

Hunter 200

Chapter 200: A Sculptor of Haven

Felix walked out of his small treehouse and took in a deep breath, enjoying the refreshing air of Haven. One would think that having a city inside a forest would get annoying, but Felix enjoyed it quite a lot. It did help a lot that no beasts were wandering about, and the number of insects was also far fewer than one would expect.

The builders even had an enchantment of sorts that made all those small lvl 0 insects avoid people's homes, which did wonders for having the windows open even during the night. Anyone who had ever lived close to any kind of greenery knew the pain of having mosquitos and a whole slew of other annoying tiny pests enter just because you felt warm during a hot summer day.

Felix was thrown out of his thoughts when he heard his neighbor already out on her porch in another tree nearby, working on her tailoring.

"Good morning, any good progress lately?" he asked with a smile on his face, getting a nod and an answer in a stern tone in return.

"Not bad, but yarn and wool supply is getting scarce; I hope those merchants will soon return with a good batch," the middle-aged woman answered, reminding Felix of that group that had come by earlier in the week.

They had come from some city down south. It was some religious city or something, but they hadn't been overbearing, so that was fine. They had asked some questions about the city, but every new arrival did that, so nothing weird in that.

Felix himself had bought some special clay to practice his profession with along with some glass to shape, also for his profession.

Felix had entered the tutorial full of hope. A struggling artist before the system, he had been a failure both by his own metrics and the metrics of his parents and peers, so when the system arrived, he suddenly felt hopeful. He felt like it was his second chance. This time he couldn't fail.

He felt like he had done everything right in the old world. He had gone to university, gotten a degree, but yet he failed to find any success. He tried to do some sculptures – his specialization – as a freelance artist, but all he got from that was being lowballed by people who thought you could make marble bust for five bucks or people who wanted things done for “exposure”. Fuck those people.

This resulted in him falling into what he would describe as a deep depression even if his parents kept telling him he was just lazy. Every day was spent laying in his bed, staring into the ceiling hopelessly. The only thing that managed to get him up every day was his computer and video games.

Felix immersed himself in the online world, made friends, and finally felt like he had a place he belonged. He was great at games, and his creative mind allowed him to excel in most scenarios, earning the respect of his fellow players. Sadly, it wasn't to the level of earning any money, so his peers in real life still saw him as an utter failure. This only brought him closer to his online friends, as that was the only place he could find comfort.

Back then, he had always played a mage because can you ever go wrong with magic?

So, of course, when he was asked to pick a class, he went with being a caster. The tutorial itself had been somewhat relaxing, at least to begin with, and the enemies they faced were these half-robot things. It was really like a video game, and Felix went with his preferred school of magic: fire. Again, how can you go wrong with burning your enemies?

Once more, he found himself excelling. He joined a group of the peers that used to shun him, who now looked at him with awe and respect as he weaved his fire magic. It felt damn great.

When he got his class to 25, he upgraded it to become a proper fire mage, and that was supposed to be when his true rise to power would begin... until that incident happened.

All Felix had ever fought at that point was those robots. Tin cans that moved like living things, but they weren't actually alive. It was a game to Felix, a game he was good at. He loved melting his foes and seeing the levels just roll in, but sadly he would soon face an opponent unlike any before.

At that time, he and his party had been in a run-down city of sorts, and during one night, they had taken refuge in a run-down apartment building. His party had consisted of four people: a girl and two other guys, and he had to be honest that he crushed on the girl in his party quite a bit. She was a supportive caster, and could also do a bit of healing magic, so she was great without a dedicated healer in the party. The two other guys were a heavy and a medium warrior originally and were the muscle of the group. It was a new party, and Felix hadn't thought much about joining it.

During that fateful night, Felix had been trying to sleep when he heard some noise from another room – the one his crush was in. A bit groggily, he had gotten up and gone to investigate, and the moment he opened the door, his eyes went wide.

He saw his two male “teammates” press down on her with a dagger to her throat, their clothes already halfway off. She had been injured and nearly out of mana when they stopped to rest, and he saw the despair in her eyes as she couldn't get free. Felix didn't think as he yelled for them what the fuck they were doing; the warrior who didn't hold the dagger just told him to fuck off back to the other room...

Felix was never going to forget the man's tone... like what Felix had just seen was no big deal. The other warrior spoke up and said that it wasn't like Felix couldn't stay and wait his turn. The fire mage responded by attacking them.

A stream of flames blew the warrior with the dagger off the woman and through the wall of the building, sending him tumbling down. The second warrior cursed as he ran at Felix with his broadsword and swung. Felix didn't know how to respond as he took a deep cut on his arm before instinctively reacting by blowing the warrior away and through several walls.

Felix desperately yelled while he threw fireballs after the warrior he had blown away, and he didn't stop until he got the notification of killing the man half a dozen levels lower than himself. Standing there heaving, he only had a brief moment free to throw the woman a glance before he felt pain in his back.

He turned around and saw that the warrior he had blown out of the building earlier had rushed up the stairs and stabbed him in the back. He was far from durable as a fire mage, but he still managed to stumble back and turn around as he was wrestled to the ground, the warrior trying to stab him through the eye with a dagger.

The warrior sat on top of him, pressing down with the dagger as Felix exploded with fire mana. A torrent of flames sprung from his body and burned the man sitting on top of him – while also burning an unforgettable memory into Felix's mind.

To him, fire magic had always been cool. It was destructive and good against nearly all enemies... but that was precisely also why it was so gruesome when it consumed an enemy. It was one thing to melt metal and another entirely to melt a human.

The scream of pain as the warrior's skin began to blister and bubble as his blood was boiled inside his veins, his veins and flesh popping as blood poured out. The flayed skin melted and stuck together as the

eyes looking down on Felix slowly liquified, and he saw the burning empty holes staring down on him instead. Felix passed out, seeing the man die a gruesome death on top of him, his entire mana pool spent.

He had awakened nearly twenty hours later, based on the tutorial timer. Alone in the apartment room. A small barrier to hide him had been set up, and he knew it had been done by the woman without a doubt, but she was nowhere to be found. Both corpses of the men were long gone too, and Felix even thought the entire thing had been a dream for a moment until the vivid images of the man burning to death invaded his mind.

Felix puked all over the floor as he sat there shaking and heaving for breath.

He didn't use his fire magic at all for over a week after that but just hid away in a camp made by other survivors, huddled up in one of the small apartment rooms. He didn't see the woman again before returning to Earth, where they only exchanged a single glance before going in opposite directions, they each going with their new respective groups. There were just too many bad memories between them.

Since that day, Felix hadn't used his magic to fight but instead focused solely on his profession. The mere thought of using his fire magic on another living thing made him nauseous as it brought memories to his mind he would prefer not to recall.

The reason why he was reminded of the tutorial again today was because of where those merchants had come from... Sanctdomo. A priest-like man led the group she had left with that day when they returned from their tutorial. He was well-known as apparently he had been blessed by a god or something, and he promised people a safe place once they returned to Earth – a promise he had clearly fulfilled.

Well, not as good as here, Felix thought as he slid down the rope that led up to his treehouse as he hit the ground, landing softly on the grass below. He lived in one of the many treehouses spread around Haven, all placed in the crowns of the tall trees permeating the forest city.

It truly was the kind of city that couldn't exist before the system. The houses themselves were actually rather large, having several rooms and built around the trunks of the trees, often fifteen or so meters up into the air, leaving plenty of space beneath.

Small hanging bridges connected pathways built around non-residential trees, making it possible to walk from house to house without ever touching the ground. The way to get up to the treehouses themselves was decided by the people who lived there, with Felix having just decided on a simple rope to hoist himself up. Another thing that would be impossible before the system, but now many people could even just jump from the ground and up to their houses.

Felix quickly went to the closest noticeboard to check for new quests. He had worked on a glassware commission over the last two weeks, putting his sculpting skills and magic to use. He refused to use his fire magic to burn anyone, but he had found other uses for his talents with the school of magic through crafting.

Skimming over the many quests, one instantly caught his attention.

Open Quest: Sculptor Needed

The City Office is looking for a talented and ambitious sculptor to assist in creating statues for the under-construction temple. The sculptor must be at least level 60 in their profession and possess the ability to adequately shape both metals and stone. The Statues will be depictions of gods or their insignias. Discretion is required.

Reward: 240 Credits per hour, extra bonus upon completion.

Felix stared at it for a while before smiling. This one looks good.

He had only been in Haven for one and a half months, so he had met plenty of people before coming there, a few preachers and priests included. He knew that gods were now far more tangible entities and that some could even communicate directly with them. He felt like he was more than suited for the job, his profession at level 67. Also... that reward was way above the usual. The average for a job was around 100 Credits per hour if the job paid hourly, though most trading was done just by selling or bartering products without having anyone pay you directly. He heard that the smiths had a good time selling blades to the City Lord recently... who knows what she was using them for.

Felix respected the City Lord a lot. She was working all the time, always made new good changes to the city, and had managed to put competent people in charge. He didn't believe those rumors about her only being in her position because she was sleeping with that enigmatic city owner either. From what Felix had seen of her, she didn't seem the type to do that, even if she had the appearance to entice any man. Yeah, he had to admit that he had a crush on her too, and he doubted he was the only one.

Accepting the quest, he got a new prompt saying there would be auditions in a bit over four hours, making him grumble a bit. Should have guessed it's with an audition with that kind of pay.

With a bit of time to spare, he went to check out a few of the small stores that had begun opening up. With so many crafters working day and night, there was bound to be an overflow of products, and someone needed to sell them, which is where the merchants came in.

Besides the overabundance of guns, because many citizens had come from a fort out in the plains that liked producing those, most products were more medieval. To be honest, it was a bit funny walking into a store seeing guns, swords, and other small trinkets sold alongside one another.

“Morning,” Felix said as he entered one of the stores, the merchant in charge of it practicing by juggling with some throwing knives. A sight that would be weird before the system, but now most people did weird stuff to passively train their skills or get a bit of experience.

“Morning, looking for anything specific?” the store owner said, putting away his knives behind the counter.

“Got any mana potions?” Felix asked, already scouring the shelves behind the merchant for any signs of those small godly bottles.

“Got a few of inferior-rarity ones, 400 or more mana per potions guaranteed. 100 Credits each, but you can get five for 450.”

Not the best, but it could be worse, Felix thought as he bought a set small batch of five. A few people had been lucky to get common-rarity ones restoring thousands of mana points, but he had never used any himself. The sculptor had heard that those were really only used by elites, such as the space mage and his party.

He bought the potions for the audition to make sure he wouldn’t run out during their tests as his way of sculpting was quite mana-intensive.

Next, he went to one of the small restaurants. Well, it was more like a stall. There, he got some soup that would help boost his mana regeneration for the next day or so. The fact that it was damn tasty, did not at all play into why he wanted it.

Four hours later, he attended the audition and found it run by Lillian, the City Lord's assistant. She looked a bit scary with her scarred face, and Felix didn't know why she looked like that when evolving to E-grade should have fixed any pre-system issues, but he didn't dare pry either.

The audition itself was easy, and only four others had turned up. One of them wasn't even 60 in her profession but was allowed to try out anyway. She crashed and burned early on as she failed to keep up, and Felix easily pulled ahead.

After that, he had to go through some questionnaires and even had to sign a contract. He felt like it was a bit much for just crafting some sculptures for a temple, but he guessed it was an important task, so Felix just went ahead with things.

Because heck, what was so special about making a few religious effigies for a few gods? He was just the sculptor, after all.