

## Hunter 250

### Chapter 250: Altmar Signet

Apparently, it was a really great cloak. At least the talkative projection refused to stop speaking about it, overexplaining details of where it came from, even throwing in info about a cousin of his who used to make them. While it was a bit interesting, Jake did notice that despite it saying so much, it didn't really give out any truly valuable information. Well, besides fashion advice.

Jake tried to ignore it at least a little as he went and opened the epic-rarity box. Within, he found a folded pair of pants. They were made of a very dark green fabric – almost black – and looked slightly worn. The fabric was rather thick as he picked it up, and he had to say the pants were rather heavy. They looked like they could actually provide some solid protection.

Yet the first thing he picked up was the smell. They smelled like... like that smell when it has just rained, and you are walking through greenery in the middle of summer. Yeah, exactly like that. It was a pleasant smell. The reason for the scent was obvious as he could practically feel the life-affinity energy emanating from the pants.

Using Identify, he finally saw the description.

[Legguards of the Undergrowth (Epic)] – As the first to wander the Undergrowth, the Records of the long-forgotten place has lead to the creation of these legguards, so you can keep a piece of the Undergrowth with you as your path continues. An Immense amount of life-affinity mana has found its way into these pants, and simply wearing them will fill you with vital energy and energy to help you on your travels. The legguards will passively absorb and store life-affinity mana in the atmosphere. This mana can instantly be released as a burst of healing if the wearer is a vitality-based lifeform. Passively emits an aura that encourages growth. Enchantments: + 150 Vitality, +50 Agility, +50 Endurance. Self-Repair. Life Burst. Aura of the Undergrowth.

Requirements: lvl 115+ in any humanoid race

Goodbye, my dear Badger Pants, you have served me well, Jake thought as he had to hold back his desire to bind the legguards now and just jump into them. Sadly, he had a curious hologram looking over his shoulder, and it would be a bit awkward to strip in front of it.

While he had just skipped over the cloak to look at it later, he couldn't hold himself back from inspecting the pants a bit closer and consider their properties.

First of all: stats. Great stats. 250 stats. Jake's current Badger Pants gave 25 Agility and 25 Endurance, so he would double up on those alone. On top of that, he would get a massive 150 Vitality and two other effects. He didn't really count Self-Repair as another effect, as while it was great to have, he had just gotten too used to it.

The Life Burst enchantment seemed nice too. Almost like an extra health potion of sorts? He was a bit unsure how it would work as the potions had inherent system-fuckery built into them to make them more effective. It was something to test out for sure.

The last part was that Aura of the Undergrowth. To that, Jake had only one response:

I swear on my fucking life, if that aura makes mushrooms grow in my house, I'll do something very unpleasant to these damn pants. Stats or not....

He hoped for the best but feared the worst. Either way, the pants looked nice, and he would surely put them on once he was out of the dungeon and test them.

"The Pioneer, eh? I guess it does make sense as most factions prefer to send their most talented to secure the title and bonus rewards. A bit risky, of course, but risk and growth go hand in hand. I shall not comment on the reward itself, but I hope it will serve you well," the hologram politely said.

"Thanks, pal," Jake answered. "So, what makes you so curious about this last box?"

"My curiosity will only hold meaning to you after it's opened," it answered back with a smile.

"Oh, okay," Jake said as he threw the lockbox in his inventory, making a mischievous smirk. "I guess I'll just open it outside then since it doesn't matter. See ya!"

"Wait, wait!" the hologram said, surprised. "Alright, the last reward should be a signet of the Altmar Empire for you to wear and serve as proof of your budding relationship with the Empire."

"So it's a tracker?" he asked curtly, raising an eyebrow.

The hologram looked a bit flustered before answering. "Yes... but it will be openly shown as one of the enchantments and will also allow you to feel the direction of the nearest teleportation circle attuned to the Empire's territory."

"Hm, sounds plausible," Jake answered, shaking his head. "Anyway, how come an elven empire has managed to create a natural dungeon like this? From what I know, that isn't how things usually go."

From talks with the Viper, Jake knew that direct factional connections in natural dungeons were exceedingly rare. Of course, it could happen, but often it contained old and destroyed factions, not ones currently in power, and much less this prominently.

"I guess there are no issues in informing you," the hologram answered. "This dungeon is part of a larger grand experiment put in motion by the Altmar Empire to create particular areas that can be turned into dungeons. I do not know all the details of how everything is made possible; I am but one of many designers. A talented one, if I do say so myself, at least all my teachers believe so. Anyway, the dungeon itself serves as a test to find talents and create connections to budding experts in faraway worlds as the Empire is rather self-contained. Note that I have done a vocal transcript of everything that has happened so far. What you speak to currently is a projection of my soul at the time of construction. I do not know the current Realtime, but this particular experiment was started approximately 5.1 billion years after the integration of the 91st universe. Everything we say is being recorded even now, and upon your exit, I will give you that recording to bring back to the Altmar Empire. Only if you have the chance, of course. I promise you will be justly rewarded."

Jake nodded along as the projection spoke. Honestly, he didn't need that much information. The projection could just have said "dungeon experiment," and he would have taken it at that. But, damn, that projection really liked to talk.

"What's your name?" he asked. "I'm Jake."

"I am Tiarsus Norlynn, C-grade dungeon designer at the time of upload. I reckon my name will hold little meaning dependent on how long time has passed, but perhaps the family is still around."

As the projection spoke, Jake multi-tasked and dialed up Villy to accomplish two things. Firstly to ask if everything said in there was purely confidential: it was. After he left, the only trace of the conversation would be if he brought out the recording. Once the next challengers entered the dungeon, everything

would be reset, after all. Oh, and the second reason he called him up was to have him listen in because he thought it would be fun.

“We’re in the 93rd universe now, been less than a year since the integration,” Jake answered with a big smile. As only he, Villy, and a hologram of an elf would hear everything; he didn’t hold back any information. Villy agreed with his plan and thought it would be hilarious.

“What? Truly? This is a new universe? Absolutely remarkable progress in such a short time. I am certain the Empire will be more than happy to invite you,” it answered, not even trying to hide its shock.

“Thanks, doing my best. Became a Progenitor and all,” he answered with a big grin on his face. “Also, the Norlynn family is doing quite well. Villy told me you even had a god rise in the family a couple of Eras back.”

“We did? You’re what? Wait, who’s Villy?”

“Ah, Villy is my best bud resident god. A Primordial or something, he made me his Chosen to have a beer-buddy. People keep calling him the Malefic Viper or something like that. It’s a bit weird. Wait, maybe he’s just with me because of the bloodline...” Jake snickered, perhaps overdoing it.

At least the hologram seemed to think so as it seemed to calm down and get more serious.

“I guess I should have added humorous to the evaluation,” it said, making a forced chuckle while looking a bit miffed.

“Nothing I said was a lie,” Jake answered, looking deadly serious. “Why hide anything when this is 100% anonymous?”

“It doesn’t matter, does it? This conversation will hold little meaning, as I understand you have no desire to bring out the recording.”

Clearly, the hologram didn’t fully believe him. I guess I did go a bit overboard, Jake admitted.

“No, I won’t. I am not going to bother Villy with getting a play-by-play, and I honestly see no reason to share personal information with the Altmar Empire when I don’t even know them,” Jake made clear, as he finally moved on to the final box. “Ah, but I will open the box here together with ya. Let’s see if I get some cool stuff, shall we?”

Without further ado, he finally opened the last box, the projection completely forgetting its prior mood, and returned to being overly curious. Quite an eccentric projection, that one.

Within the box, Jake saw a very simple-looking ring with a large N-shaped gem placed in it. Without further ado, he Identified it.

[Altmar N-Signet (Ancient)] – You have been judged by the Altmar Empire and found worthy. This ring is made of unknown metal with an unknown gem embedded in it. This signet is proof of your performance and contains an identifying script designed to only be readable by the Altmar Empire. Yet even if this ring is primarily a display of status, it is far from just a showpiece. For with great status comes great power. The first time the wielder equips the ring, they will become able to distribute the signet’s energy into whatever stats they desire. Distributing the stats will make the ring Soulbound. Stats cannot be redistributed once set. Enchantments: +1000 stats (undistributed)

Requirements: lvl 100+ in any humanoid race.

Jake read it over before he closed the description and shook his head.

Nah, mate, you read it wrong. No way.

He opened it again.

Still says a thousand.

“You truly are from a newly integrated universe! That must be the explanation!” the hologram exclaimed, a bit excited. “Usually, they only reward 750 due to the location-enchanted on the ring, but the system seems to have fully redistributed the Records into simply rewarding pure stats. Without a doubt, due to this being a new closed-off universe. What an interesting interaction.”

“Wait, a level 100 ring seriously gives a thousand fucking stats?” Jake asked, still confused as fuck.

“Yes. Distributable stats are a great way to shore up where you aren’t quite capped yet. I know it likely won’t help you much currently, besides getting some optimization done by making sure you stay capped in your most-used stats,” the projection nonchalantly said.

“Not help me very much, my ass. I get like 500 stats total from all my stuff right now; this is fucking insane,” Jake kept saying as he just kept staring at the ring.

“You... you aren’t joking, are you?”

“No, that would just be a bad joke. Most of my gear is for around level 50 or something. This is a massive upgrade. Seriously, how the hell can you think it isn’t great?” Jake asked, seriously considering if the hologram was damaged somehow.

“In his defense, being capped in stats from gear is pretty much standard for all elites of the major factions throughout the multiverse. The Order of the Malefic Viper too. Having gear lined up for certain levels isn’t anything new. You don’t even need high-rarity equipment, just equipment suited to your level. Shit, most get an entirely new wardrobe upon reaching D-grade. Of course, the more stats you have from classes, professions, race, and titles, and all that, the higher your cap, so you may need some better gear than most others, but still. You haven’t gotten shit since reaching D-grade. It’s only natural your gear fucking sucks,” Villy chimed in.

“Truly a category N... you didn’t joke about being a Progenitor either, did you? That explains it... truly spectacular. I must insist that you pay a visit to the Altmar Empire if you can. I am sure your Patron’s faction can help you if you are truly blessed by a Primordial. You don’t even need the recording. The signet alone will be enough,” the hologram insisted.

“Maybe. What does the N stand for?” Jake asked.



"We judge challengers on a scale from 1-10. Most solo combatants who make it to the end of the dungeon while being below the level of 120 tend to be around 7,5-8 based on prior experiments. Those judged to be above category 10 are categorized with an N, standing for Non-determinable. Needless to say, this category is the highest and is simply an admittance that we cannot truly test you with the tools available in this dungeon. In the end, the system rules are still in place, and it has to be beatable," the hologram enthusiastically explained.

"And here I thought I was done with exams after uni," Jake joked as he couldn't stop admiring the signet. It looked more and more beautiful by the second.

He knew that putting it on now and beginning to distribute stats would be something he could come to regret. Well... a small part of him did want to make it +1000 perception, but that would just be stupid. He would save all the math till when he was out. For now, he would keep chatting with the hologram.

"So... this may sound a bit weird, but I kind of made a friend with one of the dungeon monsters outside. It's the Cave Troll with its two kids. I was just wondering if there was any way to bring them out with me? Some hidden dungeon functionality or something?" Jake asked. He hadn't forgotten the big fella.

"Bring out some of the dungeon residents? No, not unless you have such means by yourself already. I would advise against trying to make use of dungeon monsters as a fighting force. It is rarely worth it, and their Records tend to be heavily affected, making progress borderline impossible for them," the projection kindly explained.

"Well, that sucks," Jake sighed. He had hoped for the dungeon to reward him some rare item to free the troll or something like that.

“One more thing,” the projection began, looking a bit hesitant. “Could you perhaps leave the remains of the golem here? Proprietary technology was used during its construction, and unless you are part of the Altmar Empire, you aren’t allowed to possess it.”

“Nah, it’s mine. Tough luck. Fucker was hard to take down; no way I am letting you keep it. Anyway, do you have any more questions?” Jake asked.

“Seeing as you have no interest in taking the recording out with you, no. After you leave, this hologram will cease to exist, and anything you tell it won’t matter. I would like to still heavily implore you to visit the Altmar Empire. We can do much for you, and I am sure that there is much for you to learn when part of a newly integrated universe. The Altmar Empire has always welcomed young talents from all races,” the hologram finished with a smile.

“I’ll keep it in mind. Thanks for talking, mate,” Jake smiled as he walked over to the out-of-place wooden door leading out of the dungeon. He placed his hand on it as he turned t. “Oh, by the way, remember what I said about someone from your family becoming a god?”

“Yes? Did it truly happen?” the projection asked, quite expectantly. It was funny... it was just a hologram that would remember nothing, yet it still wanted to know so badly.

“Yep, sure did. And I never mentioned the name, did I??”

“No, I don’t believe you did.”

“I heard the dude is called Tiarsus.”

Jake didn't allow the projection to say anything before accepting the prompt, leaving the dungeon - a flabbergasted hologram left behind.