

Hunter 48

Chapter 48: Unexpected Encounter (3/3)

The Hall Master stood frozen as she slowly turned around. What she saw was a scaled man, looking more human than reptilian. He wore a simple looking black robe and had what she could only describe as a big goofy smile on his lips. His long black hair tied behind his head, revealing his green eyes.

He looked unimpressive, but the aura that he gave off was more powerful than anything she had ever come across. It felt like she stood before the incarnation of death and decay itself. Yet she felt not a shred of fear. The only feeling that inhabited her body was pure joy, combined with a massive dose of nervousness.

“M... master! You have returned! I... I...” the Lord Protector stammered as tears started streaming down his face. He had waited for so long, far longer than any other being in the Order of the Malefic Viper... and he was also the only living member that had ever met the Viper before in person. Well, except for the Viper’s disciple, but that guy was a bit looney.

With a step, the Malefic Viper appeared before the Lord Protector, and to the Hall Master’s surprise, gave him a big hug.

“I am sorry little one; it must have been hard for you. You’ve done well,” the Viper said as he rubbed the head of the Lord Protector, who was now fully bawling his eyes out.

The Hall Master could only stand there frozen as she observed. The high and mighty Lord Protector, crying his eyes out, and the Malefic Viper, a being she had only ever heard of in legends, consoling him like he was a small child. She had dreamed of the Malefic Vipers return for so long, but this scenario had never been one she had imagined.

“So, Snappy, who is this young lady?” The Viper finally asked as he stepped away from the Lord Protector, who quickly managed to calm himself down.

The Hall Master was now even more beside herself as both the gods turned their attention to her.

“Ah, this is the newest Hall Master of the Order; she is more or less the highest-ranking member of the order as we only have this one hall remaining. I believe she is the descendant of one of the Ladies of the Verdant Lagoon,” The Lord Protector said, as he had now managed to entirely compose himself, returning to his more stoic demeanor that he usually displayed.

“Oh, those girls. That brings back some memories. Good to see they left some nice descendants with the order. Wonder what they’re up to these days,” the Malefic Viper said, as he stepped closer to the frozen Hall Master. “So, what are you called?”

The Hall Master, now suddenly thrown out of her stupor, managed to get out: “My name? Viridia, my lord!” She said as she did everything she could to compose herself. “May I have the honor of welcoming the Malefic One back to the Order, and apologize for our inadequate performance in the Patron’s absence! I swear on my life that-”

“Woah! Stop, stop, stop! I just asked for your name, that is all. You have nothing to apologize for, geez. I am the one who should apologize to you if anyone was going to. But I already apologized to little Snappy earlier, and I don’t make two apologies in a day, so we can’t have that. Just relax, okay? Everything is fine. The fact that the order is still even around is more than impressive in its own right,” the Malefic Viper said as he raised his hand and gave her a pat on her head, pretty much just petting her.

With a smile, Snappy went over to them and asked: “May I know why Master chose this time to make his return?” but instantly realized that it might have come off wrong. “Not that there is anything wrong

with making your return now! It is great, in fact! I am just thinking that with the new universe being integrated and everything. If there was some relation, that's all!"

"Snappy. Relax." The Viper shook his head as he turned and landed a gentle chop on the Lord Protectors' head. "And yes, it's entirely related to the new universe. Remember that dungeon I made back in preparation for the second era?"

"The one with the spikes?" the Lord Protector asked. If he recalled, that was the only dungeon yet uncleared. He hadn't lived when it was made, but the Viper had spoken of it in length.

"Yep, that one. Someone actually cleared it."

"Oh! Did Master make a new worthy follower!? Perhaps a great reward was granted for your new followers' performance in the tutorial?" Snappy said with glee but instantly frowned. "Wait, that can't be. The tutorials have yet to conclude."

"I didn't make a follower, no," he answered with a giant goofy smile. "Believe it or not, I think I made a friend!"

As Jake opened his notifications screen, he was instantly assaulted by a stream of messages.

You have slain [Human (F) - lvl 18 / Apprentice Rogue - lvl 26 / Novice Leatherworker – lvl 10] – A small amount of bonus experience earned for killing an enemy with a class above your class level. 425.241 TP earned

You have slain [Human (F) - lvl 19 / Apprentice Swordsman - lvl 27 / Novice Smith – lvl 11] A small amount of bonus experience earned for killing an enemy with a class above your class level. 467.111 TP earned

You have slain [Human (F) - lvl 20/ Veteran Archer - lvl 28 / Novice Builder – lvl 12] – A small amount of bonus experience earned for killing an enemy with a class above your class level. 489.965 TP earned

You have slain [Human (F) - lvl 20 / Neophyte Ice Witch - lvl 30 / Novice Tailor lvl 11] – A small amount of bonus experience earned for killing an enemy with a class above your class level. 591.235 TP earned

You have slain [Human (F) - lvl 21/ Aspiring Blade of Nature - lvl 33 / Novice Smith – lvl 10] – A small amount of bonus experience earned for killing an enemy with a class above your class level. 703.458 TP earned

'DING!' Class: [Archer] has reached level 21 - Stat points allocated, +1 free point

'DING!' Class: [Archer] has reached level 22 - Stat points allocated, +1 free point

'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 33 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

'DING!' Class: [Archer] has reached level 23 - Stat points allocated, +1 free point

Jake could honestly only sigh once more at the messages. Three whole levels in his class from the relatively short fight. It was almost criminally more effective than hunting beasts. Even worse was the number of tutorial points earned.

He was closing in on four hundred thousand points before the fight, but now he had over three million. They had increased more than 7-fold. From the rules, he knew that he had obtained half of the group's points; half of what they had struggled and put their lives on the line to get, robbed in one swoop.

Looking at the classes on the notifications, he also learned quite a lot. The three first seemed to have rather basic upgrades. Two apprentices and one veteran. However, he wasn't sure if the veteran was a low-level upgrade or a higher one. He assumed low as the man had been on the weaker side, honestly.

The two last were the interesting ones. The woman had been a Neophyte Ice Witch. Neophyte made one think it was low-level or that she was just beginning to step on that path; perhaps Ice Witches were just a really high-tier class? She had been a bit strong, but she was far off compared to the metal caster. Too bad he had failed to kill him to see what his class was called.

The last one, aka the plate-wearing warrior, had by far the most interesting class. Aspiring Blade of Nature. It reminded Jake of his own Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper. An unusual adjective before the class seemed to indicate that it was somehow a bit higher level, while the 'rank'-based ones, such as apprentice or novice, seemed to be more straightforward paths. 'Neophyte' was also likely a 'special' adjective. Of course, he seriously doubted it was as simple as that.

And speaking of professions, theirs were extremely uninteresting. All were just novice ranks. Though Jake did confirm the existence of four types of professions besides his own. Tailors, Smiths, Leatherworkers, and Builders.

He had to look at the bright spots of this shitty situation, after all. He couldn't sit there and dwell on what the hell was happening or why they had targeted him. Information was necessary, so he just had to appreciate what he got.

For his free points, he split them between strength and agility. He still felt that he was either weaker or on par with others despite his significantly higher race level. He knew that evolved classes would add far more stats than the basic starting ones. The 6 stats in total from each archer level did seem quite pathetic compared to his 20 from Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper.

Closing the notification window, he got up and exited his meditation. He hadn't been down for long, but he had managed to regenerate a bit of stamina and mana. He was honestly wondering if he even needed sleep anymore. He hadn't felt the need since exiting the challenge dungeon. In there, he only slept for a few hours once in a while to relax his head. Something that hadn't been necessary yet here in the forest.

Looking at his surroundings, he spotted the big sword dropped by the warrior. It was quite simple-looking but had a relatively nice-looking green gem embedded in the handle. Using Identify on it, he was a bit taken aback.

[Greatsword of Nature (Rare)] – A sword crafted from metal often found in areas with high concentrations of nature-attuned mana. Through the ages, this sword has been filled with the energy of nature itself, giving it the ability to bless its wielder. Enchantments: Energy of Nature's Strength: Absorb and assimilate the powers of nature itself found within the blade, strengthening your inner energy with its properties.

Requirements: Level 20 in any class or race. High nature-affinity.

The blade was... great. The enchantment was very interesting. This blade was likely the reason for the man's class and mystical aura. It was somehow inner energy, or stamina, infused with the 'energies of nature' as the sword described.

Either way, the sword was good. Jake couldn't help but pick it up. It was a bit heavy, but nothing he couldn't handle. The energy from the warrior was still lingering within the blade, so Jake decided to let it be for now. He could feel it slowly dissipating as he looked at it, after all. In only a few minutes, he should be able to try and claim it as his own.

But the fact that the man had dropped such a weapon made Jake think of something he had entirely disregarded. Looting. It wasn't like beasts dropped loot like in games, but humans sure did. He could take their equipment. It felt dirty and dishonorable... but Jake felt like it would be pure stupidity not to do it.

He needed power; everyone did. The dead won't blame the living for trying to stay alive. He thought to himself. Unless the said person had killed them, of course. So, these dead would kind of be pissed at me for taking their stuff... yeah, not going down that road.

Disregarding that entire train of thought, he went to the warrior and identified his armor. It was common-rarity and upgraded just like his cloak was, even with the same enchant of self-repair. As he had plenty of space in his spatial storage, and with the armor self-repairing, he saw no reason not to keep it. Luckily, he didn't have to strip the dead man, as he could directly deposit it the second he felt the man's last vestige of mana leave the armor.

Next, he went to the Ice Witch and identified her items too. He tried to be fast about it, as he honestly still felt very uncomfortable looking at the dead body. The robe was common-rarity like the warriors and his own. She also had a common-rarity wand that he honestly had no interest in. But she did have a ring on her finger that yielded a pleasant surprise.

[Ring of Brilliance (Common)] – A ring with a gem crafted by a skilled jeweler. The mana in the gem grants the user increased mental stats. Enchantment: +10 Intelligence, +10 Wisdom, +5 Willpower.

Requirements: Lvl 15+ in any humanoid race

Like the armor of the warrior, the ring and wand were stored in his necklace too. He also threw in the robe of the caster without thinking, instantly regretting it as the woman was now half-naked with only ragged clothes beneath that looked like it had been haphazardly sewn together from pre-tutorial clothes.

Quickly he took out a sheet of cloth he had brought from the dungeon and covered her body. It was as much for himself as for her. He had already decided to burn the corpses, partly as thanks for the equipment, and partly out of a weird sense of respect and to honor them putting up a good fight. It just felt like the right thing to do.

But for now, he moved on to the other corpses. As he walked towards the archer, he took out the ring and started injecting mana into it until he felt a connection form and the warm flow of stats increasing. By that time, he had already arrived before the rather gory-looking archer. The robe was a totally lost cause, and his Identify turned up with nothing indicating it was broken as his poison consumed the man.

But he did find the bow and dagger that the archer had used lying a bit off to the side. He had dropped his bow when Jake had first shot him, and while the blade was still a bit... dirty, it must have fallen off early in the process. Identifying both of them, he wasn't surprised, but still happy with the result.

[Archer's Bow (Common)] – A bow handed out for the Tutorial, now upgraded with a token. Has a robust wooden structure and string. Enchantments: Self-Repair.

Requirements: Tutorial Attendee and Archer Class (current or former).

[Archer's Dagger (Common)] – A dagger handed out for the Tutorial, now upgraded with a token. Has a sharp edge made of high-quality steel and a strong wooden handle. Enchantments: Self-Repair.

Requirements: Tutorial Attendee and Archer Class (current or former).

His current bow and old dagger were both not upgraded, so two upgraded versions were more than welcome. However, the dagger needed a good cleaning before using it, something for later, as he deposited both of them into his storage. He could bind them to himself with mana and just have the self-repair do the cleaning too.

Next, he checked the rogue and swordsman but found nothing of interest. They both had common-rarity gear, though the rogue did have boots that were also common-rarity but offered just a bit of endurance except the normal self-repair enchant. Of course, they were utterly useless to Jake as he already had his far better Boots of the Wandering Alchemist.

Having looted what he wanted, he returned to the greatsword that was still on the ground. He couldn't put it in his spatial storage as long as the warrior's energy still resided within.

As expected, the energy was gone entirely after his looting tour. Unable to hold himself back, he tried to bind the sword to himself. But the moment his mana entered, he felt a strong resistance, followed by a retaliatory force that sent a burning sensation up his hand.

Cursing, he drew back his hand. Somehow the sword had communicated to him that he wasn't able to bind it. Apparently, he wasn't attuned to nature or maybe he didn't have the right affinity or something, going by the requirements. Maybe it had something to do with nature typically seen as related to life, and his current approach to most anything was pretty much the direct opposite of that with his poisons? Or something entirely unrelated, like some innate talent?

Either way, he stored the blade in his spatial necklace. Who knows, maybe he could find someone to use it later on. No matter what, he saw no reason not to keep it around even if he himself had no use for the oversized sword.

With everything gathered, he started preparing their send-offs. The fight had likely been on the wrong premise and merely the result of a huge deadly misunderstanding.

The least amount of respect he could give his opponents was not to leave their corpses lying around. He remembered many civilizations used to burn fallen warriors, and even in modern countries, cremation was the norm in many places too.

Gathering the bodies, he made sure to transport the half-decomposed archer carefully. Afterward, he gathered some wood and lay all the corpses on top of it. His Alchemical Flame quickly started burning the bodies along with the wood. The flame did nearly nothing to living targets, but due to the ever-present system-fuckery it worked wonders in breaking down objects or setting things ablaze.

As the pyre burned, Jake decided to continue what he did before the battle: Alchemy. He was getting low on stamina after the many Shadow Vaults, and it was more than about time that he learned how to make stamina potions.

He sat down beside the still burning pyre, taking out the book on how to make them from his spatial storage. With his new movement skill, he had confidence in escaping pretty much anyone, so he decided

to let the pyre serve as a beacon to perhaps draw other survivors to him. The only ones that should see this pyre's smoke would be people already out and about; therefore, it was unlikely to attract anyone.

He clearly needed information. He was filled with questions while having no answers. The risks associated with seeking out Richard or even the faction that opposed him also seemed just too numerous. Once more, due to his lack of information.

A meeting with any of his colleagues would be the best. While they hadn't been the closest of friends, they at least knew him a bit. They should know he wasn't the type to go around randomly attacking people and trying to incite wars.

Jacob especially should know this. That guy had such good insight into other people, so even if he and Jake hadn't known each other for long, he should still be able to reassure others that he wasn't some monster.

Looking at the burning pyre, however, he knew he wasn't exactly helping his own case. He doubted the friends of the squad he had killed would accept him going: "Hey, yeah, sorry I killed your friends, but it was all a big misunderstanding! No hard feelings, right?"

With a big sigh, he half-distractedly read the small book. This entire thing was a fucking mess. Why couldn't it just be easy? Killing beasts to get points and humans attacking you being just psycho enemies.

Looking up from the book, he looked towards the sky. He really wished he could ask someone for advice on what exactly to do. His instincts weren't exactly helpful here, as he was sure it would only advise killing anyone who dared raise a weapon against him. It didn't care for motives, thoughts, or morals. It was pure. Simple. Perhaps living just following your instincts would be far easier.

Shaking his head, he decided to cut off all distracting thoughts and focus on his alchemy. Worrying would do him no good. Stamina potions and levels, however, would do him a lot of good.

Keep it simple, Jake thought to himself, and take the complications as they come.