

Hunter 61

Chapter 61: A bitter end

Caroline couldn't even scream anymore as the metal spread from her heart until all that remained was a mannequin of iron. The low vitality and toughness of a healer became apparent, as she didn't even have time to struggle before her death.

On the other hand, Richard was dumbfounded along with the still more than 30 elites around him. What the fuck was going on?

"Always the healer first," William said, his voice cold, "And then you do the adds, followed by the big boss."

With those words, metal slid up and covered his face, not even leaving any holes for air to seep through.

His spear was still stuck in Caroline's corpse of metal as the two warriors closest to him made their move.

The first one swung down a massive heavy sword, aiming for the hand that held the spear. William didn't even bother to dodge as the man hit his lower arm.

To the surprise of everyone but William, the arms didn't even move. Instead, the warrior felt the impact reverberate up his arms, causing him to grunt in pain. The ground below William did sink in slightly, but otherwise, he didn't really feel the blow very much.

Counteracting the force using metal manipulation on his armor was simplicity itself, while the enchantments Herrmann had placed on the armor nullified much of the impact. Along with that, William didn't exactly rate the man very highly.

The other warrior simply stabbed towards William's back, his blade not finding any purchase either as it encountered the impenetrable armor.

"Boring," a distorted voice sounded out from within the golem-like body.

Taking his spear out in a far faster motion than any of the warriors were capable of, he swung it to one side, slicing up the chest of the one with the heavy sword, while four blades seemed to emerge from the armor as they stabbed through another.

Instantly two warriors fell as Richard started to realize the gravity of the situation.

"FORMATION!" he yelled as they all shrugged off their groggy states and all retreated away from the metal caster.

The casters on Richard's side began to condense spells, as the two archers that remained began to each channel a Powershot.

Not that William planned on letting them fire it, as more weapons emerged from his armor.

William didn't have any spatial storage but instead used the Legacy of Herrmann Schmidt to summon his armory. It was akin to spatial storage in some ways, but in other ways, it wasn't. The weapons didn't physically exist but were constructed in real-time by the skill as he used them.

It allowed William to summon creations of the late smith. Swords, axes, spears, daggers, all sorts of weapons, and some pieces of armor. Though the young caster didn't need that part of the ability, as he was more than fine when it came to his defenses.

It did cost him mana to create these weapons, but it was nothing compared to using his other metal-creation skill.

These weapons were now flying out one by one from his body as he focused his mind on controlling them. When he had first gotten the skill Metal Manipulation, he could manage only a few daggers. It rapidly progressed from three to four to five, and so on and so forth.

Now, more than twenty weapons that were far bigger than a dagger flew around him with erratic movements. Like a school of fish, they bombarded the poor warriors, who could only scream and run as the nearly two dozen weapons chased them down pointy-end first.

Seeing that this couldn't go on, Richard charged towards William as he released a shockwave of force. While the young caster's armor gave him incredible defenses, it did have its limits as he was blasted backward, momentarily losing control of some of the flying weapons.

However, he quickly stabilized himself as he raised his spear and met Richard's glowing sword with it. A mighty clash of caster and warrior ended as one would expect, with William pushed back, forced to retreat as a red gleam started enveloping Richard.

His blows got faster, as William was forced to retreat as he started feeling a bit dizzy from the impacts. It was like he was stuck inside a giant bell as the man hammered it with his sword. Without the enchantments, William would, without a doubt, be spitting out blood from internal injuries by now.

As he retreated by sliding backward, he didn't get far as a Powershot hit him in the chest, making him nearly fall over from the impact. The arrow naturally disintegrated as it hit the armor, but it did leave a slight dent and scratch where it had hit.

The archer himself wasn't in a much better state as his arm looked decrepit and weak. He looked in an even worse shape after more than twenty swords pinned his body to the ground after he was too weak to dodge.

William, wasting no time, slid forward as he simply manipulated his body to smash into Richard, who didn't manage to raise his shield in time. The spear struck down again and again but was reflected every time.

The spear he used was, of course, the epic-rarity skill Spear of Ferroras. It raised his physical stats significantly while wielding it, and the powerful curse placed upon it only made the weapon all the deadlier.

But while it could turn anyone it hit into metal, it only worked on living things, which meant that William had to penetrate flesh to activate it. Something Richard currently hadn't allowed him to do, as he either dodged or blocked every blow.

Neither of them was agility-focused in any way, but their speed was nevertheless impressive even to most light-warriors only due to the stats both men possessed.

But while they seemed equally matched at first, one had to consider the entire situation. Richard did manage to face him in melee combat, but this was all while William simultaneously focused on the many flying weapons as he suppressed all the other elites around him.

He also had to keep track of all the ranged attacks and the warriors who managed to approach him. While he could shrug off most attacks, some of them were genuinely troublesome - the most troublesome one which was to come.

A torrent of flame exploded from the side as William dodged backward frantically. Another flood soon followed as a caster who seemed himself to be on fire approached him.

William recognized the kind of skill the man used. A sacrificial spell not unlike what Herrmann had done to finish his armor. In return for consuming your life source, the skill allowed you to display power far above the usual.

The man was a candle flickering in the wind, as he with a yell, fired a torrent of flame behind him, propelling towards William. With a fright, the metal manipulator tried to get away but was blocked by Richard, who once again had raised his shield and erected the giant blue barrier to block him off.

With an explosion, the burning caster detonated himself like a living bomb, with William only barely managing to summon his trusty Wall of Iron in front of him to take the worst off the blow.

Heat washed over him as he was cooked within his armor. While the armor provided exceptional defense towards physical attacks, it was far from good against elemental ones. The pain was unbearable as he felt his arms and chest heat up and blister as he blocked the torrent of fire as the man slowly burned out.

Finally, every last piece of energy dispersed from the man as the flames died out. Not a single trace of the caster remained, save for the vast area of burned forest in the shape of a crescent moon as one side had been blocked off entirely by Richard.

The smoking armor was unmoving as Richard retracted his shield with a deep breath. His stamina was getting dangerously low after the fight with Desmond, as well as the blow he had just blocked.

The flying blades had dropped to the ground as they slowly started turning to mana once more as they dispersed. The Spear of Ferroras was also nowhere to be found, as it too had been dispelled. A total of eight people and one unmoving suit of armor remained in the clearing of ash.

An archer, two casters, and five warriors were all that remained. Not a single one of them unscathed, the wounds they had suffered after the fight with Desmond had only worsened. One of the warriors even missed an arm as William had managed to cut it off with one of his flying swords.

Despite the slight reprieve, none of them relaxed. No notification had been received which meant that the monster that dwelled within the smoking armor still lived.

Suddenly everything felt like something was wrong. Very wrong. The caster was the first one to notice as he exclaimed: "Watch out! He is doing something with the mana!"

At the exact same time, a figure came out of nothing. A man with only a single arm and a rapier flew past everyone as its tip found purchase in the man standing in the middle.

Richard groaned as he felt the thin blade penetrate him from behind, but he managed to twist his body and avoid getting hit in the heart. In the same motions, he turned and, with a swift cleave, beheaded the rapier-wielding warrior.

Which was the moment William's final attack arrived.

"Vortex of Steel."

The distorted voice sounded out from within the armor as the ground started shaking. Small shards of unprocessed metal started slowly rising up from the earth and gathered towards William. Followed by all other metal in the surroundings.

One had to remember exactly where they were. On a battlefield with dozens of bodies all within a few hundred meters. All of them with the equipment they had worn still on. Equipment that now lay unclaimed as their owners had died.

Armor, still with corpses in them, started flying towards the eye of the vortex - weapons, arrows, everything. This was soon followed by other tools and articles of metal. Every piece that remained within Hayden and Desmond's former base was now being sucked towards the youth as the concentration of metal around him only increased.

Even the hinges from the blown off gate found their way towards him. An unlucky warrior also started getting sucked in as he was impacted by an object, followed by another, some of them sticking to him.

Richard could only gape with his mouth wide open as the twister appeared before him.

“Disperse,” The voice sounded out once more.

The metal exploded out from the twister as it started expanding in scale. It carved a path through the forest, cutting up and even felling a few of the smaller trees. The storm of metal and corpses all hit the survivors as they were blasted apart.

One of them got hit by a nail in his eye, but before he could react, half a quiver worth of arrows smashed into his unprotected side. He only managed to get a single scream out before the torso of what had once been a heavy warrior collided with his head with the velocity of a speeding car, knocking him out instantly. More and more random things slowly tore him apart until he too joined the vortex as yet another object to hit his former comrades.

The storm was brief but effective as it slowly died down.

Only two living beings remained within hundreds of meters of the vortex's epicenter: the one who had summoned it and Richard. The warrior who had with all his might managed to hang onto his life, if only barely.

He was lying in a pile of battered armor and weapons as he breathed heavily. Both his arms and one of his legs were completely twisted, with his shield and sword nowhere to be found - a horrendous wound seeping out blood from where the warrior stabbed him just moments earlier.

The kneeling figure encompassed in the steel-looking armor slowly got up as the armor started retracting back into a breastplate.

What was revealed was a monstrous appearance, as every area of his body had suffered severe burns. Not a single spec of hair remained, and vast parts of his skin and flesh seemed to have melted away. But he lived.

Levitating, the corpse-like caster floated closer to Richard as the warrior listlessly looked up at the young man. He had been stupid... too stupid. The dog was too mad and had somehow managed to get far more powerful than he could ever believe...

Today was meant to be the day he solidified his position as the number one survivor in the tutorial. The day he became the rightful leader. He had so many plans, so many ambitions. He could have become so much...

"...Why?" he managed to get out with a hoarse voice that seemed to wheeze out at the end. It seems like one of his lungs had given out. He didn't have long left as he looked down and saw several sharp objects sticking out of his chest.

Yet he wanted to know. He had offered benefits, the illusion of a partnership. What was the mistake that led to this misunderstanding? In his own arrogance, even in his final moments, he didn't understand.

William answered with a voice even more horrific sounding than Richard's own.

"It was...inevitable. This outcome was always what was meant to happen. What I had planned," William began, as he struggled to get through the words. It was painful... but his pride and desire to gloat and get his message across overpowered that pain.

"You were a pawn all along. I used you as you wanted to use me and everyone else," William gasped out.

He laughed as he looked at the unmoving man, not even noticing that his eyes had already closed.

"But worst of all, you killed Herrmann! Herrmann was my friend, and you killed him! He is the one who made this armor, you know? Who made this all possible! We beat you together!"

His laughter only got louder as his voice started cracking.

"We got our revenge on all you fuckers! And after this, I will return and kill the rest of your herd of sheep! I will pile up their corpses as a tribute to Herrmann, show him that we did it! That we won!

"And then I will chase down that bastard archer and get my own revenge on him too! I will be the only one left in this shithole and show the system that I am indeed the best! That I am superior to every single fucking one of you..."

At this point, his voice barely came out as a whisper. Two small streams of water had managed to pour down from his eyes despite the burns.

Richard had already died. William knew it, but he didn't care.

William kept rambling on until his voice no longer came out. As his voice ran out of energy, so did the rest of his body as he collapsed on the ash-covered ground. Tears kept streaming down his cheeks as he looked towards the artificial sun that shone in the fake sky. His final thought as he passed out was of Herrmann, and how he had finally fulfilled his promise... and of how much emotions sucked.

William didn't know that this sudden influx of emotions he had never experienced before was of his own doing. Jake was perhaps the one with the most knowledge of the system due to the vast library in the challenge dungeon, and if William had read it, he too would be aware.

Evolution was guided by your Records, by your desires, goals, and dreams. William had wished to understand emotions... wanted to comprehend why people like Casper would prefer death over life due to such strong feelings, and how it could even allow him to grasp for such power.

He felt like he needed to understand why the war had turned as brutal as it did. He had wished to comprehend emotions more than anything... and his evolution had delivered. What was broken had been healed by his own desire. The floodgates had been opened to a new world of emotions.

Perhaps it was all a bit too much for the young mind that believed he had everything figured out. He thought himself to be a superior being due to his lack of emotions, but now perhaps these emotions would lead him to more extraordinary things than ever before.

He hadn't known any of this would happen.

But someone did.

A man stepped through nothingness as he, with an eternal smile, fished out a small crystal. Crushing it, tiny motes of energy entered the young caster's body. They did little more than making sure his health points didn't reach zero. He had overreached, and by all accounts, he should die. But the smiling man wouldn't allow that.

"You do not have my permission to die yet, now do you?" he spoke softly.

He could do no more for now. The system wouldn't allow it. Besides, if he went too far... he would also get needlessly involved. More so than he already had.

With those thoughts, the figure disappeared once more. Leaving the burnt caster on the ground, with only the small motes of light keeping him alive.