

Hunter 294

Chapter 294: Treasure Hunt: Judging Stuff

Jake stared up at the puzzle door, no one answering his inquiry right away. He could get why it could be a bit unsettling to chat with the guy who had nearly just killed someone, but in Jake's defense, the guy hadn't died. The lack of a notification confirmed that, and Jake was pretty sure people were healed when exiting.

"Uhm, it's a magic puzzle of sorts," some young man finally answered. He looked rather unassuming, and while Jake had seen him before as one of the observers, he wasn't exactly someone Jake had taken special notice of. Just another level 105 in the crowd.

"Hm, I see," Jake said, already inspecting the magic circle himself. Well, that was useless information and exactly what the message written there also said. However, it appeared that no one had really made any progress with the entire thing, so Jake decided that he wasn't in a rush as he went over to the side of the chamber.

People looked towards him, but when they saw that he just summoned a comfortable chair and sat down, they turned back to the magic circle – a few glances were still thrown his way now and then, though. Once Jake was sitting comfortably, he deactivated his Limit Break and slumped down a bit. If push came to shove, he could reactivate it and suffer a worse backlash later if anyone tried to mess with him. It proved to be completely unnecessary as it seemed to only make them relax more when Jake stopped giving off his aura.

Jake decided now was a good time to go through some of his gains before he could tackle the big puzzle gate thingie.

The first items he went through were those he had looted from the Count of Blood, starting with the black sword.

[Count's Vampiric Blade (Rare)] – A blade wielded by a Count of Blood that has been soaked in the blood of countless enemies throughout the ages. Crafted using a special type of steel, the blade can absorb the life force of vitality-based lifeforms to repair itself. The Records left during this time have allowed the blade to evolve and transform even further, allowing it to steal a portion of the life force of anyone injured. This blade was originally crafted in a set of nine using the unique environment of the hidden world and can absorb the weapons of other Counts of Blood to enhance itself. Note this functionality is only available within the Treasure Hunt area and will disappear once the event concludes. Enchantments: Hemoabsorbant Self-Repair. Vampiric Blade.

Requirements: lvl 125+ humanoid race.

Jake read it over a few times and reached one conclusion... it was pretty damn similar to his Scimitar of Cursed Hunger. Scarily so. Had Jake accidentally transmuted the cursed sword to make a vampire sword? Or were swords with vampiric abilities just not that rare? Thinking about it, it was a pretty basic effect to steal vital energy on each hit.

It was the kind of passive ability Jake didn't really notice while fighting. It was just there and nice to have, much like many of his other passive effects. Now, the sword was good, but Jake didn't really feel like using it. He liked the Nanoblade due to its longer length and insane sharpness, and he felt like the scimitar was still better as a vampiric sword. However, that wouldn't necessarily last forever.

The ability to upgrade the sword by absorbing the other weapons was super interesting and, once again, pretty game-like. It did mean that Jake would have to hunt down all nine Counts himself or possibly trade with someone to get all the weapons. Well... he would have to do those things anyway due to the other item he had gained: the infamous key.

[Key of Blood (Unique)] – One of nine keys held by the Counts of Blood within the Treasure Hunt area. When combined with the eight others, this key will grant you the potential to earn bonus rewards. Holding any of the keys, even if unused, will contribute greatly to your final reward.

While the sword being able to absorb other weapons was ‘pretty game-like,’ having a set of nine keys one had to collect to open some secret place was super-gamelike. Or maybe movie-like? A plot about collecting MacGuffins was a prevalent trope, after all. Not that Jake was particularly complaining about it, he liked collecting stuff and unlocking bonus events.

Additionally, even if he failed to get all nine keys, he would still get bonus rewards. What this bonus reward entailed, Jake didn’t know, as he felt like all the loot he gathered was enough rewards in itself.

Moving on, he got to the red crystal the Count had transformed into. It turned out to not be a crystal at all, but a heart.

[Starved Balnar Vampire Heart (Epic)] – The heart of a severely starved Balnar Vampire. This type of vampire is a rare variant with high physical strength and incredible durability. The rarity has been downgraded due to the starved state of the vampire the heart has been claimed from. Has many alchemical uses.

Jake frowned as he read the description. Starved vampire? What? To him, the Count hadn’t seemed in any way starved or weakened. Wouldn’t the boss that loved exposition begin talking about how “even in my weakened state, I am still superior” or something like that?

In retrospect, though, it did seem to make sense. The vampire had been sleeping for a long-ass time, and while Jake wasn’t a vampire expert, he could see how one that hadn’t fed for many years could be weakened. Also... it was true the Count wasn’t exactly a top-tier foe in Jake’s mind. It was inferior to the

Altmar Census Golem but superior to something like the Monkey Prima. Now, this did make him consider how powerful a non-starved Balnar Vampire would be, especially with how the system recognized them as a rare variant.

Either way, figuring out what to do with it was for later. Chances are he would learn more about it as the Treasure Hunt progressed, and if he didn't, he could just research it once outside in the real world.

Now that he was done with the loot gained from the Count of Blood, he moved on to what had been in the Count's chamber. It was the items the thief had stolen, and upon checking them out... he suddenly understood the illogical actions of the thief a bit better.

The altar and the coffin were two separate items, both of the ancient-rarity.

[Yalsten Altar of the Damned (Ancient)] – An altar created by an extremely skilled crafter from the long-perished world of Yalsten, using a single unbroken piece of an unknown metal. The metal of the altar itself makes it near-indestructible for any being below A-grade. This altar has absorbed vast amounts of blood to empower it further, as countless sacrifices have been made upon it. It has been enchanted further to increase the effectiveness of all rituals made using it as a catalyst. The effect of all sacrificial rituals increased further. Faint Records and echoes of old rituals remain imprinted upon the altar, making it passively infuse anyone lying upon it with the life energy of those once sacrificed upon it.

Requirements: N/A

Jake wasn't certain if he really had any uses for this altar, but he was damn certain Villy was going to make a joke about it if he knew about it. However, one had to remember that even if Jake didn't know what to use it for, its value was unquestionable, and it would surely count towards giving a good final reward.

Also, after the Treasure Hunt, there would be a big auction, and there was sure to be someone in attendance who could use it. Shit, couldn't Miranda use it? She was a witch and made rituals and stuff.

With the altar was also the accompanying coffin that Jake checked over next.

[Yalsten Coffin of Eternal Slumber (Ancient)] – A coffin created by an extremely skilled crafter from the long-perished world of Yalsten from an unknown metal that has been left untouched by the ages, slowly soaking in the Records of history and the concept of time. The metal of the coffin itself makes it near-indestructible for any being below A-grade. The runes on the coffin allow any who slumber within to be preserved longer, as time is distorted while inside the coffin. Once inside, enter a special type of meditation that will keep all resources fully replenished and allow you to enter deep sleep, making time pass unnoticed while lessening aging significantly. All effects are amplified for vampires, especially when used with Vampiric Slumber.

Requirements: N/A

This one was, in Jake's opinion, a fair bit more interesting. First of all, it was a coffin in a vampire tower, so it was already great thematically, and he also saw how well it worked with the altar. The altar would constantly infuse the vampire with vital energy as he or she slept in the coffin placed atop the altar.

The entire time magic part was also interesting, though not that relevant to Jake at all, as he didn't have any plans to enter some eternal slumber anytime soon. These two items were probably the worst ancient-rarity items Jake had ever obtained. At least for him. Oh well, if he ever made a vampire friend, he had some cool stuff for them, and if not, he could always have someone melt all the stuff down and make something else. Because no, Jake was not going to sleep in the coffin. Ever. Fuck that.

Being done fully inspecting the two ancient-rarity items, Jake once more considered how the thief's actions made a lot more sense. He had likely banked on Jake not knowing the true value of the items and attempted to make Jake not think getting rid of the thief was worth the potential issues it could cause.

It was stupid to think the Court of Shadows would actually make an enemy out of Jake just because of one idiotic thief, but it did make sense he could think Jake would hesitate. The thief knew nothing about Jake. He had only seen Jake in this tower in person, and what had he done? He had fought a monster terrorizing others, helped many people, and even given out a healing potion to the woman with the stomped legs. This made Jake consider if the thief had somehow concluded that Jake was some kind of good guy with a hero complex who wouldn't just kill someone for a 'petty crime.'

Again, in some ways, this was a sound conclusion. Capital punishment for thievery wasn't exactly commonplace, so maybe the stupid thief had hoped for Jake just to file an official complaint and start a diplomatic conflict or something. The thing is, Jake wasn't big on politics, and hey, he had handled the problem just fine. What was the thief going to do? Go to Caleb and say: "Hey, so I tried to rob your big brother, the leader of another faction, and he got mad and made me leave the Treasure Hunt. Can we please declare war or something? A strongly worded letter at least?"

Yeah, no.

Jake sat back in the chair he was in and relaxed. People had turned away from him again after he had just been sitting there and going through the items, slowly having the period of weakness disappear. Still not in peak condition, Jake looked up towards the magic circle puzzle as he began inspecting it more closely. Seems interesting.

"Four signals have disappeared within the last half an hour," the man said as he kept track of hundreds of floating wisps all around him.

He was standing within a cleared house in the central Mistless Plains, hidden by enchantments and a barrier.

“Could be better, could be worse,” Caleb shrugged. “Any particularly noteworthy disappearances?”

“Hm, JN, the Shadow Thief who went towards one of the towers disappeared less than fifteen minutes after he reported back about getting a big score. Apparently, someone managed to fight quite the powerful monster and left the boss room unattended for him to loot,” the Solicitor said, as he kept control of his ritual.

Solicitor was a unique role of the Court of Shadows dealing with getting jobs, but also assigning them. More often than not, they took the role of handler for many assassins too and kept track of their successes, failures, and potential deaths. While the Judge was the highest-ranking member in any individual Court, the Solicitors handled the day-to-day leadership.

“JN? That kleptomaniac? He probably got found out and refused to hand over what he stole. I am a bit interested in who was able to catch him; he was quite the sneaky one if I recall correctly,” Caleb said with a wondering tone.

“I am not certain... let me check if there have been any other reports,” the Solicitor answered as he began going through the wisps. Each of them corresponded to a person, and each of them was linked to their respective member of the Court. They would send information through them, though it was only simple messages.

Additionally, only the Solicitor could understand these messages. The number of people who could snoop in on such long-range communication wasn't small, after all, so it was all encrypted by the individual Solicitor who received it.

Caleb reentered meditation as he worked to steady the storm brewing within him. The reason why he wasn't out and about with all the others was simple... they needed protection at their main headquarters. Caleb was fully aware he wasn't an outstanding fighter in longer battles, but in short bursts, he was undoubtedly one of the strongest people on the planet. Quite fitting for an assassin, though Caleb didn't exactly view himself as one.

He had to admit, he found himself in a bit of an odd position. Caleb wasn't comfortable being some cold-hearted assassin killing people for money, yet he now found himself as the leader of an organization doing exactly that. So far, he hadn't needed to do many things that compromised his own moral compass, but he constantly found himself challenged. It was lucky that 'killing' in the Treasure Hunt didn't necessarily mean to actually kill someone. One just had to make them leave, and that was enough. Heck, killing people during the Hunt was extremely difficult, as unless killed instantly, one could exit with a simple mental command.

It was a bit lucky that as the Judge, he wasn't generally expected actually to be an assassin himself and go around killing people. And from the few conversations he had with both Umbra and a few higher-ranking individuals from the Court, it was actually preferable the Judge had some kind of moral compass and wasn't just a mindless killer. Mindless killing was neither profitable nor sustainable and would only lead to the Court finding it more difficult to have a presence in the multiverse. The Court preferred to remain in co-existence with the existing establishments and be viewed as a necessary evil. The devil you know and all that.

In the end, this meant Caleb was actually more of a protector and guide to the Court. Someone who would decide what to do and make the important decisions based on his own judgment. So... yeah, a Judge. That was also why he was remaining behind right now. He was there in case the Solicitor needed to ask for feedback on anything and, of course, as a protector.

There was also the fact that choosing to run around to loot things himself quite yet didn't make much sense, as the primary objective of all the Court members was to gather information for now and only obtain treasures when opportune. Ultimately, they weren't treasure hunters... they didn't need to obtain the treasures themselves.

They just had to take it from those who had before the event ended.

“Uhm, sir?” the Solicitor said, sounding more unsure than Caleb had ever heard him before.

“What’s the issue?” Caleb asked, wondering if there was trouble.

“I got information from someone in the same tower as JN... apparently a Count of Blood was slain there... JN looted the boss room and was tracked down by the killer of the Count and was made to leave the Treasure Hunt...”

Caleb sighed as he facepalmed. What a goddamn idiot.

“Let me guess; it was Jake?”

“Yeah...”

“Whelp. Shit happens, I guess. Just write off the loss and put a note on JN’s file.”

“Yes, Judge!” the Solicitor said as he returned to work, relieved at Caleb’s response.

Caleb just shook his head. Jake had always been a quite possessive person... to steal from him and expect to get away with it...

Yeah, he would have to have a nice long talk with that moron JN after the Treasure Hunt.