

## Hunter 14

### Chapter 14: Nicholas (2)

Nicholas did feel slightly regretful sacrificing his comrade in order to get the drop on the archer. Not because his former ally died, but because Nicholas had failed in killing the enemy. After he had given the wounded archer a healing potion, he decided to hide in a tree twenty or so meters away, with a clear line of sight to the wounded man.

In other words, he had set up his ally as bait.

The enemy archer seemed to have a perception skill of some kind or something that achieved a similar effect. A way of locating nearby individuals at the minimum. He first thought it was perhaps the Basic Tracking skill, but he had also seen the archer use basic stealth. Which would either mean that the man had unlocked two skills, hence being above level 10, or had some other means he was unaware of.

Ultimately it did not matter. What mattered was killing the bastard, and his trap had worked like a charm until the very last moment.

As he timed his shot with the enemy archers, the man reacted as if he had eyes in his back, and managed to slightly swerve to the side, lessening the damage from the shot significantly. Nicholas cursed to himself as he shot another arrow, but once more, the man stumbled to the side, dodging without even turning around. Before he could fire another shot, the guy had already fled to safety behind a tree.

He jumped down from the tree he had been in and started running to the side while still keeping a good distance. He spotted the archer once more and quickly shot another arrow, but once more, he managed to slip around the tree.

What followed was a cat and mouse game, where Nicholas kept shooting arrows whenever he saw the other archer as he slowly got closer. Based on the movements of the other archer, he must have consumed a health potion, putting Nicholas on a timer before he would be back in top condition.

The entire thing was frustrating and only got worse as the other archer started returning fire. Neither of them seemed inclined to enter melee range, and with a good twenty meters still between them, they entered a standstill.

Jake felt quite a bit better after avoiding a couple more arrows, and he even started shooting back. His life was in danger at every moment, and he had a couple of close shaves, the other archer being both faster and stronger than him. He was enjoying every moment of it.

They both dodged and weaved in between trees, firing arrows back and forth, neither finding any luck. Jake was absolutely fine with this stalemate, as he started to feel better and better, his high vitality helping to heal his internal injuries.

Despite a healing potion's magical effect of restoring Health Points, it did not instantly fix the body. That was all up to the person's vitality. A stat that Jake had no lack of due to his [Bloodline Patriarch] title.

As they shot at each other, they ended up slowly moving closer together. The initial twenty meters became fifteen and then only ten. With less than 20 arrows remaining, the other archer finally entered Jake's Sphere of Perception, making the physical barriers between them far less relevant as he no longer needed to rely purely on sight.

The forest was quite a sight at this moment, with tens of trees having arrows stuck in them. Some were low on the trunk, while others were closer to their tops, as the two archers periodically climbed them in order to get any advantage.

Jake could feel the other archer becoming more and more frustrated throughout the fight, and when he entered his sphere, Jake finally confirmed the big frown on the man's face.

Jake smiled to himself as he called out. "This is fun, right?"

"What the fuck do you want?" the other archer yelled back.

"A name I would prefer. Name's Jake!" he replied.

"And why would I care about that?" the other man once more yelled, clearly not enjoying their exchange whatsoever.

Jake saw that the man was spending his time conjuring more arrows. Not that he had much to say as Jake was doing exactly the same. The other archer, however, was down to only eleven arrows, with Jake still having nineteen. Based on the other archer's skill level, he had likely counted them and knew he was at a disadvantage, leading him to endure the conversation to buy time.

"It would be a shame to just end up as another random notification of experience and tutorial points gained, wouldn't it?" Jake replied, honestly.

The other man had skill to be sure. Despite his clear frustration with the situation, he still kept his cool, had a methodical approach, never losing control of his emotions enough to hamper his performance. This would not be Jake's last fight with life and death on the line against a strong enemy, but he wanted

to know the name of his first, at least. He slightly regretted not getting the name of the three assailants he had first killed, but the situation had not exactly called for a name-exchange.

“Still trying to act cool, huh? Get a grip; you are making me cringe over here,” he sneered back. “But if you care so much, then my name is Nicholas.”

“Well, nice to meet you, I guess. Was my taunt really that bad?” Jake asked. He had tried to make himself seem like a total badass, but, thinking back; it came off more as him acting like a fifteen-year-old’s version of a badass.

“Cringeworthy enough to make me want to get rid of you even without Richard ordering it. Seriously, what the fuck was that?” Nicholas asked, counting his stock of arrows. Eighteen.

“Seriously, that bad? I guess I should apologize?” Jake answered questionably, more than a little embarrassed. Never going to do anything like that again. Ever.

“Still going to kill you,” Nicholas answered, as he saw that he was now up to two dozen arrows. “You fucked up really bad, you know. Making an enemy out of us. Do you really think your friends will be safe after I kill you and return to tell how full of shit you were?”

“Okay, I guess this means talk is over,” Jake muttered as much to himself as Nicholas.

The conversation at this point would lead nowhere, but Jake was happy enough that he got a name to call his opponent. Jake exited from behind the tree and jumped to the side, shooting another arrow at Nicholas, who managed to dodge it quite easily.

The purpose of the shot had only been to interrupt his conjuration of arrows.

The game of shooting back and forth resumed, but Nicholas quickly noticed his disadvantage at the closer range, as the other archer seemed to always know what he was planning, despite having no line of sight. They were close enough that they ended up grazing each other here and there, but nothing even close to lethal.

Nicholas briefly considered running away but decided against it. He would be far more exposed trying to run, and even if he did manage to get away, it would achieve very little. An enemy archer of considerable skill would still be out there, and the next time he could easily get the drop on him or one of his allies. Much like how they had gotten ambushed today.

And all of that was ignoring Richard's reaction to finding out that he had gotten his entire squad killed by a single man. He at least assumed they were all dead at this point, as none had shown up despite the lengthy battle.

Nicholas, instead of running away or getting more distance, decided to close the gap. As a part of his job before the initiation, he had training in hand-to-hand, and his skills with a knife were not to be scoffed at. While he had limited experience with a bow before the tutorial, the system had even given him a rank-upgrade to his one-handed weapon skill once. He had picked archer because he believed a ranged weapon would be superior to a melee one, despite light warrior perhaps suiting him better in retrospect.

He ran back and forth between the trees, and while the distance was only reduced by inches at a time as they kept shooting back and forth, he did make constant advances towards his opponent.

Jake, on the other hand, was fine with the other archer deciding to get closer. While he most certainly preferred ranged combat, he was not afraid to meet the enemy in melee. Not because he had any confidence in his abilities with a melee weapon, but because he unconditionally trusted his instincts at this point. They were not perfect, and he had taken several wounds during the fight, but it was nevertheless extremely reliable.

He suddenly got an idea as something appeared in his sphere while dodging yet another arrow. He kept dodging towards a certain tree while returning fire at opportune times.

Finally, he got to the particular tree he had been aiming for, having increased the distance to a good eight to ten meters once more. He dodged behind the tree he had been running towards, as Nicholas followed close behind. It was at this tree that Jake had killed the wounded archer at the beginning of the battle.

During the course of combat, they had moved around so much that they eventually switched locations from where they had started, as they both circled the forest from tree to tree. This meant that Nicholas could not see the dead archer from where he was now hiding. Jake, on the other hand, standing behind the tree, right next to the fresh corpse.

Jake once more smirked as he hoisted up the dead archer, leaning him against the tree in preparation. He then got out from behind the tree, firing yet another arrow. Jake purposefully stayed around this tree, as Nicholas finally got within a couple of meters.

Nicholas charged for Jake as he circled the tree where the archer was hiding. As he got around it, he instantly saw a person coming towards him, and with no hesitation, he stabbed for the throat. He smiled

as he felt his knife sink into flesh as he looked at the face of his opponent, hoping to see the look of terror in his face.

What instead met him was the dead eyes of the comrade he had sacrificed earlier. Before he could process what had happened, a knife came out from behind the corpse, penetrating deep into his chest.

With a cough of blood, he fell backward, the knife being ripped out in the process. A warm feeling spread from his chest as blood poured out. He knew his heart had been hit and that he was done for as blood filled his mouth.

Jake looked down at the archer who was collapsed on the soft underbrush of the forest. His eyes still open as he struggled in vain. His vitality still kept him from an otherwise instant kill before the system as his health points were fast depleted.

"Good fight," Jake stated solemnly.

"Fuck y-" Nicholas tried to say, as he coughed up more blood. Not even attempting to speak again before the final vestige of life left him.

Jake sighed as he got the notification confirming the kill. He went forward and closed the man's, no, Nicholas's eyes.

At one point, he had considered cutting off the head of this leader to send a message to Richard that his threat was serious, but he could not bring himself to defile the corpse of someone who had given him the best fight of his life. It would also be just a bit too cliché.

Jake instead decided to bury his fallen opponent's corpse, but first, he had some unfinished business with the last member of the hunting party. He walked towards where the archer had been frozen in fear and found him still in the same place, clearly attempting to hide.

He had no respect for this young man, only pity. He was barely an adult, if one at all, and he had been thrown into this messed up tutorial with beasts, monsters, and people out to kill him. People like Jake.

The kid's attempt to hide was rendered rather pointless by his constant shivering, making it easy to find him even without his sphere. The kid had his dagger in his hand, hidden under the cloak, but he had either lost or thrown away his bow at some point.

As Jake got closer, the archer started shaking even more, and finally summoned the courage to look up, only to see Jake in a blood-red cloak that used to be brown at some point. Before the kid managed to scream, Jake ran forward and easily disarmed him by giving him a solid punch in the gut, making him kneel over. His knife dropping to the ground.

"Your pals are dead, kid. Return to Richard and say that Nicholas fought well and do remind him that I was serious when I told him that I would kill him if he does anything to my friends. Oh, and say that he is free to send more people after me, I enjoyed it," Jake said, as he looked at the kid, who was clearly thinking that he was going to die.

The kid looked up with terror and hesitated at Jake's words. The man in front of him was, in his eyes, a monster in human skin. Out of nowhere, two of his friends had died, and as he was getting his bearings, he heard screams all around him as everyone panicked.



He had frozen up, not daring to move as he feared yet another arrow would come out of nowhere and end his life without him even knowing how. He instead hoped, no begged, that the others would win and come get him. But now everyone was dead, including the seemingly invincible Nicholas, who even the super-scary Richard respected as his equal. Worse yet, now this monster was standing right in front of him.

“Hello?” Jake wondered aloud as the kid still just stood there shivering. Hadn’t he heard him?

The kid quickly tensed up before he quickly started running haphazardly, nearly falling over during his first couple of steps, until he got his bearings and started sprinting.

Jake was a bit confused for a moment but just shook his head as he looked at the kid running. It looked more than a little silly as the kid bumped into several trees on the way running like the devil was chasing him.

When the archer left his line of sight, Jake finally slumped down to the ground, tired as hell. Turns out that fighting someone to the death for the better part of an hour was exhausting.