

Hunter 115

Chapter 115: Records

“Hey Guide, what now? Is there really no way to leave here?” Jake asked the vaguely human-like creature that the system had conjured.

“You have been offered four invitations from gods who are willing to receive you. If you accept, you will be able to go to them for the remaining time.”

“That was an option? And what gods?” he asked. He knew one of them, but he was interested in the three others.

“First, the main contributor to the tutorial you have just finished, Karroch. He has offered you to come to his realm and the potential to receive his blessing and guidance.

“Secondly, the god Umbra. She has offered you the opportunity to join her court and receive training to better use your high affinity for dark mana and the guarantee of a blessing and high position in the court if you perform well and wish for them.

“Third is the god Gwyndyr. He has offered his blessing and the possibility to acquire his legacy, which revolves around archery and the concept of fire. He has also guaranteed his blessing as well as training and guidance.

“Fourth is the one known as the Malefic Viper. He has offered you a ‘cool-ass, time-warped training session in alchemy’ as well as a bottle of vodka. Do note that all offers are binding for the gods.”

“Well, can’t say no to that last one,” Jake smiled. He was still quite interested in the other three gods as he had only heard the name Umbra before from his bracers and, of course, his Shadow Vault of Umbra skill.

Sure, they would offer stuff, but he could only have one blessing, so he wasn’t really interested. He also didn’t really feel like meeting a bunch of people he didn’t know... Jake remembered going to parties where he didn’t know anyone but one or two, and that seriously sucked... yeah, fuck that.

“I accept the invitation from the Malefic Viper. How do I go there?”

A few seconds passed with nothing happening, until suddenly a doorway appeared, leading into a room Jake had seen that time he accidentally sent a part of his soul to the Viper. Well, that was easy enough.

Looking at the Guide, he still wondered what the hell it actually was. If it was indeed a personification of the system or perhaps something else. Maybe he would never really know.

“Been a trip. See ya around.”

“If your path takes you.”

The Guide's voice, appearance, and demeanor were all the same as the first time Jake had appeared in this realm more than two months ago. It hadn’t changed. Jake was the one who had changed.

No longer was he in formal wear, wearing his shined black shoes and hair combed back. Now his hair had grown out to cover his ears and was unkept. His shiny shoes changed out for old worn boots, and the rest of his outfit a collection of fur and leather, all covered by a cloak and even a mask covering his face. The only thing similar was the color scheme, as he also wore quite a lot of black before.

But his looks weren't the only thing that changed. Jake had experienced a lot over the brief period, and he had learned a lot about himself. He had, of course, gotten significantly stronger and developed his skills in combat.

He had often been close to death, his encounter with the King of the Forest likely being the most immediate. It was his biggest crisis, but at the same time also his most significant achievement. The day he killed the Den Mother, he set the goal of killing the King of the Forest for himself.

That goal he had now met. When he heard the 'congratulation' for passing the tutorial, it truly seeped in. He had succeeded. He won. It was a lofty goal, to begin with, and yet he had managed to sneak out a narrow victory at the end.

Most other humans who had experienced the tutorial likely saw it as the worst thing they had ever experienced. For Jake, it also hadn't been a cakewalk. He had lost nearly all his colleagues, suffered emotionally and physically, and was in a constant rush to fight and grow stronger. And yet...

It was fun.

Jake had genuinely enjoyed his time in the tutorial. The constant tension and danger, the always looming knowledge that there was more to see and more to experience. And naturally, there was the challenge... Jake loved a good challenge. No challenge was more exciting than one with your life on the line.

Now it was time to move forward. Jake stepped through the door with a satisfied smile hanging on his lips, already looking forward to whatever comes next.

“Your senses are adequate, but your movements too stiff. Don’t think. React,” the Grand Master said as he admonished the black and blue Bertram sitting on the floor. He had just gotten done getting another beating.

How long had it been so far? Two weeks maybe? Bertram wasn’t sure. He still had a hard time comprehending the concept of how time could somehow move slower in this chamber than just outside the door.

The Grand Master explained that it was through a formation put down by an A-rank High Inquisitor, but that was about it. The rest of the time had been spent training. Learning how to fight with his sword and shield properly.

Bertram had already learned to fight and thought himself competent with both a knife as well as a gun. But he had to admit that he hadn’t rigorously ever practiced swords, much less shields, before the tutorial.

On top of that, the man in front of him was just on an entirely different level. Every one of his movements was exquisite, every step calculated to the smallest detail. Despite him lowering his stats to the same level as Bertram himself, the bodyguard hadn’t managed to touch his clothes, much less land a blow.

He was still unsure how powerful the man was, but he couldn't be some lowly soldier having achieved the title of Grand Master. He was the leader of an order of Templars directly below one of the subordinate gods in the Holy Pantheon.

Bertram had asked if the man couldn't simply follow them back to earth, something he had gotten a solid negative answer to. The system didn't allow other universes to interfere in newly initiated universes. When Bertram asked to enquire further, he was told to pick up his sword and stop thinking about things above his station.

He was a bodyguard, after all. Or perhaps guardian would be more accurate now. That responsibility was the only constant in his life. A constant he would hold unto no matter what happened. He would follow the young master no matter what he decided to do. Be he a devil or a saint; it was not for him to judge. He was just his silent guardian. Well, mostly silent guardian.

Just outside the chamber and down the hall was his young master studying a large tome. Jacob had spent the majority of his time waiting for his return to Earth reading. His class had many benefits, one of them being his requirements to level.

Unlike nearly all others, he would get nothing from killing. Instead, the mere act of acquiring information on his faith, as well as just expanding his knowledge, helped. He had already read that other classes could level without fighting, but most still revolved around it.

To him, it was very different... for him to be involved in taking lives would be penalized. It would hurt his future potential as an Augur, and if he went astray, it could end badly. Jacob was also strictly aware of exactly how heavy these penalties would be: if he ever killed a single enlightened being, he would lose his class and many of his skills.

A warrior could level not just by slaying enemies but also by practicing with his sword and improving his skills. Needless to say, however, it was much slower. Slower, but infinitely safer. However, it wasn't a sustainable way of improving your strength with a combat-focused skill.

At some point, you would stagnate. You would be unable to level up further. Even going out slaying beasts at that point wouldn't necessarily grant a level. Jacob had come to learn that despite his and most likely most others' assumptions, that the system wasn't as much like a videogame as he sometimes assumed.

The largest difference was, without a doubt, the entire concept of Records. Jacob knew it was his translation of it, and it held many names, but all boiled down to the same thing in the end. Like the Akashic Records that the translation was based on, it was a collection of everything. Of all that has ever happened, and in some ways also all that would happen.

A warrior going out fighting would write upon these Records. Every single thing in the system carries within them a collection of their own Records - their own accomplishments, failures, and successes. Each person had their own story, and the Records describing their own path.

This is where the impact on leveling comes in. One needs to have sufficient Records to be able to level up. One could liken one's Records to being a pond, with experience points being the water filling it up. Records would expand the pond, but not just any Records. They had to be noticeable.

Fighting beasts weaker than yourself, training to level, or being taught by others would grant experience to fill the pond but wouldn't help expand the pond at all. One would fill it out at some point, and something drastic would be required to develop it.

Simultaneously, if one repeatedly risked their own life and fought beasts at the same level or stronger, one would expand their pond at the same pace or faster as the experience was earned. One would be able to keep leveling like that, but of course, it also came with a constant risk to your life.

In the same vein, crafters had to push themselves too. The non-combat professions and classes had to go beyond their comfort zones and strive to improve themselves. Craft items of higher rarity or greater difficulty, maybe even craft different things. Use more expensive materials and never stagnate.

Yet this method wasn't foolproof. One other major obstacle for leveling was one all faced - rank upgrades or evolutions as they were also called.

Ranking up from E to D tier or D to C tier wasn't simply expanding the pond. It was a renovation - one that required far more Records than just the ones needed to be able to keep leveling normally. Rank upgrades would more often than not mean a bottleneck. One most would never overcome - all of this, not even mentioning that sometimes just sufficient Records wasn't the only requirement for ranking up.

But how does one earn enough Records then? Jacob found several surefire methods recorded. The largest of them being titles. As a newly initiated human, Jacob had assumed the most substantial reward from titles was the actual title and their associated bonuses. But many, especially those of higher rank, would disagree. The most considerable reward from a title was the associated Records.

A title was clear proof of achievement. This isn't to say that all titles are hard to earn, but all of them indisputably add Records of quality. The easy titles that could be achieved even with little effort were often gained through standard leveling, making them just another part of normal progression.

Records also aren't only what limits when you can level and rank up, but also what you can gain from it. The skills, classes, professions, races, etc., available. All of it was coming together to give you options. Options being the keyword.

Despite the system seemingly being limited through Records, it still emphasized options. And the more powerful one becomes, the more Records of quality one has, the more options. Better options. Often there was a snowball effect to having strong Records early and getting a great class and/or profession at E-rank or even race for monsters.

That isn't to say that getting a worse class or profession would be the end, though. The stronger your base, the more is required of you to move forward. Complacency would still mean the end of your path, while one who started out weak can become strong through perseverance. Sometimes slow and steady wins the race.

The book did, however, say that the destiny of everyone wasn't to fight. Sometimes one had to accept one's situation and instead of pushing themselves to improve, try and help those around you. That sometimes, you reach the end of your path, and you have to realize that and effectively give up.

There was also the entire thing called concepts. Concepts, nomological laws, dao, laws of nature, the essence of the world. It all had many names, but ultimately it boiled down to comprehending the incomprehensible. To understand that which cannot be truly understood.

Many powerful skills found themselves rooted in concepts. Jacob knew that his own skills did so too. His divination being firmly rooted in the concept of divination itself. And if he managed to understand that concept better, so would his skill improve. Like a swordsman enhancing his skills with a sword, albeit countless times more complicated.

Reading, it quickly became clear, however, that concepts were something that often would come naturally. Something more easily accessed and understood as stats increased and ranks increased. Concepts could easily be explained with them being the "why" something is.

Some focused on learning these concepts and gain power that way, but it wasn't strictly necessary. It was just one path of many.

They also were closely tied to affinities and mana as a whole. But to understand that tie-in and relationship was a concept in itself. Honestly, it all felt more complicated than Jacob had the brainpower to really get into.

To sum it all up, Records was the collection of who you are and the potential you possess - an impossible thing to truly quantify, affected by countless factors. Titles, achievements, concepts, affinities, bloodlines, innate talent, destiny, karma, personality, actions, thoughts, history, desires, emotions, comprehension, and countless other things incapsulated the sum of your Records. And those Records would be what determines your path of progression going forward.

Jacob himself was a great example of how weird to understand Records were. He had gotten the class Augur of Hope. A special class that was both rare and powerful in so many ways. Yet Jacob had no idea how he had gotten it. He just had. Maybe he had just been lucky, or perhaps the system knew things Jacob himself didn't yet – another concept that often occurred.

Just based on that class, he could go far. The Grand Master had said that he shouldn't experience any bottlenecks for quite a while as long as he kept true to himself and his own path. Whatever that means.

He knew that the new initiates were in a bit of a different situation than most. The 'history' upon their Records was short. There was barely anything to them, which meant that forming them and everything written upon the Records would matter far more in the early days.

This was why so many could more easily get rare classes and professions. The requirements were lower as you didn't have as much baggage to drag along. It would smooth out relatively soon, but it did mean

that the new initiates had some inherent advantages if they pushed themselves here, to begin with. For now, at least.

Through his research, he had also learned a lot about the nature of gods. More accurately, why they seemed to be so involved in the tutorial and why they gave out blessings and such, unsurprisingly, it all had to do with Records.

To improve one's Records was something every single entity in the multiverse wanted, from the lowest of F-grades to the most powerful of gods. But for a god to do so was problematic. Often, they had to either do so by achieving something new or through their believers. Or through the last big way to get Records. Events.

And no event was more significant than the initiation of a new universe. Through that, gods could gain new believers, of course, but they could also help shape the new universe and the new people in it. Doing so would help their Records immensely. There were even some more tangible rewards set by the system, such as titles or opportunities. Rewards, all based on how well individuals perform in so-called 'sponsored' tutorials.

Jacob had been unable to read further into it from there. Likely due to the gods censoring the knowledge, or perhaps just distorting it. However, what he did learn was the importance of blessings for both the god and the ones receiving them.

A blessed individual would contribute Records to the god that has blessed them based on everything they do. Simultaneously, the blessed one is granted quality Records through the blessing, effectively making them stronger and raising their potential. It was a win-win in many ways. However, Jacob had suspicions that it wasn't all that flowery as the books made it out to be.

He knew that what he read was all written by the Holy Church. A lot of it was likely easily provable and obvious to those that lived in the system, but many details weren't. It was the knowledge he guessed was only privy to the gods or those of higher ranks. Or perhaps for you to discover yourself.

Of course, it was also a possibility that even the mightiest of gods didn't truly understand the system either.