

Hunter 37

Chapter 37: Leave nothing behind

The Malefic Viper stood in the desolate middle of nowhere, surrounded by the ever-present white mist. He had stood here for days now, unmoving. The decision to leave had been made, but the last step still stumped him. It wasn't that he couldn't or that he didn't want to go. A single thought would bring him away. But he still felt doubt. It had been a long time since he last left... a very long time.

Suddenly, he felt a small trickle of faith come to him, for the first time in many eras. Of course, he knew from where it came. He had only one being in the entire multiverse who held his blessing after all. The prayer was simple if a little insulting.

The Malefic Viper couldn't help but chuckle to himself as peered through the void into the challenge dungeon, observing Jake drink his concoction.

"Crazy bastard," he muttered to himself, smirking. "And entirely pointless. Should I tell him that his body would be powerful enough to survive the poison already and how he is unnecessarily putting his life at risk? Nah, gonna save that one."

Looking at Jake drink down the sludge, his own hesitation seemed like a joke in comparison. He feared the unknown, while his one blessed mortal faced death with courage and a bit of foolhardiness.

"I guess I should stop stalling."

With those words, he disappeared from the desolate realm.

A ripple went through the multiverse as he passed the veil. An aura that hadn't appeared for eras washed across existence, only detectable to the most powerful of gods. Some had already felt the movements of karma when he granted his True Blessing, but now there was no doubt.

The Malefic Viper had returned.

Two mighty giants stood on the metaphorical battlefield, one representing life, the other, death. Equally matched as they tried to fell the other. Their fight had allowed them both to grow, but at the same time, had whittled away their strength. The end was near.

Yet, at that very moment, the third, forgotten, entity struck. A mighty arrow of life surged forward, utterly destroying the avatar of death. The giant of life took this chance to leap on the fallen avatar but was only met by the consuming grasp of the hunter. It had no recourse as it was too weak from the long battle.

The war of life and death had finally come to a close. It had only been a bit less than an hour; however, the pain had been utterly consuming, and Jake felt delirious despite his body now slowly healing. Yet he felt triumphant. He had won, all the poison now either firmly nestled harmlessly away in his body or wholly eliminated.

Jake suddenly heaved in a breath of air as his throat finally finished healing, and he could once more draw in air. The experience had also inadvertently taught him that he didn't really need to breathe much anymore. Not that it made the inability to breathe any less hard to get used to.

He stayed on the ground for several minutes as he became aware of his surroundings, noticing he was still in the dungeon. His head was a mess, and he couldn't move a single finger. The pain had subsided

significantly, but it still hurt as his body kept healing. Whatever vestige of poison remained in his system was pretty much gone by now, and his natural resistance would handle the rest.

His mind started clearing up, and as it did, he couldn't help laughing. Or at least he tried but ended up just gurgling out blood instead. After spitting out a lungful of blood and grime, his attempted laughter did go through, though.

He had lived. His foolish gambit had worked. Honestly, he did feel a bit like an idiot currently. Based on the power of the poison, a single well-made inferior-rarity antidote would likely have cured him or at least suppressed the effects enough for his body to handle the rest. Maybe his body could have taken it even without any external help.

His own little concoction had only amplified the flare-up and turned it into the nightmarishly potent poison that nearly took his life. Not that any of it mattered now. He had won after all. And with his victory came a slew of system messages.

You have assimilated a potent source of vitality.

+1 vitality

You have assimilated a potent source of vitality.

+2 vitality

You have assimilated a potent source of vitality.

+1 vitality

You have assimilated a potent source of vitality.

+1 vitality

...

It went on for a bit, and Jake could see that it had periodically given him stats after the initial intense burst.

In the end, he had ended up getting a total of 31 vitality. The energy naturally came from the Argentum Vitae mushrooms, which would have granted him 10 vitality if he just ate them straight up. While fewer stats, that wouldn't have required him to nearly die, though.

With the poison cured, he had naturally also passed the trial.

Dungeon Challenge:

Cured yourself of poison 1/1

Congratulation! You have successfully cleared the Tutorial Challenge Dungeon!

Rewards given are based on performance during all trials.

Dungeon shutting down in 3:57:11

Looking through the message logs, he had completed the dungeon a bit over two hours ago. It had taken him only a couple of hours for his body to heal enough for him to regain proper consciousness. Not that he was entirely healed yet, as he couldn't really move his body. Like, at all.

As for rewards, he had gotten not just one but two titles. However, these were more in line with his initial Forerunner of the New World, compared to Bloodline Patriarch, or his quite overpowered Holder of a True Primordial's Blessing.

[Dungeoneer I] – Successfully clear a Dungeon suitable for your level. +1 all stats.

[Dungeon Pioneer I] – Be the first to clear a dungeon suitable for your level. +3 all stats.

The stats were fine and all, but most important was the number 1 in both of them, in his honest opinion. This clearly indicated that these titles were not just one-offs but would likely grow for every dungeon he did.

Finding nothing else of note in his notification window, he closed it and just lay there. His Sphere of Perception, making him aware of his surroundings, as he noted the bottles of health potions inside one of the cabinets. With nothing better to do, he began weaving a small string of mana to try and drag one of them to him like he had been practicing.

The heaviest he had lifted using only pure mana so far was a pen. So, a bottle, even a tiny bottle, still took quite the effort. First, he had to open the cabinet to get the potion, cursing himself for even closing it, to begin with. Why did he need to close cabinets? Or doors for that matter. Not like anyone else was going to wander in and scold his lack of etiquette.

The process of opening the cabinet was a real struggle, not that Jake in any way minded it. He was alive. And he was feeling great. Well, aside from the whole body-being-paralyzed part. Looking at his health points, they were at a measly 700 out of nearly 3000, and this was after it had regenerated quite a bit. He had likely been below 200, perhaps even below 100.

Health points as the vital energy functioned as the fuel that healed the body and kept a living being alive. Undead creatures famously didn't possess any health points but instead had an energy of death that kept them un-dead.

This meant that the natural healing of the body consumed health points to do so. When one took damage, an initial portion of health is consumed, with another part used to heal the wound afterward. As long as health points remain, so does the life of the being who possesses it.

But being 'alive' is a rather broad term. If the poison had consumed Jake's brain, it didn't mean that all his health points instantly disappear. He would remain alive, and his health points would keep healing his brain. If the poison was then cured, his vitality winning the bout, and his brain healed, no permanent damage would be sustained.

The problem is that the brain was still the organ that served as the director of consciousness. The mind existed within the soul, but it couldn't do anything or even be aware of itself without the brain. Memories, personality, what makes you, you, exist disjointed from the physical body. Many beings in the multiverse don't even necessarily possess a brain or a set physical form; some only having a non-tangible spirit form.

For humans, at least at his current rank, losing the brain would mean losing all semblance of control and consciousness until it is regenerated once more. If Jake had lost access to this control, he would no longer be able to affect the two opposing forces at all. He would be unable to fight on the metaphorical battlefield, which was why he struggled so hard to defend his brain during the assault.

Jake had no idea if this weakness was amendable but guessed that skills existed that allowed a human to still act despite having no brain. Perhaps it would naturally happen with an evolution in the future.

And speaking of health, Jake's epic quest for acquiring a health potion had reached a critical stage. He had managed to budge the cabinet's door slightly, a major win in his book.

After a few more minutes, as he was finally getting close to fully opening the cabinet, he felt a bit of his mobility return. At first, he could move his fingers, then his hand, his arm, and soon he managed to sit himself up.

It turned out, the whole quest for the health potions had been a waste of time. Dragging himself off the floor, Jake still felt weak throughout, as he with difficulty opened the cabinet and took out a healing potion.

He felt a bit better after drinking it, but getting back to top shape would still take a while. Overdrawn vitality was not so easily overcome. From what he had read, the weakness typically disappeared when the health pool was once more maxed out, and he still had about half to go for that.

Walking out of the laboratory, his Sphere of Perception picked up something new.

He had spent 30 days in the dungeon, and with his sphere always active, he had every single minute detail memorized. But in the room where he had initially gotten his profession, two lockboxes now sat on the shrine within.

He didn't hesitate to enter the room and check them out. One of the boxes was rather large, while the other one small. Both were jeweled, and as he approached them to use Identify, he was pleasantly surprised.

[Challenge Dungeon Lockbox (Rare)] – A system-created magical lockbox enchanted with the ability to block off all types of attempts to peek inside before opening. Awarded for passing the Challenge Dungeon.

The bigger box had a rare-rarity. Opening it, Jake saw a pair of boots.

They looked old and well-worn. Both looked to be made of leather that had once been brown but was now a dull grey color. Small scratches and minor imperfection marred their surface, and the soles looked like they had accompanied their last wearer for countless steps. In all honesty, they looked far worse than his slick leather bracers.

Using Identify on the old boots, however, he was not disappointed.

[Boots of the Wandering Alchemist (Rare)] – Boots once offered to an alchemist before setting out on a journey to experience the world outside. Despite being made of simple leather, the Records of the alchemist has left a deep mark on this item, allowing it to transcend many ranks. Enchantments: +20 Endurance, +15 Agility. Reduces stamina expenditure from all movement-related skills by a small amount. Increases sensitivity towards earthbound plants.

Requirements: Lvl 25+ in any humanoid race.

They rewarded 35 total stats and two passive effects. The reduced stamina expenditure was useless to Jake currently as he didn't have any movement-related skills, but he was sure it would show its worth down the line. It would be bizarre if he didn't get any movement skills from his archer class.

The increased sensitivity would likely also be useful, he assumed. Without any hesitation, he put on the boots. He hadn't been wearing anything beforehand after his old shoes were entirely devoured by acid around a month ago. It felt great to finally have something on his feet, and the boots themselves felt amazingly comfortable.

The comfortable feeling only increased as he injected mana into them and felt the familiar feeling of his stats improving.

Feeling great in his new boots, he turned to the other, smaller, lockbox and was once more pleasantly surprised.

[Challenge Dungeon Lockbox (Epic)] – A system-created magical lockbox enchanted with the ability to block off all types of attempts to peek inside before opening. Awarded for passing the challenge dungeon with excellent performance.

He had his doubts if the system would reward him for taking a more difficult path than necessary to succeed, and turned out it did. Barely able to hold himself back, he opened the lockbox and looked inside.

A very expensive-looking necklace lay within. The entire thing was made of what seemed like silver or perhaps even platinum. A green gem was beautifully adorned to the chain. With great anticipation, he used Identify on the beautiful work of art before him.

[Prodigious Alchemist's Necklace of Holding (Epic)] – An amulet awarded to a prodigious young alchemist upon completion of a trial. An ornate creation of high craftsmanship made of metal attuned to the space-affinity, holding a spacegem in place. Allows the user to store items in a small pocket dimension found within the gem. Due to the nature of the gemstone used, living, non-sentient entities can be stored without harmful side-effects in temporal suspension. Enchantments: Alchemist's Spatial Storage. +25 Wisdom.

Requirements: Soulbound

Jake cracked a big smile as he read it. The good old trope of the item box. And his item box was even the type that could store living items. The 25 wisdom was also more than welcome. The bonus of storing living entities was naturally to allow plants to be stored, and a lot of plant-life went bad not long after being picked, so keeping them alive through temporal suspension seemed almost like a must-have.

He was a bit worried about the Soulbound requirement, as he wasn't quite sure what that meant. Though he doubted he would be unable to use it unless this was a massive prank by the system. If he had to guess, he would say it just meant that it was bound to him.

Picking up the necklace, he put it around his neck before injecting mana into it. With it came the feeling of his wisdom increasing, but it was accompanied by something else - knowledge of how to operate the spatial storage.

In his mind, he had a mental image of a room. The room had no source of light but was pretty extensive. How big exactly, he couldn't quite comprehend. The lack of any point of reference made it even more difficult, as the room was completely empty.

Looking at the timer for the challenge dungeon shutting down, he still had two and a half hours left. Quickly, he went to the library and started storing books. At first, he did it individually, but soon he was scooping up bookshelves at a time. After keeping all the bookshelves, he even grabbed the desk, chair, pens, and pretty much everything he could get his hands on.

In the spatial storage, he found that the items had barely taken up any space. Quickly he went to the bedroom and threw it all into the spatial storage too. Bed, dresser, another small table, everything went in.

Next, he stopped by the laboratory, but here he met his first difficulty. A lot of the instruments were fastened to the wall and floor. Luckily the mixing bowl, the most essential tool, was able to be brought along. The small burner, however, was fixed. It seemed like he had to either find a new one or use his Alchemical Flame skill instead.

A bunch of the other instruments, like the mortar and pestle, he also brought along. Next, he started storing the potions and poisons he had made over the last month. In reality, most of them had been created the last week only, as he had to empty out a lot of the bottles periodically to recycle them.

Luckily, the cabinets storing the bottles were free-standing, allowing him to grab them whole and toss them into the storage. Looking at the barrels of purified water, he kept the full one and picked up the other as he headed towards the garden.

Carrying it to the garden, he filled it with purified water as he threw it too into the storage. Looking at all the plants, he cracked his knuckles. Leave nothing behind.