

Hunter 252

Chapter 252: Something Long Overdue

He now realized he had truly neglected his gear for far too long. Jake hadn't made proper use of humanity and their ability to create items. Arnold had given him the Nanoblade, a far better weapon than his old Venomfang. Why not also get gear in his other slots? He had replaced everything from the first dungeon with the Badger Pants gone, but he had more subpar equipment to get rid of.

Actually, Jake still had the two pieces of equipment he earned from the challenge dungeon, which was technically his first-ever dungeon. He still had the Boots of the Wandering Alchemist and the Prodigious Alchemist's Necklace of Holding. The necklace had his spatial storage within, so replacing that was impossible. The fact that only gave 25 wisdom was a bit offputting, though.

Jake knew there had to be ways of upgrading Soulbound equipment somehow. Perhaps he could find a talented jeweler... but to be perfectly honest, he didn't really want to. He needed someone he truly trusted both as a person and their ability before he would ever risk them trying to improve the necklace.

The second piece of equipment he still wore from the challenge dungeon was, of course, his trusty boots. Now, did they only give 20 endurance and 15 agility? Yes. Had the enchantment to reduce stamina expenditure been useless for many levels? It had been. Did he still love the boots? Fuck yeah.

They were just too damn comfy and durable. They looked as worn and old as the day he got them, which was the point – they looked just like the day he got them. Without any self-repair, enchantment, that is. They had survived being blasted by mushroom-mega-beams, blown up in dozens of different types of explosions, and a slew of other things... but nothing had managed to leave a mark.

Their comfort was also on an entirely different level. The boots were snugly and just felt good on Jake's feet, and in the end, isn't that what's most important when it comes to choosing footwear?

Okay, he would try to upgrade them if he ever got the chance... but who could upgrade them was the issue once more.

But even if Jake didn't want to mess with these two pieces of equipment, for now, that didn't mean there weren't other places to improve. His second ring, chestpiece, bracers, and gloves. These were the pieces of equipment he would seek to improve. The ring and chestpiece were okay for now... but he knew he could do better.

As for other "gear slots?" Villy had told him that humans could have ten pieces of wearable equipment bound at once. With Jake's two rings, necklace, chest, legs, boots, bracers, mask, cloak, and gloves, he had those ten. This did mean Jake could toss away one of these things to potentially put on something else. Different humanoid races naturally had different pieces of equipment.

Jake himself could, for example, wear some earrings instead of rings or a hat or helmet instead of the mask. The gear was still bound to the parts of the body they went on, though. Also, based on their effects to some extent. Aka, Jake couldn't just wear four chestplates or two pairs of boots. He could wear an undershirt of some kind and a big chestplate on top, though, but that would mean he couldn't bind a cloak.

To be perfectly honest, it seemed like yet another place one could really min-max and optimize, even if young geniuses from other universes tended to be stat-capped anyway. Jake had absolutely no intentions of doing some major do-over of his getup – he just wanted to replace some of his old shit with new shiny treasures.

He liked most of his current things. Especially the mask. Not just because of its legendary-rarity and indestructible build, but because it was a mask. Jake had found that he actually really loved wearing a mask, and he found it sad he hadn't discovered the comforts in wearing one before the system.

Then again, if he ever walked into a bank in a wooden mask with only eye-holes, he would likely have been arrested.

Also... it was probably about time he addressed what lay beneath. No, not in any philosophical way, but literally what lay beneath his lodge now. He went over and entered the cellar, and down there, he found a new door installed. It wasn't a wooden door but one made of thick metal.

Beyond the wall was a hole. The entire hole looked a bit like an old mine-shaft. Wooden boards entirely covered the walls with metal plates in between to fortify and isolate the tunnel as a whole. It was nearly three meters wide and across, and one could easily fit a large elevator in there if they so desired.

And if it were before the system, one would be sorely needed.

The hole went down a bit over 100 meters, where it opened up into a large and empty chamber that still looked to be under construction. There were beginnings of cutouts to other rooms. Jake also saw that a marking had been made in the direction of the cave with the dungeon. He had mentioned to Hank that he might have wanted to link them up, and this seemed to be the beginning of that.

Really, Hank had gone a bit above what Jake had expected. He just wanted a cave a few dozen meters below the lodge, but what he instead got was more what looked like an underground bunker 100 meters below. Heck, the underground complex would be even larger than his lodge above by a good margin.

As he stood there, he felt oddly comfortable. It reminded him of the tutorial dungeon... a hidden livable chamber away from everywhere else. Now he just needed a spatial pocket with a garden in it.

Seeing as things clearly weren't done in his soon-to-be alchemy cave, he made his way up to the lodge again. He had a feeling they had stopped to wait for him to ask for input. Their plans had been quite rough the first time around, and Hank probably wanted some clarifications.

Jake had already decided he needed new gear, and how he also wanted to visit Hank and ask him about things. He didn't really want to do alchemy down in the cellar in case builders would head there again soon, and he didn't really have anything else to do.

So Jake went on a quest. To his own city.

As much as he hated to admit it... this would be his first time actually entering his own city and exploring it. All he knew about Haven came from him stealthily checking it out when he went in and out of the city. He had never walked the streets or seen the shops. It was about time he did so.

Jake wore his new cloak over his armor and pulled up the hood. He instantly poured in a bit of mana, and the cloak began changing color until it was black. That projection had said it would take some practice learning to control the colors freely, but that turned out to be bullshit. You just had to make those small metal pieces act as mediums and impose your will while manipulating the mana in the cloak. Took like ten seconds.

He decided not to fly but just walk and try to stay as inconspicuous as he could. The valley was not that far from the relatively bustling city of Haven, yet it seemed nicely isolated due to its nature as a valley. There also weren't any people walking in his direction at all.

Haven didn't have any walls or large defensive barriers constantly active - a rarity as far as Jake knew. Wayward beasts, especially of the flying variety, were hazards to most other settlements, and the occasional alpha beast trying to lead its flock to take down a city also wasn't abnormal. Heck, the Fort

had to deal with the occasional attack. Luckily at least none came from the forest where Haven was located, and the Mindchief still had left its mark on the area it was from.

Jake had also been told that his bird buddies occasionally made their way to the Fort, which served to scare away any opportunistic beasts. A pair of D-grades was far more than most beasts – even D-grades - could handle. Speaking of birds... he was a bit sad he hadn't seen them upon his return. He missed Sylphie, that adorable little murder-hawk.

Well, everything at the Fort should be fixed by Miranda reaching D-grade and also claiming the Fort as officially recognized as part of the area influenced by the Pylon. That would make it clear to all beasts that – like Haven – it was the domain of Jake.

Beasts had the common sense not to invade the territory of a hunter.

As he walked closer, he focused on his hearing as he heard the city's noise far ahead of him. Jake had learned a long time ago that while perception also increased all his other senses, it really wasn't that effective most of the time. Hearing everything far louder was nice in some situations, but it could just as well be a distraction during a fight.

Improving his sense of smell would be nice, but again, it wasn't really something he focused on. Jake had also noticed that the atmospheric mana made smell kind of useless as the mana just kind of ate up all smells, making them not linger that long. Unless it was a magic smell. But those kinds of smells were most often placed because the source wanted you to smell them. He reckoned there were ways of using smell based on the many monsters he had encountered that used the sense. Jake just hadn't learned how to yet. Or maybe humans just couldn't.

Anyway, he heard the noise of the city - people talking, arguing, someone landing on the ground with heavy boots on, someone yelling as they dropped something, and even the sound of kids screaming. To

be perfectly honest, it was overwhelming. Like an auditory version of his sphere, he felt like he got overloaded and quickly stopped focusing on improving his hearing.

A minute later, Jake saw the first treehouse. A guard sat atop it and was looking not towards the valley but the city. He even saw a sign on one of the trees saying the valley ahead was off-limits. The guard was likely there not to keep people out but keep them away from his lodge.

The guard never even noticed Jake as he passed underneath - Expert Stealth on full display and his new cloak making him appear almost invisible. Coupled with the guard not looking specifically for him or using any perception-related skills, it really wasn't a surprise he missed the powerful D-grade passing by underneath him.

Curious, Jake made his way to where the true city began. He saw the trees above filled with treehouses, sometimes with accompanying buildings on the ground. More trees seemed to have staircases on them than not, and he even saw hanging bridges connecting many wooden platforms above. Haven was quite the vertical city.

He also didn't need a mega-perception-boosted smell to pick up on the sweet scent of grilled meat. He hadn't eaten for a good while with the dungeon and all. Not real food, at least. And while he didn't need it, he still wanted some.

The cause of the smell was a small booth at the base of one of the trees. There was a single large man inside working it. He had a big rack of skewers in front of him with sizzling meat on it, and he smiled as he cooked, clearly enjoying himself. Jake saw the man infuse some herbs and spices with mana as he carefully seasoned some skewered meat before he put it on the grill.

It looked simple, but Jake detected some respectable mana control from the man. The metal rack was infused with mana as the man controlled the heat and poured mana into the food. There was already a

small line in front of the booth, waiting for the latest batch to be ready. Jake joined them as he deactivated Expert Stealth and also made sure his cloak didn't passively hide him anymore. Naturally, he still had his hood and mask on, but he at least avoided people overlooking him.

This would 100% have happened based on the man in front of Jake nearly jumping in fright as a figure appeared behind him. The man turned around and looked at Jake. He stared for a second before just giving him a nod and facing towards the booth again.

Jake smiled beneath the mask. He had felt the attempt at Identify. Could he feel it before? Jake wasn't sure, but he could now. Maybe it was due to the sheer level-disparity or Jake's increased perception stat. Hard to tell.

It took ten minutes before it was Jake's turn. He stood patiently in line the entire time, just taking in the atmosphere and inspecting all of the city he could see within his sphere. It was actually great practice. Not looking at everything, but figuring out how not to look. He didn't feel comfortable peeking into people's homes, especially not after he saw someone in a bathtub.

The cook looked at Jake but didn't try to Identify him. A real professional that one. He was also level 61, which was pretty damn good.

"How many, chief?" the cook asked Jake with a friendly smile.

"Three," he answered. There was a small sign saying you could only get three, so... he took three. Also, there was a sale. It was forty for one and a hundred for three.

"That'll be an even hundred," the man said with a big smile as he wrapped up the three skewers.

Jake was damn happy at this moment he wasn't the only one in line, allowing him to see how payment worked. There was a small metal plate at the front of the booth where everyone placed a finger and paid through.

It was a good system. The plate confirmed payments were made to both parties, as while Credits could be transferred directly, it was an entirely hidden action to all outside observers. This meant it would be borderline impossible to enforce scammers as it would just be one word against another. Furthermore, the plate seemed to record all transactions, and Jake wanted to bet his ass the city itself could see all transactions taking place through the plate. Clearly, there was some system-fuckery going on with it.

Jake didn't place his finger on the plate but just touched it with his will. He didn't even need to make a mana string. He didn't get why others didn't just pay like that, but he assumed most hadn't figured out how to impose their will on stuff. Honestly, it was only so easy as it wasn't anything that required power but was just a system interaction.

This action did earn him a stare from both the cook and the ones behind him. While none of the others waiting in line asked anything, the cook didn't have any reservations.

"Neat trick. You new around here? I haven't seen you before. I am darn sure I would have remembered you as you're sure a memorable type," the cook said with a slight chuckle, wrapping up the last skewer.

"I've been around," Jake answered as he accepted the skewers once they were all wrapped up. He used Identify on them meanwhile.

[Seasoned Mixed Meat Skewer (Common)] – A skewer of different mixed meats from high-level E-grade beasts, grilled by a skilled chef and seasoned with herbs and spices. Gives a minor increase to stamina-regeneration while not engaged in combat for the next 24 hours. Restores a small amount of health upon consumption.

“This is some good stuff,” Jake continued. “Could you tell me the direction to where the bosses of the builders are these days?”

“Either in the guild or the Fort. Pretty sure a big group went to the Fort the day before yesterday. I would check out both places. Caravans are traveling to the Fort nearly once every hour... though I have the feeling, you’ll be fine on your own,” the cook chuckled.

“Alright, thanks. How’s business anyway? The city treating you well? Also, did you get access to the system store?” Jake asked curiously.

“Business is good, and Haven is a nice place. Very cozy. Most of my ingredients for the seasoning and all the herbs used I got from the store with the help of the city office,” the cook answered patiently before adding on a bit teasingly: “Now, can you stop holding up the line? And enjoy the food!”

This was when Jake realized the gazes boring into his back weren’t one’s of curiosity and due to his trick when paying but pure annoyance and impatience.

“Sorry,” Jake muttered, a bit embarrassed as he hurried away, mumbling under his breath without thinking: “You too...”

“Have a nice day!” the cook yelled after him, a big goofy smile on his lips, just making Jake even more embarrassed. Why the hell had he said: "you too" ... shit, so embarrassing.

It didn't help that he had no idea where the hell this mentioned guild was. He remembered Miranda had talked about some profession-archetypes making guilds... but that's it.

I'm sure I'll find it in a jiffy.