

Hunter 47

Chapter 47: Unexpected Encounter (2/3)

If simply taken as an archer, Jake wasn't anything overly impressive. He was relatively strong and fast through his many levels in his race, but he was still a bit behind those with evolved classes. He still got an edge during combat due to his lack of hesitation and powerful bloodline, though. But overall, fighting an entire team with class-levels higher than his own wouldn't end well. If one disregarded his other primary source of power, that is.

However, If one added his profession, the equation changed. The pure stat amount of toughness and vitality it had provided made him far more robust than nearly everyone else, especially in prolonged fights. But without a doubt, his greatest strength currently was his potent toxins. A single arrow or a single cut transformed from a minor wound to almost certain death.

And now he had applied his poison. He hadn't done it from the beginning of the fight for many reasons. First of all, he wasn't sure it would turn into a battle. Secondly, he wanted information more than anything, and if it didn't end in a fight, he would just waste a bottle of poison. Now, however, the time for talking was over.

From behind the tree, he saw his enemies get ready to flank him once more. A tactic he would gladly exploit. Taking a normal non-poisoned arrow, he nocked it and started charging a Powershot. The skill was weak in open combat, usually, but it had its time to shine. Now was one such time.

With the timing just right, as the medium warrior entered his line of fire, he released the arrow. The man didn't even have time to react before he was hit, the arrow exploding from the impact as it hit his chest. The man wasn't left in a much better state than the arrow as a huge gaping hole had blown open in his upper chest, taking with it his heart and lungs. Needless to say, the man was well and truly dead.

Having two down, he switched to poison arrows as he Shadow Vaulted away from the tree once more, seeking refuge behind another. Their being unable to pin him down was a significant advantage that he didn't want to lose. Besides, while the plate-wearing warrior was undoubtedly strong and had formidable defenses, he had gotten that by having far worse mobility. Hence, he would be saved for last.

Two Shadow Vault later, and he discovered that the enemy archer had entered his sphere. And from how he moved, he was not yet aware of Jake's location. Seeing him split up from the ice caster, he made his move.

He stalked the archer with his sphere as a guide while staying out of sight from all three enemies. The other archer moved slowly, only at walking speed, with his bow fully drawn, ready to shoot at any sudden movement. His caution was natural but misplaced. Jake never planned to enter his line of sight after all.

As the archer entered a small clearing, Jake saw his chance and shot an arrow from directly behind the man. He managed to react only at the very last moment but still ended up with an arrow hitting him on his upper backside - an annoying but otherwise very easily manageable wound. If the necrotic poison was disregarded, that is.

The archer only had time to roll out the way and rip the arrow out before he felt that something was wrong. At first, he felt a weird numbness, followed by intense pain that seemed to spread through his very being. Next, he was hit by the smell - the smell of rotting flesh. With horror, the archer yelled, attracting his comrades who rushed over to him.

Jake had taken refuge behind a tree once more but kept close enough for the dying archer to still be within his sphere. The warrior and caster made it to their dying comrade and were both stopped dead as they saw the archer rolling on the ground shrieking in an inhuman voice.

As he rolled around, pieces of rotten black flesh fell off. The grisly sight ended before long as the screaming also died down. It had taken less than half a minute from the arrow hitting to his death. Yet this half a minute was enough to bring endless nightmares to those seeing it.

Before the two, the archer barely resembled a human anymore. The entire back area and most of the upper body had completely rotted away. An entire arm was lying off to the side, having become detached as the archer rolled around.

Even Jake from behind the tree had to take deep breaths to calm himself. This was the first time he saw the actual result of his poison taking effect. The only other time he had done anything like this was when used Touch of the Malefic Viper on a beast. But this had been a human.

He still vividly remembered the water from the second challenge room that nearly killed him. The feeling of your limbs slowly rotting away, the indescribable pain. He didn't like it. He didn't like it one bit. But poisons were his best weapon.

In the end, the only thing he could calm himself down with was that he hadn't been the aggressor. They had attacked first. He was just defending himself. They were allies of Richard and William, two people who both had attempted to have him killed before. They were his enemies, and to your enemies, you show no mercy.

He remembered back on a conversation he had with the Malefic Viper during his visit to his realm.

The Viper told of a story from when he was younger before he became a god. He spoke of how he had just gotten the ability to assume a humanoid form and how he had tried to enter the world of civilization and become, well... civilized.

The Malefic Viper talked of his naivety back then. He believed that the enlightened humanoid races were not like the beasts he was used to, but would have values above simply striving for more strength. He had gotten close to people, and he had believed them as if he was a gullible child. Beasts didn't lie after all. They either attacked or retreated. A monster that would first become your friend to then stab you in the back was unheard of to him.

Until it happened. For wealth, the Malefic Viper was betrayed and his betrayers attempted to kill him. Of course, even then, his strength was above most of his peers, and he was not so easily thwarted. But yet again, he had believed the man when he claimed it was all a big misunderstanding.

So, he spared him. Spared him out of misplaced compassion and benevolence. A benevolence returned by having the few humanoid friends he had made slaughtered. The man had hired a far more powerful force to take down the Malefic Viper out of something as simple as pure pride. He had made a contract with a powerful king to hunt down the Viper and steal his treasures.

Of course, the Malefic Viper returned this favor by massacring the man, his forces and turned his head to the country of the foolish king. Personally. In retrospect, the Viper confessed it to perhaps be an overreaction to let the entire kingdom face his wrath.

It ended up resulting in the destruction of nine planets.

After this entire inhuman massacre, the Malefic Viper was not shunned or hunted. Even if he had killed innocents, women, children, elderly, he was never admonished for any of it. Instead, he was revered for his power. Praised for his boldness. But more importantly, no one dared to assist anyone in ever betraying him again, as now the consequences were clear as day.

The lesson the Malefic Viper wanted to teach Jake was a few things. The first was not to trust blindly and to not show mercy to one's enemies. The second point was that power ruled supreme. Might makes right, as one says. Additionally, if one shows the cruelty and the ability to cross certain lines, your enemies will hesitate and falter the next time they deal with you.

Jake didn't fully agree with this interpretation, as cruelty can also lead to a far stronger response than one predicted. That the enemy will not be discouraged from fighting but instead be far more resolute in destroying you, throwing all caution to the wind.

And that was precisely the situation Jake now found himself in. After the initial fear wore off, the warrior and ice caster didn't flee or go on the defensive. Instead, they abandoned all signs of caution, as they both yelled obscenities.

"Get the fuck out here, you fucking coward!" the warrior yelled, followed by the Ice Caster calling him far more insulting things. Not that Jake necessarily disagreed with some of the things they called him. He just honestly didn't care. Allies of William and Richard didn't have any right to teach him anything about decency and honor.

Withdrawing another bottle of poison from his necklace, he prepared himself to strike. Jumping out from behind the tree, he fired an arrow at the delirious woman. As he had expected, the blow was blocked as a shield of ice popped up behind her. Automatically activated from what he could see.

This, of course, gave away Jake's position, as both turned towards him, rage in their eyes. Spikes of ice started coalescing in the air as the caster stepped out from behind her wall, and the warrior charged towards him. The same green aura still enveloping him.

Jake was fully aware that his regular arrows couldn't break through this green aura, so instead, he threw the bottle he had prepared earlier. While the bottle's speed was slower than an arrow, it was still far too fast for the warrior to avoid.

The bottle struck him as he blocked with his arms, the liquid within splashing all over his upper body. A sizzling sound was heard as the aura began being eroded, and the man retreated as he seemingly focused on protecting himself. Jake was aware that the necrotic poison was far weaker thrown like that compared to getting applied to an arrow, but he had to make do.

With the warrior out of the way, Jake made his way towards the ice caster. After only a few steps, the ice spikes she began conjuring earlier made their way towards him, prompting him to make a full power Shadow Vault straight through the spikes. He felt a considerable drain on his mana as he passed through spike after spike. But the tactic paid off.

He now found himself within only a few meters of the caster who's facial expression had changed from one of pure anger to one of abject fear. Giving her no quarter, Jake continued his assault as he stepped towards her once more, activating Shadow Vault another time.

Just as he vaulted, a wall of ice started getting summoned, but it was too late. Before the wall could fully form, Jake appeared behind the caster and went for an overhead swing, straight for her head.

In a final gambit, the caster seemed to release all her mana, sending a wave of frost exploding out of her, hitting Jake and freezing the ground all around her. Jake, however, did not retreat as he instead pushed forward, bringing down the dagger on the woman.

Her toughness proved inadequate as the dagger managed to enter the top of her skull. He hadn't poisoned the blade, but he knew this blow was lethal either way. The notification hitting him less than a second after his attack landed only confirmed as much.

Not that he had time to look, as one opponent remained. With an explosion of ice and green aura, the wall made by the caster prior was smashed apart as the warrior charged through it. His armor and body had clear signs of the poisons still lingering, but he had managed to cleanse most of it. This slightly surprised Jake, as it displayed that the mysterious green aura seemed to possess both strong defensive and self-enhancing effects.

As the warrior saw the dead caster with Jake standing over her, his anger reached entirely new levels.

Completely berserk, he started swinging his massive blade back and forth with far more power and speed than before. In the end, this did little for him, as at the same time, all semblance of technique disappeared from his attack, ultimately making it far easier for Jake.

Not backing down, Jake engaged in melee, dodging and weaving around the man as he avoided every single swing. It reminded him of fighting the boar, though the boar had been both weaker and slower. Though at least the beast had magic to pin Jake down, something the warrior sorely lacked.

The fight continued towards the expected conclusion for a few more minutes as Jake felt the green aura around the man get dimmer and dimmer. His speed and power also gradually slowed down, allowing Jake to land small cuts here and there.

In the end, Jake managed to kick the man's arms when he made a far too predictable downwards blow, disarming him. Another kick made the man stumble, as he fell to the ground only a few meters from the caster's corpse.

The fact that he lost his weapon and got knocked down brought back some clarity to the man's eyes, prompting Jake to talk.

"What do Richard and William think they can accomplish by sending people after me like this? Except for donating me experience and tutorial points, that is," Jake asked, seeing no reason to be cordial.

"Revenge for what you have done, you fucking lunatic," The man answered with a far calmer voice than Jake had predicted. Though he felt the apparent signs of weakness from his tone. He, too, knew that he was dead no matter what.

"Revenge for what? Killing people Richard sent after me, or for fighting back when that William fellow tried to backstab me?" Jake said with a mocking voice. How goddamn ridiculous were these people?

"For killing... everyone... for starting this... war," The man said, his voice getting weaker and weaker.

Jake could only stand there confused at his words. Something was off. Way off. From how he had said "everyone," it sounded like it certainly wasn't just for those people he had killed sent by Richard. Could it be the three ambushers from the very first night of the tutorial? No, that couldn't be it either.

To make matters even more confusing, he was clearly blamed for starting a war. The war was likely the one William had alluded to between Richard's faction and those other guys. But why the hell was he getting blamed for it?

"I didn't do anything!" Jake protested as he looked at the dying man. He didn't hesitate to take out a health potion. "Here, drink this health po--"

Before he could finish, the warrior knocked the potion out of his hand.

“Why wou-“ Jake tried again, but the warrior’s arm dropped to his side, having used his final vestige of strength to knock away the only thing that could save him.

Jake just stood there. “God fucking dammit,” he spoke out loud.

I am pretty sure I would remember starting a goddamn war, Jake thought with much frustration. Had their entire fight indeed been based on some huge misunderstanding? Was it a mistake fighting them?

No, Jake shook his head. Even if it had been a misunderstanding, they had clearly been dead-set on fighting him. He had tried to talk, but they had shot his attempt down. He had to remember; they were enemies. And he couldn’t afford to show mercy to enemies. It was simple...

With a sigh, he sat down on the ground. For now, he wasn’t going to think of it. Next time he would try harder on the diplomacy part. Focus on what you can.

And with that, his focus shifted to his notification screen.