

Hunter 146

Chapter 146: Familial Conflict

"It's hard to believe," Levi said as he stared at the blue bottle in his hand. "How do you even make something like this?"

"How do you shoot magical blades at people, and how does Neil teleport us thousands of kilometers at a time?" Christen scoffed before continuing. "And how does Silas heal wounds in seconds, or Eleanor's arrows appear from thin air or--"

"Yeah, yeah, I get it. No need to be a bitch," Levi said, handing the potion back to Silas, who was keeping them for now.

"Sorry I hurt your feelings, me being a bitch has totally nothing to do with my stomach being constantly on fire," she said sarcastically.

"Sorry..." Silas apologized meekly. He was still trying to heal it, but all he could do was to keep it in check as the power of the curse slowly ran itself out.

"It isn't your fault," Neil cut in. "We didn't know they had made an alliance and got overconfident. Hopefully, this mysterious 'owner' can help us."

"I still don't like trusting some unknown person we don't even know is human," Christen sighed.

"We can't keep running either," Levi said. "And there is no way in hell we hand the orb to them. Not like they are going to let us live either way."

"Won't this 'owner' want the orb, though?" Eleanor asked. "I doubt we can keep it hidden if we actually need his assistance."

"Let's just hope he isn't interested then," Neil smiled. "In the meantime, we shouldn't idle. They are for sure on our trail, so not preparing would be foolish."

"So we are staying here?" Silas asked as he was channeling what little mana he had recovered into Christen's wound.

Neil looked at the two and saw the wound that still appeared to have small embers burning in it. "Christen is not in any shape to travel like she is now, and I used the last remaining ingredients I had on the last teleportation circle. We may be able to outrun them still, but is that really a way to live? So, yes, we are staying. For better or worse."

At the current time, they had created some distance from the lodge and the four other survivors. A discussion was in order on how to move forward. But in the end, decisions nearly always fell on Neil to make.

"Should we involve those four?" Eleanor inquired.

Neil nodded once more. "I think it would be wise. They must have some rapport with this 'owner,' so having a working relationship at the minimum would be preferable. They may also be able to provide further assistance and help with preparing for the inevitable arrival of my cousin's group."

“Speaking of assistance, why don’t you take a swig of one of these little wonder-bottles?” Levi asked Silas, who was clearly out of mana again.

They already used Identify on the potions, and it had returned the same message as back in the tutorial.

[Mana Potion (Inferior)] – Restores mana when consumed

[Mana Potion (Common)] – Restores mana when consumed

It didn’t show the values, and in their eyes looked identical to the ones they consumed back then. The only difference was the common-tag on some of them, so these were likely of higher quality.

“They could be poisoned,” Silas said a bit hesitantly.

“That would be a shitty assassination attempt. Even if it worked, we would just wipe them out,” Levi said with a big laugh. “Don’t worry, if you die, I promise to take revenge for you!”

“Screw you,” Silas joked as he took out the potion. “Here goes nothing.”

Silas felt the liquid enter his body as a flood of mana spread throughout. Far more mana than those shitty mana potions provided during the tutorial.

He sat staring into thin air for a while after drinking it as he checked his status.

“Holy shit.”

“What? Is anything wrong?” Levi asked, concerned about his earlier jokes becoming a reality.

“It gave me more than 2200 mana,” Silas said, still in disbelief.

“What!? That’s like my entire mana pool,” Levi exclaimed in shock.

Neil, Christen, and Eleanor also looked on with interest. Christen and Eleanor didn’t really use mana, but if the mana potions were that good, chances are the stamina potions were too. Neil, on the other hand, began to see possibilities he hadn’t considered before.

“And there are no side-effects?” Neil asked.

“None. Works just like the tutorial ones. I can tell there is the same one-hour cooldown too. This is just crazy,” Silas calmly explained as he collected his thoughts.

“Well, I think making a partnership with those four is pretty much settled now. Especially if they got more of these potions,” Neil laughed. Perhaps they would be able to put up a defense by the time she arrived after all.

After that, they returned to the lodge, where Miranda and the others still sat. They agreed to work together as Neil also came clean about their reasons for coming there.

Their tutorial had been more like Jake’s than Miranda’s. A smaller number of people put in an archipelago of islands with bridges connecting each one. Each island had a general level-range of beasts and other types of monsters.

The five of them knew each other before the integration. Christen and Silas were childhood friends, while Neil and Levi went to the same class in university. Eleanor was a friend of Christen as they lived in the same university dorm.

All of them were only in their early to mid-twenties, and Neil was the oldest of the bunch.

But there had also been others. Neil’s cousin, a woman named Abby, had also entered. She had joined with a group of her own friends and her father, Neil’s uncle.

In the beginning, they had teamed up with this group. Their teamwork turned out to be immaculate as Christen took the front and tanked, Eleanor scouted and made ranged attacks, while Neil and Levi provided most of the damage, with Neil also learning supporting skills later on. Silas was the group’s designated healer.

All had gone well till they encountered a particular island. This one contained no monsters of any kind, but instead a large crypt, which they had entered with a large group of nearly two hundred people. There they found a unique challenge dungeon. All casters below 25, which was all of them as it was still only the first week, got the chance to enter it. They pretty much all did in their unbridled naivety.

As was customary of a challenge dungeon, you either win or fail. It was designed for one to win it, but something unexpected happened. Two people managed to, against all odds, beat the challenge dungeon. After a month, Abby and Neil both walked out of the door, the only two victors.

Both had gotten a new and powerful class. Both had upgraded it to an even more potent version at 25 too. From that point onward, they came to dominate the tutorial. Both were higher level and more powerful than anyone else. Their parties benefitting from this too, as their levels soared in concert with their own.

After the challenge dungeon, Neil and his cousin had split up. Each was going their own way to find and hunt more beasts. By some miracle, or perhaps by design, they reached the final island simultaneously, when only a single day of the tutorial remained.

There they had entered a new area together. Within, Abby and Neil, as well as their respective companions, encountered the 'final boss.' The disciple of the one who had given them the legacy in the challenge dungeon. The one who had given them their class was long dead, with only this one disciple remaining behind as an honor to his old master.

The disciple had been D-grade. More potent than they could possibly handle. Luckily, he wasn't there to fight them. He offered them yet another trial. One they could try with their parties of five.

Abby, at this time, had come with a group of several hundred people. An entire army she had at her command. Of course, she protested at the limitation of only five people, but the disciple insisted, and even the headstrong Abby didn't dare cross the D-grade disciple.

Once more, Abby and Neil had competed. Which was when the disparity between the two became apparent. Not in their personal skill, but the skill of their party.

Neil had only ever been with his party of five. Be it luck or fate that they had decided on that from the start, which meant that he had an immense advantage throughout the trial. Their party even cleared two dungeons prior, and all managed to get good equipment.

On the other hand, Abby had put herself and her father before everyone else. In personal power, she was above Neil. Her father was also slightly stronger than any of Neil's party members. But that was it. The rest who followed her were far from powerful individuals.

This resulted in Neil winning in the end. Abby was walking out with only her and her father surviving. As a reward, Neil was granted the Orb of Kallox. Named after the one they had inherited their class from. The item that would come to be the reason for their current predicament. And upon sharing its properties Miranda and Hank understood why.

[Orb of Kallox (Legendary)] – An orb made by the space mage Kallox in his final days. Left to his disciple to grant to any worthy inheritor of his path. The orb was made by condensing a microcosm to physical form in the shape of an orb. It is nigh-indestructible by any being below B-tier. Due to the very life of Kallox being consumed in its crafting process, it contains insights into his understanding of the concept of space. The orb contains a spatial storage that is able to house non-living objects. Can store a large amount of space mana.

Requirements: Inheritance Class of Kallox obtained.

"I was foolish enough to show Abby too. I was naïve and excited at having gotten it and believed she would share in my excitement as we would move forward into this new world together," Neil said with regret. "Outwardly, she did appear to do so. Until we returned from the tutorial, and the Disciple of Kallox was no longer there to interfere. That is when we found ourselves surrounded by her army of followers and a demand to hand over the orb and all our equipment."

"I thought you were family..." Louise said as she had also gotten invested in the story.

Neil smiled sadly. "So did I. I naturally refused and even offered that we could both study and use the orb together. This wasn't good enough for her. So she, along with all her followers, tried to kill us."

"How did you manage to escape when surrounded by hundreds of people?" Hank asked.

"By luck mostly. We managed to take advantage of their bad formation and break out even without my space magic. After that, we ran for half a day, being pursued all the time. We managed to shake them off for the better part of a day, just enough time for me to set up a teleportation circle and take us hundreds of kilometers away."

"Teleportation circle?" Miranda asked. She had a good idea what it was, but confirmation was always preferable.

"A type of formation to transport us a far distance. But each one consumes ingredients, and I have to use the stored up mana in the orb to power it. And before you ask, I am all out of ingredients," Neil explained.

"But if you teleported away, how did they find you again?" Hank pressed.

"The orb and my class. Abby can track me anywhere I go, and these four idiots refuse to leave me," Neil said, referring to his friends, who all just smiled goofily. "We kept teleporting a few times, the last one taking us to this forest."

"So, to sum it up, an army of people far stronger than you is chasing you down to kill you, and now you have led them here to kill us too?" Miranda asked rather directly.

"I guess?" Neil answered a bit sheepishly.

"And exactly how long do we have before our imminent demise?"

Neil felt a bit of sweat on his back from the woman's intense glare as he answered. "Three days at minimum, a week at most..."

"Great..." Miranda said with a big sigh. "Brilliant plan. Why exactly did you choose to teleport here, to begin with?"

"I... we encountered others on the way. One group we encountered was absolutely massive. Far stronger than us or even Abby's by a mile. We are talking thousands. A priest or something led them," Neil explained.

“He did some weird shit, and suddenly I had these coordinates in my head. He told us that we would find, and I quote: ‘salvation and our fated path.’ Yeah, I don’t get it either, but for some reason, I believed him. Silas’s skill also said that he didn’t lie.”

“Sounds a bit too convenient, don’t you think?” Hank asked, more than a little skeptical.

“I perfectly understand your doubts. I was doubtful, too, at first, but he was just so damn convincing. I can’t properly explain it,” Neil said, unable to put it into words properly.

“Why didn’t you stay with them if they were such a big group?” Miranda asked, equally skeptical of the entire story.

“We tried, but he refused us. He said that joining them would not end well for either party. That our paths were not found within his fold.”

“Sounds like you met a lunatic or a conman,” Hank scoffed. “And if I am right, that lie-detector skill can probably only confirm what the one speaking thinks is true, and not some universal law. Am I right?”

Silas looked briefly at Neil, and when he got a nod of approval, he too nodded. That was indeed how the skill worked. In other words, if the speaker didn’t believe they lied, it wouldn’t register as a lie.

“Maybe, maybe not. But he was strong. Real strong. Not just in level but in spirit. He was also surrounded by equally powerful people who all seemed keen on protecting and listening to him,” Neil continued defending his action of believing a random guy.

“Doesn’t matter right now,” Miranda finally cut in. “What matters right now is what we plan on doing about the people coming here to kill us. We can’t just count on the ‘owner’ showing up.”

“I agree,” Neil said, more than happy to change the subject. He proceeded to explain a few of his plans, but it was clearly something that would take more time to plan properly. It also quickly became apparent that every single member of the 5-man party had evolved professions.

“So, who was this guy?” Hank asked, bringing the topic back to the mysterious guide.

“I never got a name,” Neil confessed, “but everyone referred to him as the Augur.”