

## Hunter 13

### Chapter 13: Nicholas (1)

How troublesome, he thought as he pursued the archer on Richard's orders.

Nicholas, an archer himself, was silently running through the forest with six of his companions. Four archers and three light warriors made up the hunting party. In his opinion, it was total overkill to send seven men for a single archer from some corporate office.

Seriously, what the fuck was up with that guy? Spewing off some cliché bullshit to look like a badass. He had to hold himself back from cringing during the entire thing and barely managed not just to shoot him in the back as he walked off.

Sadly, Richard didn't want to spoil the relationship with their new healer. While the guy did do some weird stuff, it was nothing to make Nicholas wary of him. It was totally unnecessary to send so many, but Richard was nothing if not thorough.

Ultimately, he did, of course, understand why Richard sent people after him. Either he was for real, and a serious threat, or he was a lunatic, in which case he would be a chaotic threat. In both cases, the issue was best nipped in the bud.

Nicholas himself had been one of the people who entered the tutorial with Richard, and he worked for the man before the initiation. Richard ran a private security firm and had employees contracted in several offices in their city of operation. Nicolas was just another faceless employee, but his track record had earned him some amount of trust, which had netted him the right-hand man's position in this tutorial.

Finding a healer was fortunate. Having none was quite honestly hell, especially for the warriors who often got minor injuries, being forced to be in melee and all that. They had a healer when they first got here, but he got impaled by a huge stag in one of their first fights. This left them with only a limited amount of healing potions, made worse by having to waste them on what a healer could fix in minutes for just a bit of mana.

Even luckier was that the healer was a part of a team of laymen who were clearly inexperienced when it came to battle. And yet he had been asked by his boss to pursue some archer with a big mouth who decided to play cool. He did not buy the guys bullshit at all.

He personally wanted to just bet on the guy getting himself killed, but Richard was not the kind of man you rejected. He was their leader, with pretty much everyone just calling him 'boss'. Earned not through nepotism or posturing, but sheer competence.

Nicholas didn't question his decision, but it did suck a bit that they had to take in a group of weaklings. He doubted a single one of them was even level 5. At least the healer chick looked nice, and the red-haired caster was quite good too. The one he found the most annoying was that crippled middle-aged woman - the very definition of a burden in his opinion.

I am sure Richard will find some way to fix it,

he thought. How would they be to blame if the newbies had unfortunate accidents during combat? As long as they could get the healer on their side, all was fair game.

They had been running for a while and finally reached the area where Mr. Bigmouth had entered the forest, as they all entered stealth. They had a rule that every archer and light-warrior had to pick stealth at level 5, as Richard wanted a strong scouting-force, and as this situation proved, assassination-team.

They snuck through the underbrush as they scouted ahead. The guy had not exactly been sneaky, leaving clear footsteps in the underbrush. While none of them had a tracking skill, it did not mean that tracking was impossible. You just had to do it the old-fashioned way.

As they followed the footsteps, they suddenly seemed to stop in the middle of a small clearing.

Before any of them could react, he heard something pierce through the wind, followed by a thud. The light warrior at his side, falling over with an arrow stuck in the back of his head, dead as dead can be.

WHAT THE FUCK, was his immediate internal reaction as he acted.

“TAKE COVER!” he yelled as he ran for the trees, quickly hiding behind one. Peeking back into the clearing, he saw two corpses, one of the archers now also dead, shot during their retreat. What the fuck is going on!?

He activated Archer’s Eye and started looking up at the trees. He had a feeling their attacker was up in one of those, and it didn’t take long before he spotted the enemy. It was another archer based on the fact that another arrow flew out from a tree crown.

Nicholas nocked an arrow and went out from behind the tree, firing where the arrow had come from. He got no feedback from his shot as he quickly backed behind the tree once more. He peeked around it once more, his high perception and skill both working on overdrive.

Before he found anything, he heard another scream sound out. He charged over to where the scream came from, dashing between trees. Arriving at the location, he saw a wounded archer with an arrow in

his chest, and luckily, he was still alive. Nicholas quickly ripped the arrow out and took out his last health potion, making the man drink it.

The wound visibly healed, and the now healing archer opened his mouth: "I got a shot in," he barely managed to say, still heaving for breath as his lungs healed. "In the stomach, I think."

The man fell, still out of breath, while the potion did its magic. Nicholas left the man to lick his wounds as he heard more yelling from his comrades all around him.

Jake was still smiling to himself as he examined the arrow in his stomach. He considered ripping it out and drinking a healing potion, but looking at his health, it had only gone down a measly 50 points. Not even one-sixth of his total health after his new title. Ripping it out would only make it bleed more, making him lose more health, and quite frankly, it barely affected him. It hurt like hell, but it was more than manageable.

His initial ambush had gone well, killing two of them right off the bat. He also felt the sensation of level-ups, but he decided to ignore the system messages for now. It wasn't the time to get distracted.

However, the third target he had gone for had been prepared and had been outside his sphere when they spotted each other, resulting in them both landing an arrow on the other. Jake narrowly missed the man's heart, but still landed a fatal blow. If the man did not have any healing potions, he would bleed out in minutes. Or drown in his own blood as it filled up his lungs. Jake wasn't a doctor, but he was pretty sure it would be one or the other.

From the bush he was now hiding in, he focused on his sphere as he moved out, sneaking in between trees. He saw a lone light warrior hidden behind a tree in his sphere, the tree itself posing no obstacle to his perception ability. His initial plan had worked out perfectly, baiting all of them into the middle of a small clearing, and then attack, making them split to all sides. Divide and conquer and all that.

Jake threw a small rock to the left of the warrior as he approached from the right. The man turned instantly towards the sound, and Jake promptly charged forth, sliding up behind him, putting his left hand across the man's mouth, and using his right to slit his throat. The man managed to yank his dagger behind in an awkward last-ditch effort, hitting Jake in his left shoulder.

The man went limp with Jake holding him until he got the notification. When it came, he let the corpse go as he looked at the knife wound on his left shoulder. It hurt, but it barely did any damage, and he could still easily use it.

Three, maybe four down. At least three to go, including the archer leading them

He had seen the archer in charge of their little assassination-troop. He was fast, faster than Jake, indicating that he had a higher level. And not by a little either, Jake estimating the man to be at least level 7 or 8.

Jake began sneaking towards his next target as he tried to stay hidden. He had already decided to leave one alive to send a message if possible, but it sure as hell was not going to be their leader.

He had already spotted the one he wanted to function as his messenger. It was a young archer, could not be more than seventeen or eighteen. Jake was looking at him at this moment and could both see and feel him shake in fear. He kept throwing glances towards the clearing where the two corpses were.

Jake decided to ignore the kid and instead started looking for another target. From the way the kid had frozen up, Jake saw no scenario where he would prove an issue.

Jake felt no one in his sphere as he moved and saw nothing either. He closed his eyes and focused on his hearing. At first, he heard nothing but the ambient sound of the wind and the occasional beast or bird, until he picked up another, more relevant sound - labored breathing.

He silently snuck towards the sound of the breathing, and soon the last light warrior appeared in his sphere. Unlike the others, this one had decided to cover himself in leaves and parts of the underbrush, practically invisible in combination with the basic stealth skill as he lay prone on the ground. Jake doubted he would even be able to spot him using Archer's Eye.

Luckily, Jake did not need his eyes to see him. The man was hidden well if you looked at him, but with an omnidirectional sphere, what he was doing barely counted as hiding. Jake decided to get a vertical advantage and climbed a tree to ensure his attack would prove lethal.

From up there, he had a clear shot right at the man. He sure had done a decent job hiding, as Jake could not even spot him from above, mainly due to him lying completely still. Jake nocked an arrow and drew his bow, aiming for the head.

He found it interesting how not a single of the basic outfits for any of the classes provided any protection for the head. Even the heavy warriors didn't have a helmet, despite their otherwise full armor. The only thing remotely close was the hoods on the cloaks that casters, healers, and archers had. But that did not exactly provide a lot of protection against an arrow to the head.

The only true protection seemed to be provided by the toughness stat, maybe vitality, and perhaps endurance to some extent? He did not know exactly, but he did remember the light warrior class not offering any stat points to toughness and only one to vitality. In other words, their level advantage meant little to nothing if hit, except for maybe one or two levels in race.

Which was exactly what led to the hidden warrior dying without even knowing how. All that was left was what looked like a stack of leaves and sticks with an arrow sticking out it. A red liquid slowly soaking the underbrush around the arrow.

Jake confirmed the system notification of him getting the kill, and checked his list of notifications quickly, finding only 4. Meaning that the archer he traded arrows with earlier still lived. Must have used a health potion, he thought.

He decided to go finish off the archer, doubting he had gotten far. While a healing potion did renew the lost health points instantly, it still took a bit of time for the body to fully mend and judging from where he had hit the arrow, the guy was hopefully still down for the count.

Jake climbed down from the tree and snuck towards where he had fought the archer. He still had to be careful with the leader of the hit-squad on the loose. The guy had decent skill judging from his fast reactions to the initial ambush, and his accuracy was quite decent judging his return-shot.

He quickly found the archer who had done nothing more than drag himself to the other side of the tree Jake had left him at. He was still heaving for breath, as his lungs had just finished healing, and was not in any condition to put up a proper fight.

While it was not exactly exciting prey, an enemy is an enemy. The archer had covered his body and face with his cloak and made sure that blood was clearly visible as he tried to sit completely still. Likely hoping to fool Jake into believing he was already dead.

Jake was off to the side of the man, still sneaking, as he drew his bow. The man had his vision blocked by his hood, completely unaware as death approached.

Jake aimed and fired the arrow. The moment he released the arrow, his danger-sense went ballistic, and he barely managed to move a bit to the side as an arrow entered his sphere and struck him in the back. A wave of immense pain struck him, making him grit his teeth, barely managing to stumble behind a nearby tree, narrowly dodging yet another arrow.

He slumped down behind the tree and quickly ripped out the arrow still in his stomach and the one in his back. The one in the stomach was narrow, only penetrating muscle mostly, but the one in the back had hit something important. He quickly drank a healing potion and felt a cold sensation spread throughout his body. The potion itself was tasteless like water, not that he had any time to think about flavors at the moment.

He couldn't help but smile to himself despite the pain as he confirmed the kill notification for the already wounded archer. Afterward, he quickly opened his status page and threw all his free points into perception. He didn't even have time to look at his stats before his danger-sense acted up again, as he had to slide around the tree, avoiding another arrow.

His smile grew wider as he got to temporary safety once more. The archer was outside his sphere, despite it becoming slightly stronger from the increased perception given during his level-ups and the allocated free points.

Whoever this leader was, he wasn't an amateur. He knew his way around a bow, and unlike many others, he didn't hesitate. Jake felt the excitement practically boil in his stomach as he felt his wounds heal. Finally, he had found a worthwhile opponent. His terrible taunt and equally terrible acting had been one hundred percent worth it.