

## Hunter 49

### Chapter 49: Enemy of the people

The room was filled with tension as both sides sat staring at each other. As always, it was a contest of who would speak first and break the silence. Both sides seemed to see it was a weakness to be the first to make their thoughts known, which is why Jacob reluctantly ended up taking that role.

“Ahem, gentlemen,” he started as both Hayden, and Richard turned their eyes to him. “As we discussed yesterday, Hayden, we did a thorough check of the people you presumed us to have killed, and after a lot of searching, we were still unable to have anyone take credit. In fact, the majority of the fights either have no surviving members from our camp or maybe... we were never the party fighting your men, to begin with.”

Hayden didn't even react but still sat there stoically. The man was nearly as tall as Richard and as strongly built. No way anyone would think the man was a caster just based on his build. The spear on his back certainly didn't help either.

The only thing really giving away his original class was the red robe he was wearing. It wasn't the starting robe simply upgraded but likely an item of higher rarity. His spear was the same, also a far cry from the simple equipment given out at the beginning of the tutorial. Overall his look was sleek and deadly.

Richard, on the other hand, was built like a tank. Full plate armor and a massive tower-shield strapped to his back with a sword sheathed at his side. He had even acquired a helmet, truly finishing his look. While both men were huge, Richard still had a few centimeters on the other man.

As to who was most powerful... Jacob didn't want to find out. Both had upgraded classes, of course, and he seriously doubted they were the standard kind.

“So, you are saying some mysterious third party is out there and wiping out squad after squad, and somehow none of us noticed? Wouldn’t that be a bit too convenient?” Hayden said, extremely skeptical of the entire premise.

“If the third party intends to somehow ‘win’ this tutorial, it is plausible. If the individual believes that victory entails wiping out all other survivors, that is. And based on the description and rules of this hellhole, it would make sense,” Richard said, as he leaned back on his chair, making it give out loud creaking noises.

“Think about it. Humans award far more experience and especially tutorial points compared to beasts. The system encourages us to actively kill each other for higher rewards. Would the final reward then not be highest for he who has managed to kill all other tutorial attendees?”

Hayden didn’t necessarily disagree, but that didn’t mean he believed the warrior.

“Oh, I am not saying it isn’t possible. But how the hell do you propose a squad could manage to dance around our detection for so long? Perfectly executing everything? The only way I see that being possible is if this group has information and a network within either of our factions. And I sure as hell don’t have some lunatic killer cult within my group.”

“Unless,” Jacob said, as he hesitated a little. “Unless it isn’t a group but one individual. An individual with powerful perception skills allowing him to avoid us. A person with the fighting skills to take down entire squads single-handedly.”

“And who do you propose this mythical being is? Me? This tin can?” He said, pointing at a slightly offended Richard across from him. Continuing, he raised his voice with a mix of anger and annoyance. “Or are you saying it is some other unaffiliated guy?”

“Jake Thayne,” Richard said. “A guy I had the misfortune of meeting early in the tutorial. He was a cocky bastard and threatened me, so I sent my best men, including my right-hand, after him. He slaughtered six of them and sent the last guy back a broken mess with a message. From the message, he seemed to enjoy having people after him and even taunted me to send more. Needless the say, the guy is a complete wacko.”

Hayden sat in silent contemplation for a while as he digested the information. But he quickly identified an issue he wanted to be elaborated on.

“You seem to know a lot about this enemy of yours. Also, you said this happened at the beginning of the tutorial. Do you have any proof this guy is even still alive?”

“I think Jacob should be able to answer the first part,” Richard said, as he waved his hand at his base manager. “As for why we think it is him? A member of my group encountered him. He isn’t a pushover by any means, and yet he barely managed to escape with his life intact due to a strong escape skill. The description fits like a charm. This member also told us that he saw Jake kill another member. A certain trapper you may have heard of.”

At that last part, Hayden’s eyes hardened. That damn trapper had killed many of the men he had sent to keep an eye on the enemy base. Yet he had disappeared not long ago, the magic in the traps he had laid down gone too.

Turning to Jacob, he continued as he asked: “So, what do you know about this guy?”

Jacob could only sigh as he started explaining the same things he had to Richard a few days prior.

He explained how he and Jake had been colleagues before the system arrived. What he knew about him, but also how little he knew about him. Jake had always been a very private person. He went to work, did his job, and went home afterward. He wasn't much for social excursions or heading to the bar after clocking out.

In other words, a loner. He then explained the tutorial's happenings - his uncanny abilities to fight, but more importantly, about the first night they had spent here. About how Jake had killed the three attackers that night, all men of a higher level than himself. How he had been smiling when they found him standing surrounded by the brutally slaughtered men, completely covered in blood.

He briefly mentioned what Richard said about how they split from Jake and finally touched on William, who was the only one who had ever survived fighting him. Retold the story that William had told them about how Jake had killed Casper and tried to kill the caster himself, only narrowly escaping.

Jacob also explained all the abilities he was aware of Jake possessing. How he was skilled with a bow and had even helped train Casper a bit. He explained his uncanny perception ability. Jake's training with Casper to unlock it was an open secret; everyone knew that Jake had something... extra, so to say.

The poison was another critical point he emphasized. It was potent, making anyone not extremely durable an easy target. Something Hayden as a caster had to look out for. Richard did add that he believed the poison to be a newly acquired power as he hadn't used it much before. Clearly done to try and handwave away any questions as to why nobody had been found killed by poison before.

Overall, Jacob had to admit that Jake, based on his own description alone, did seem like quite the vicious foe.

As he spoke, he saw Hayden get gloomier. Jacob also had to admit that the more he explained, the more plausible it became that Jake was able to do this. Plausible, not probable. Jacob still staunchly refused to believe that Jake had done what he was accused of.

Jake was a loner, and he had indeed shown himself to be capable of killing. But he hadn't been a complete maniac, and he clearly cared for his colleagues, which is why he didn't believe that Jake had killed Casper.

Sadly, for now, he couldn't do anything. Richard was in charge, and clearly, even Bertram suspected Jake to have done it based on a prior conversation. His old friend had brought up the point that they hadn't seen Jake for a month, and during that time a war had been going on.

Inhuman cruelty was inflicted upon others during those battles. To think that Jake had just chilled by himself during that entire time was delusional. Unless he had been stuck inside a cave for a month, he had to be aware of what was going on.

Jacob couldn't know if Jake had... changed. He didn't think he had, but he didn't know. If Jacob had to really choose one lone psycho going around killing people, it would be William and not Jake. Yet Richard had very adamantly vouched for William, and somehow the teenager's flawed story had turned to truth.

Besides that, he had to look at the bigger picture of having a big nasty third party to fight. During these last two days of negotiations, no one had been killed from either side by the other faction. At least none they were aware of. A complete ceasefire, so to say.

They were able to gather the two leaders in the same room together. Even if Jake wasn't the culprit, heck even if no culprit existed at all, the benefits of believing one existed makes it all worth it.

In the end, all Hayden cared about was finding his son's murderer, and all Richard cared about was to make it through this tutorial with a strong faction to bring into the new world. Even if neither of them genuinely bought into the narrative, it was still beneficial for them to open up a communication channel to reach their goal.

"Alright, let's say this guy is the one behind this mess. What are we gonna do about it?" Hayden asked.

"I would advise for us to create powerful squads to scour the forest. Find him and kill him," Richard said.

"Without definite proof, I think we shou-" Jacob tried before being interrupted.

"If what you say is true, isn't it quite idiotic to send more people after him in such a disorganized manner?" Hayden said, ignoring what Jacob said.

"I agree, but people want in on the action. You are not the only one who lost someone dear to them. Many are burning with a thirst for revenge. Having found an outlet and a target, many have started to become restless. Not that I can blame them," Richard said with a faux downcast mood.

"Which is why we are here," Jacob said. Hayden, apparently not ignoring him as long as he said something the caster agreed with. "Together, we should be able to cover far more ground and avoid clashing out in the forest. We already have some plans in motion to try and lure him out, but with your cooperation, we would be far more confident."

After thinking for a while, Hayden sighed as he acknowledged that perhaps it was time for their conflict to be put on pause indefinitely. As long as he could find his son's murderer, nothing else mattered. Even if this Jake guy weren't the culprit, a closer relationship with Richard and his group would allow him to locate the killer more easily. "Fine, I am in. What's your plan?"

At the same time elsewhere, the perpetrator of this entire plot, together with Richard, was happily walking along a small cliff-path. He was now fully healed, and as he saw his conspiracy grow its own legs, he refocused on getting stronger.

It was so easy, mainly because Richard apparently knew this archer that attacked him beforehand. When William described his abilities, Jacob and Bertram were brought in, and they confirmed the guy to be someone named Jake Thayne. It was almost too perfect.

William didn't care about the negotiations; he was far too busy focusing on himself. He needed power... to prove that he wasn't weak and to work with his new partner. William was beginning to really like the idea of having Richard as support.

He had even given him two mana potions the man had stowed away somewhere.

He would never admit it, but William was... unsure. For the first time in his life, he had begun doubting himself. After waking up, two shadows were hanging over him. Two archers who had both beaten and broken him one after another. With that feeling of desperation, William had begun seeking more power... to reach above his former definition of 'perfection'.

William trained his smithing with newfound vigor after waking up, and in only a few hours, got another level, also reaching 25 in his race. He had excused himself to his cabin, set up a metal cage, and begun his evolution.

This was the first clue as to how Jake was so much stronger than him. Another evolution that nearly doubled the stats from each race level. But more importantly, he discovered something else.

The invisible barrier cutting off the inner zone could now be passed through. With some probing, William learned that, to others, it was still inaccessible.

With a gleam in his eyes, he entered. His biggest blight of having no high-level enemies was gone. The level 25 evolution was the key to the inner area all along.

In this area, far more beasts roamed. Yet that wasn't all... the entire inner area was a world of its own. As in, the inside was larger than the outside. If he had to guess, the inner dome's size was nearly the size of the entire forest outside.

The beasts were stronger here. William had already met many more powerful beasts in here than he had ever even seen outside. Some he couldn't even identify. And the creature he stood before at this moment was one such beast.

It was a raptor with a red hide that had lines resembling lava running through them. It didn't take a genius to identify that this thing used fire. The ashes and burned down bushes in its surroundings were also a pretty good clue.

With a snicker, William prepared himself to strike.



Not that he didn't believe he couldn't beat them. He was growing stronger every day now. He had been level 39 in his class and only 10 in his profession when he fought Jake. Now he had already gained 3 levels in his class and of course a new skill. His first epic rarity skill.

Putting his hands together as if praying, he focused on the skill. Slowly spreading his hands apart, a long object started to materialize.

A spear made of iron with intricate runes covering its surface.

Putting his hands out to his sides as he finished, the spear appeared as William breathed heavily.

"Spear of Ferroras," he muttered as the spear hummed in recognition. By far, his most powerful skill. It was named after the god of iron, carrying the same name as his wand.

Laying his hand on the spear, he felt the power it bestowed entering him. His physical stats getting an immediate increase.

Lifting the spear, he prepared to throw it. The weapon conjured could be used in melee, but it was when thrown that its real power was revealed.

Leaning back, he threw the spear towards the unsuspecting raptor. The beast didn't notice the incoming attack before it was too late.

The spear penetrated into its durable hide like it was nothing, embedding itself deeply. The beast roared but had no time to run after its attacker before the spear exploded in a silver light encompassing it.

\*You have slain [Redhide Raptor – lvl 44] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 48000 TP earned\*

\*‘DING!’ Class: [Metal Savant] has reached level 43 - Stat points allocated, +4 free points\*

\*‘DING!’ Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 27 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points\*

Reveling in the warm glow of the level-ups, he observed with glee as the silver light subsided. In its place stood the statue of a raptor made entirely of iron. The spear's true power wasn't how sharp it was or the buff it granted its wielder. It was the powerful curse placed upon it that sought to turn anything it touched into iron.

Walking up to the statue, he placed his hand on it as it started slowly liquifying and flow into his body, replenishing his mana pool.

As the last part of the raptor disappeared into his hand, he started walking back towards Richard's base. The meeting with Hayden should be done by now, and he was more than excited to learn what they decided.

Hopefully, an all-out hunt was agreed upon, but one can only hope.