

## Hunter 298

### Chapter 298: Treasure Hunt: Blood

Jake considered what his next step would be as Reika was hard at work.

After dividing all the loot and telling the people outside they could enter, Reika called her followers to keep watch over the smithy as her followers also called some smiths while making their way there. They only took a few minutes to arrive, and Jake saw they looked a bit more haggard than before, and he sensed the remnants of curse energy on their bodies. It was easy to see they had been fighting those cursed armor golems.

The two followers stood guard at the smithy as they waited for members of the Noboru clan to arrive. A few had already been in the gallery of observers before, and now, more were coming from a basecamp in the central plains.

Reika and Jake walked out of the armory, and the room with the puzzle in was now near-empty.

“Something has been on my mind for a while,” Reika suddenly said. “Why would one hide an armory in the middle of enemy territory like this? It doesn’t make any logical sense, much less to ensure it with some magical puzzle and not a key or something like that.”

“I actually think it makes a lot of sense. Especially to make it a magic puzzle. That meant one had to have some level of power and experience to open it, and you couldn’t just take a random unturned human and have that person open it with just a bit of mana,” Jake chimed in.

“What stops a vampire from just solving the puzzle?” she asked him, genuinely confused.

“Vampires don’t have mana. At least not the same kind as you and I or really anything else I have met do. Instead, they seem to have some kind of unique energy that serves many of the same functions but is fundamentally different. I think this energy may have also been the cause of their downfall,” Jake answered.

He had fought the Count and noticed this difference in energy pretty much right away. He just called their energy, blood energy in his head because it was red and looked like blood, and knowing the system’s naming sense, he was probably right on the money.

“They don’t? That... I didn’t even consider that.” Reika looked to be deep in thought as she considered the implications of that.

As Reika stood there, Jake noticed one of her followers come out of the armory towards them. It was the communications guy, as far as Jake could tell.

“Mr. Thayne, I bring a message from the Patriarch,” the man said, confirming he was the communications guy. Reika also perked up at the mention of the head of the Noboru clan, and Jake raised an eyebrow – hidden under his mask, of course.

“Do tell,” he answered.

“The Patriarch relays the message that you should have your meeting in the center of the Mistless Plains at the hidden tower once all keys are gathered, and he would like to propose a bet. There are nine keys... so the one to bring five will get priority in exploring the hidden tower,” the man said, adding. “He

also expresses his hopes that you and his great-granddaughter are getting along and that you treat her kindly.”

Jake bit onto that first part. “Oh, so he’s out there hunting Counts too, huh? Better tell him to hurry up. Also... I don’t mean to be an ass, but let’s not assume it’s only he and I who are capable of matching those vampires. Especially not after what we just found.”

The man smiled almost triumphantly as he added: “He knows you are one key ahead and that others are also capable of defeating these Counts... but he still stands by his words to bring five. Because if you don’t, he will.”

I’ll take that as a challenge, Jake thought as he just heard the Noboru clan make it clear they were willing to challenge any other faction who managed to obtain a key. Which meant either Jake would have to do the same... or just get those five keys by himself.

“Well then, tell him the game is on,” Jake smiled as he turned to Reika. “Oh, and do remember to make use of the wooden stake. Maybe give it to him. Perhaps he will need it to help him make up the difference.”

Reika had been looking a bit embarrassed since the conversation began, no doubt due to the whole thing about treating her well. Jake got it. It was always awkward when a grandparent said something like that in front of others, making him smile a bit internally. Jake also had a good relationship with his grandparents before they passed, and it was only good that Reika seemed to have a positive one with her great grandfather.

She looked up at him before she steeled her look. “Don’t think he will be the only one from the clan hunting down Counts.”

Jake looked at her and smiled. "Good luck to you. But be warned they aren't that easily taken down, and I would advise you against trying to beat one with numbers, as weaker humans are little more than walking health potions to a vampire as far as I can tell. Of course, you also have the stake, so yeah, happy hunting!"

"Thanks, and you too," Reika replied, giving Jake a bow. It was a tacit understanding that they would naturally split up after the puzzle was done and the loot distributed. Besides they didn't really have any reason to stay grouped up.

Jake did add on one more line as he left with a wave over his shoulder while walking. "Cya around Reika, it's been fun."

"You too... Jake. Take care and stay safe," she half-yelled as Jake smiled under his mask.

Well, he didn't know about that last part. Jake wasn't known as the type to take care of himself nor stay safe. He was more the type that would head straight for danger. Sadly, he could not go to the next tower right away but had to find a Mark of Blood first. He did throw a mental message towards Sylphie, and she sent back something about having fun, but that the next floating Mark thing wasn't Sylphie's but her friends. So he would have to get one himself.

Jake knew there were likely other treasures still in the tower; in fact, he was certain there were. He hadn't called the structure a mega-structure for no reason, after all. Even just sprinting down the stairs, he felt mana in the distance and a response from his boots that there were treasures. However, he also felt the mana of other people, and he didn't have any inclinations of coming in and stealing any loot. He was confident that what had been in the chamber of the Count and the puzzle room was the best there was.

It didn't take him long to get out of the tower, and when he reached the bottom, he saw many other entrances. So yeah, no need to enter from some balcony.

People made way for him as he exited out into the plains, and Jake had to hold back the impulse to steal the gates. It would be a bit too much for even him to spend half an hour slowly burning off a gate with people passing by and looking weirdly at him all the meanwhile. No... he would have to play it smarter and find isolated gates to steal.

Because he was 100% still going to steal some gates.

The Viscount of Blood stumbled as she landed another slash using her long claws on the human in front of her.

Her claws cut through the man and sent blood splashing everywhere as his entire body was ripped apart. The severed arm hit the wall, and his guts spilled all over the floor.

The man's body was fully healed the next moment, and he stood in the same position as before the Viscount attacked as if nothing had ever happened - the only sign remaining the newly made splatter of blood and some more guts on the floor. He stood the exact same place he had been standing from the moment she awakened. Where he had been standing for the last five hours, just staring at her.

Exhaustion was apparent in the movements of the vampire. Her attacks and steps were sluggish and slow, the red glow in her eyes dimming. Meanwhile, the man only moved to comb back his hair and continue staring at her, never allowing her to leave his sight.

Even when his head was severed, the eyes of the severed head stayed on her body. Even when the entire head was squashed, it returned a moment later to observe her.

The vampire tried to drink his blood but found itself poisoned by the vitality she consumed, dealing even more damage. It was not the first time she had tried, but she was desperate. Finally, the vampire just slumped back and sat on the ground, heaving. The tomb was completely locked, just the man and the Viscount inside.

Once the vampire was done fighting... unable to go on... the man made a sad smile as he nodded towards her.

“Thank you.”

He went forward and lovingly placed his hand on the top of her head as he comfortingly spoke at the vampire. “Your sacrifice will not be in vain.”

The vampire looked up at him, her eyes dimming as her life came to an end, with not a single wound on her body. She turned to ash and left behind the Mark of Blood while a side room with treasures opened up.

At the same time, the door to the tomb opened, and a dozen or so people stood right outside it. They all looked at the man, complicated emotions in their eyes, as none said anything but just looked on as he slowly went over and claimed all the loot before walking out of the tomb, all of them making way.

Once outside, a man and a woman were ready to receive him. “How did it go?” the woman asked with genuine concern.

The man, still dirty from the happenings before this, sighed. “The sparks are corrupted... broken... yet whole. I know more now, but still not enough. Come, let's us continue as we seek out one of these Counts.”

Back at the tomb, one of the people who had been waiting took a look inside and stared wide-eyed. It was pure carnage inside. Guts everywhere, severed limbs by the hundreds, and the smell were absolutely horrific. Everything was just red, even the walls and ceiling. Yet the worst was the floor.

The floor looked like that of a flooded cellar. The liquid on the floor wasn't water but blood—thousands upon thousands of liters of it.

All of it human.

Jake ran through the dense mist headed towards a hill far away from the tower. He was headed towards one he was certain no one had been to before due to the long distance and how it was slightly hidden behind two other hills and several actual towers. Not mountain towers, but buildings made to look like buildings. He decided to check those out first and sprinted along the plains, scanning them with his sphere all the meanwhile. He noticed everything was cleaned up already and considered who it could be until he saw faint movement ahead.

Something small was flying through the air silently, barely visible in the mist as it was camouflaged and nearly invisible, a lot like the vampire's invisibility. But, as he saw it, he also spotted a common-rarity staff of sorts embedded in the ground, seemingly just left there when someone went “fuck it” and stuck it into the ground before leaving.

Jake went closer to get a better look and saw this small flying thing descend towards the staff. He wondered what it was but saw that the moment it flew down and made contact with the staff, several metal wires were sent out, wrapping themselves around the weapon before pulling it from the ground.

The second the staff stopped touching the ground, it just disappeared.

Now he was really curious and used One Step Mile to get over there quickly, and in a snap, he was before the flying thing that he now recognized.

“Arnold?” he asked out loud at the drone in front of him as it promptly dispelled its camouflage. It was about the size of a basketball in diameter was nearly entire circular with one large, completely silent rotator at the bottom.

“What?” Jake heard from the drone, the voice completely unrecognizable. In fact, there was nothing about the drone to even indicate someone controlled it.

“How the hell did you put the staff inside the storage?” he asked. Probably not the question most would have asked, but it was what Jake was wondering the most.

“It’s done through touch, and I touched it,” Arnold answered through the drone.

“Okay... and how does the mist affect the drones, by the way?”



“The mist is based on a curse. Curses target living entities. Drones and robots don’t count as living; curses don’t work, at least not this variant,” he answered promptly again, Jake getting the hint that the dude really didn’t want to chat but just get on with it.

“Cool stuff. See you around.”

With that, the drone became invisible again and flew away without a single more word spoken. Jake was pretty darn confident Arnold had found a loophole or something. He wasn’t entirely sure how he had managed to loot stuff through the drones... but then again, he and Sylphie shared an inventory somehow due to the peculiar way the Hunter Insignia worked.

It was good to see that people from Haven were doing well, though. He was sure the others were managing too. They were all competent in their own rights, and even if they got in trouble, he was certain they could get out using the Insignia.

Jake continued on his journey as he made his way to the towers. When he got close, he could see they were made of a mix of wood and stone, with each of them having a metal gate. Sadly, it wasn’t the awesome super metal like at the mountain towers, but just some boring metal.

He opened the gate and got inside. The entire tower was only about fifty meters tall, and while that was a lot by old-world standards, it was just a small building in this new world. It was pretty wide, though, and inside, Jake found that this one had clearly been a living space of some kind.

The primary clue for this was the bones. Yes, bones. Which meant this place had not been inhabited by vampires but more regular enlightened species. Jake saw several kinds of bones, ones he clearly recognized as humans, but many were also slightly different. Some bones looked somewhat different in shape, while some of the skeletons were just too small.

Small, but still robust. Dwarves?

Another kind of skeletons was thinner than humans, and their shape reminded him a bit of the projection he had seen during the Undergrowth dungeon. So, elves. He also saw some that were bigger and some even smaller, and some that were just weird, including those with tails.

Jake quickly went through the entire tower and found only a few minor items and a few pieces of furniture. He also noticed that while the tower's first floor was a living space, the ones above were certainly not. It was cells.

"I guess I just found out where they kept the livestock..." Jake muttered as he left the tower again.

He didn't even bother checking any of the other towers but headed straight for the hill ahead. Considering none had entered any of the towers, he was certain he was the first to be there.

Time to speedrun this vampire hunt!