, he shouted.

"They wanted to sacrifice me!"

"He agreed!" replied the merchant. "We all agreed. The bugs come back every ten minutes. We simply decided to draw lots to see who would die next. Otherwise, we'd all be half-eaten!"

Guandi sighed. The roar of insects was getting closer. Moments later, some fifty insects descended from the shaft of light.

"[Mastery- Greatsword], [Storm]."

In one swift movement, Guandi gathered the air in front of his blade. The result was a mini-tornado hurtling toward the locusts. The attack reduced the insects to lint before striking the ceiling. The metal girders fell to the floor, sliced to shreds. With an end-of-the-world crash, half the roof collapsed.

Guandi turned back to the stunned group. "I feel less and less like taking you back to safety," he declared. Even without training, a score of individuals could have dominated the insects.

"You could have locked them in ovens or covered them with sheets and tarps. It is a market, after all. Instead, you sacrificed individuals..."

"We're not fighters," pleaded the merchant. "Three weeks ago, I was selling household appliances. We did our best to protect the children."

Guandi looked at the young children in silence for a moment.

"We've wasted enough time. Follow me," he sighed. The group before him wasn't perfect, but they'd done their best to protect the youth. Everyone was doing their part, and he would do his.

Humanity would survive.

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

PHYSICAL:

Strength 173

Constitution 343

Agility 210

Vitality 339

Perception 414

MENTAL:

Vivacity 189

Dexterity 270 (+1)

Memory 50

Willpower 380

Charisma 199

META:

Meta-affinity 216

Meta-focus 143

Meta-endurance 110

Meta-perception 71

Meta-chance 150

Potential: 1195 (+1)

Tier 0

[He Who Eludes Death] charge: OFF. Reloaded in 19 hours 56 minutes 37 seconds

[Tribulation]: A Tribulation is coming.

Time: ???

Delayed.

