

## Hunter 69

### Chapter 69: Augur of Hope

Private tutors since he could barely walk, expensive private schools, and a support system surrounding him made up of the best money could buy. Graduated top of his class, got into the best university, and once more proved himself excellent, being at the top once more.

He had been in the papers, praised by everyone. But he had always tried not to let it get to his head. His father had been the “treat the janitor like the CEO”-type of person. His old man had even refused to hire him at his own company, telling him he had to go his own way.

Connections certainly had helped to begin with, but as he made his way into the corporate world, he once more excelled. At first, perhaps he was chosen because he was his father’s son, but now Jacob was selected because he was the best man for the job. A mark of honor for him.

But this... this shitty place wasn’t one where he excelled. This god-forsaken shithole called a tutorial wasn’t anything he had ever trained for or even dreamed of.

And yet he had tried his best. He had tried to make sure they all survived, and all returned home. But he had failed time and time again. His colleagues died one by one, and he was powerless to help them. His hands shivered whenever he held a sword, and his mind went blank when a beast came at him. He felt useless.

Even where he was supposed to be skilled, he failed. He couldn’t even help Jake, accidentally leading him into a trap and nearly getting him killed. His relationship with Caroline had soured after that. She had changed, perhaps in her own desperation. Jacob believed he could have still helped her, fixed their relationship, and gotten her back on the right path. Maybe it was a naive hope, but Jacob wanted to at least try.

Could... because even that he had fucked up. Not even something as basic as not parting without regret was possible for him. He had ignored Caroline when she left with Richard to attack the remnants of Hayden's camp. His last words had been "leave me alone," for fuck's sake.

Yet he tried again. Even after being broken, again and again, he got up. The tutorial counter was clear. Everyone was dead.

After they saw the number drop dramatically, the entire base had gathered. When the killing finally stopped, Jacob had done a headcount... and found every single person still living present, besides two.

Jacob had left together with Bertram to investigate what the hell had happened. What they found was pure mayhem. Corpses and shattered armor were strewn across a big area. They had called out for survivors, but silence had been their only answer.

They didn't have any healing potions or healers left... so even if they found someone, it was unsure if they could save the person. They hadn't stayed for long as Jacob had seen something that made him send Bertram back alone. Jacob stayed a while longer, contemplating what to do before he also returned.

Which led to the current situation. Jacob had done what he could to try and keep things running. But the situation was terrible. Everyone had lost friends or family in the battle, many even showing clear signs of having given up.

But he managed to keep them going. The two enigmatic survivors were a great boon there. No one knew who they were... which meant they could be anyone. Just that small shred of hope kept many going, and Jacob himself hoped that it was enough to ride out the rest of the tutorial. By then, hopefully, they could reunite with the rest of the world.

Jacob also hoped to return to the real world alive. He would fight, and he would survive.

But... Jacob knew who the two survivors were. He knew it was a false hope, but it was all he could offer them. On the battlefield, he had sent Bertram back because he spotted someone. It looked like a burnt corpse, but Jacob felt like he saw faint movement.

It was William. He was barely recognizable, but Jacob knew it was him. Jacob wasn't stupid and quickly put together everything that had happened, especially when he saw Caroline's metalized corpse.

William had killed them all.

And there he was. Unconscious and defenseless before him. With the starter-sword at his waist, he could kill him. Perhaps he should kill him.

Yet he turned and left.

Even after everything he had done... Jacob didn't wish to see him dead. Not because Jacob necessarily believed that William could be 'saved' or anything stupid like that. Jacob just didn't want to kill anyone.

Sitting down in the middle of the battlefield, he stared up into the sky. He truly hated this place, yet he refused to let it break him. Everyone was losing hope by the day, but Jacob felt responsible for keeping it alive.

Perhaps William would wake up before the tutorial was over... no, he would most certainly wake up and come to kill them all. If that is fate... then let it be so.

He had been stuck at level 24 for a long time in his class. A very long time compared to everyone else. The prompt had never appeared for him like everyone else. As the only person in the entire tutorial that he knew of, the evolution eluded him.

\*Class Evolution available\*

He didn't know why it came. Why now of all times. He hadn't killed anything... he had just been sitting alone, staring into the artificial stars above.

Letting the system humor him, he accepted the evolution. But compared to what he expected, he wasn't met with a selection of classes. Many had reported having at least two, with some just being a big shift from their original class. But Jacob only saw a single one.

Augur of Hope – When all is lost, most fall to their knees in defeat, but you became the shepherd to lead the lost. A hero to many, mentor to most, a guide to all. The Augur of Hope is a support class focused entirely on guiding and leading others. Your creed is not to fight; your fate to have others realize their destiny. How that is done is up to you. Stat bonuses per level: +8 Wis, +8 Will, +8 Vit, +8 Free Points

He barely skimmed through the description before he just accepted it.

\*The Holy Mother has invited you to her realm. Accept?\*

\*Umbra has invited you to her realm. Accept?\*

\*Rigoria the Maker has invited you to their realm. Accept?\*

\*Yggdrasil has invited you to her realm. Accept?\*

\*The Daofather has invited you to his realm. Accept?\*

\*Camicus has invited you to his realm. Accept?\*

\*The Eternal Servant has invited you to his realm. Accept?\*

\*Autemius has invited you to their realm. Accept?\*

\*Atlas has invited you to his realm. Accept?\*

\*The Seeker has invited you to their realm. Accept?\*

...

Jacob instantly received what he could only classify as spam. Hundreds, no now it was thousands of 'invitations' appeared before him. Every single invitation was not as simple as a simple message, however.

All of them seemed to carry some kind of intent within. A faint hint of what the ones inviting Jacob were all about...

Once more, Jacob just took in the feeling of them... but he knew that he would pick the first one. An action, which immediately made his vision turn black, as his entire world shifted.

A blinding light appeared before him as he felt solid ground beneath his feet. With a startle, he looked around as his vision slowly returned to normal. He knew he had gotten many system messages before obtaining the class but didn't feel like now was the time or place to go through them.

He stood within a great hall. No, calling it great was an understatement. This place was beyond massive. He couldn't even see either end as he saw pillars shoot into the sky all around him, each larger than the most prominent building he had ever seen. There wasn't even a ceiling, but a layer of clouds which the pillars disappeared into.

As he marveled at the sight, he suddenly heard a voice behind him.

“Quite beautiful, is it not?”

Turning around, he saw... a woman. Which was all his brain registered as he stood there dumbstruck. He couldn't 'see' her per-se, yet he knew that he stared at perfection. A feeling of reverence welled up in his chest that he didn't even feel the slightest desire to quench.

After what felt like minutes, he barely managed to compose himself as he stammered: “Y... yeah... beautiful.”

The woman waved her hand as a couch, and a table appeared before him. The table even had what seemed like newly-brewed tea just sitting there in a cup, ready to drink.

“Take a seat, Jacob,” she said as she ushered him towards the couch.

Jacob didn't even think. He just did what she said and sat stiffly down on the couch. The woman herself sat on a chair on the other side of the table as she picked up her cup of tea and started drinking. She was showing no intention of addressing him.

“What happened?” Jacob finally asked, after taking a few more seconds to compose himself.

“I must thank you for accepting my invitation,” she answered as she added. “As for why I invited you... there are many reasons.”

“What reasons? And why does getting a class upgrade lead to me being invited here? I didn’t hear about this happening to the others?” Jacob answered, his curiosity now exceeding his wariness.

“So many questions,” The woman laughed as she nevertheless answered them. “You initially caught my eye due to your affiliation with the Savant, which only got amplified with your connection to the Viper’s Chosen. A Hunter, it would seem. As for why you are here... far from everyone has anything special happen during a class evolution, so it is normal for others not to speak of it. But know that you are not the first of your tutorial to have an encounter like this.

“Another major reason I chose you is that you have what I am looking for in my followers - a worthy shepherd, and one able to bring more light into the people’s hearts. Your class now is perfect for just that. As you no doubt know, any god would gladly invite an Augur into their fold.”

Jacob took a while to digest the information. Was he being recruited into a religion of some sort? Did he even have a choice? Was this entire thing happening a good or a bad thing? But more importantly...

“Who, or what is the Hunter and the Savant?”

“The Savant is of interest to a friend of old, and the Hunter roused the Viper. I can no longer see precisely who he is, no doubt due to the Viper’s interference, but he should be a friend of yours,” she answered calmly as if she had all the time in the world.

Jake is the Hunter? he thought instantly. This also confirmed that he was alive. Though Jacob had kind of expected that, to begin with. Jake had escaped after all, and based on what he had seen, the guy could handle himself.



But what was this about “rousing the Viper”? Did he do something? Was this the reason why he became so strong?

“What do you mean when you say that he roused the viper?” Jacob asked.

The woman looked like she was reminiscing for a bit before she began: “The Malefic Viper is who I speak of, an ancient being that has been around since the dawn of the system itself. After a tragic event, he secluded himself from the rest of the multiverse for many eras... but after your world’s integration, he has returned. And your friend is the one who made him leave that seclusion.”

“... is it a good or a bad thing that this Viper has returned?” Jacob asked, a bit confused.

“Time will tell,” she answered with a smile. “I hope it will bring good with it. On a personal note, I am happy to see him no longer mope around in that empty realm of his.”

Jacob nodded along, as he quite honestly didn’t get half of what was being said.

“This may be presumptuous of me to ask... but is me coming here a good or a bad thing?” he asked.

“You seem to care a lot about good or bad, Jacob.” She answered with a giggle. “It all depends on what you do with being here. But if you had to put it in a box, I would call it a good thing.”

“Okay,” he said as his brain kept trying to comprehend the situation he found himself in. Yet he didn’t question her judgment... he felt unable to question it. “Why did you bring me here, then?”

“I wish to offer you a gift as well as a responsibility,” The woman answered. “The gift; my blessing, the responsibility; to serve beneath me. To help spread my word to your universe.”

Jacob furrowed his brow at this. This did seem very much like some kind of religion. Jacob had never been the religious type, so he honestly wasn’t sure how to feel about the offer.

“May I ask what spreading your word entails and to who exactly we pray?” he asked, trying to learn what exactly he was getting himself into.

On the other hand, the woman couldn’t hold herself back from giggling once more, mesmerizing Jacob completely. He was very sure by now that her charm was in no way natural but magical of some kind.

“The word is easy. To serve me, and to serve the Holy Light. My teachings are hope, justice, and righteousness - of fairness and love for one another. Of the punishment of the wicked, and self-actualization to become the best one can be,” she answered.

Jacob began to come to a shocking realization. One that he quickly got confirmed.

“As to who we pray... well, I don’t personally pray to anyone. But my followers pray to me.”

“Are you... God?” Jacob asked in disbelief. Was this God?

“A god,” she corrected. “Do not be so shocked; we aren’t like the ones you had heard of before the system. We are very much tangible entities, and as you can see, one can even meet their god. Though it is rare. If you wander far enough on your path, you too can step into godhood, Jacob, even if the path is long. But if you follow me, I shall help set you upon this path, though your success or failure will be entirely up to yourself as well as fate.”

Jacob had to take a while once more to compose himself after the bombardment of information and shocking revelations.

“If you wish to join me, I will give you a blessing and send you back to the tutorial. Our time here is limited, after all. I can only hold you here for so long before the system drags you back,” she continued before Jacob could formulate a response.

“Wait, if you are a god, why can’t you stop the system? And what is the system to begin with? What does it want?” Jacob said, failing to hold back some of the many questions he was struggling with.

“I am not all-powerful. No one is. As to what the system is... well, that requires an answer longer than we have time for,” she said patiently, despite the seeming lack of time. “I understand that you struggle with the system as a concept... but from my experience, it truly doesn’t want anything. It is simply there. It is like asking what gravity wants or why light won’t stop being bright. If you truly wish to learn of the system, do so once you become powerful enough.”

Jacob nodded at the response, as it did kind of make sense. Enough sense for him to not want to think about it further, as that would just take him down another spiral of wandering thoughts.

“What does getting this blessing entail?” he asked, getting back on track.

“One can only ever hold a single blessing, bestowed upon them by a deity. As to what the blessing is... it depends on the god. But no matter what kind of blessing, it will open up paths, meaning more skills and evolution-options. As to what I want... we can talk about that next time.”

As she said that, Jacob felt himself slowly start to fade away.

“So, what is your answer?”

Gritting his teeth, Jacob decided to take the chance. Perhaps he was just falling for the woman’s unearthly charm, but he still decided to give it a shot.

“Yes!”

With that, she reached out her hand and slightly touched his still fading cheek. “Goodbye, my child. May you fulfill your destined purpose.”

And with those words, Jacob felt his vision spin once more, as he found himself back on the ground where he had disappeared from. It felt like hours had passed, but it had likely not even been an hour. Jacob even briefly considered if it had all been a hallucination until he checked his notifications.

[Greater Blessing of the Holy Mother (Blessing – Greater)] – A worthy follower personally recognized by the Holy Mother. To become a speaker for the Primordial herself is a great privilege, given to few throughout the multiverse. Through the vestige of karma given to you, you have tapped into a bit of her holy power. +5% Intelligence, +5% Willpower. Grants access to many new paths. Only one blessing can be held at a time.

This was the first one he saw, as he was taken aback. It even gave stats... though his stats were still meager currently, he knew it had to be significant later on. The other effect, such as opening up new paths, had to be related to those evolutions and skills that she... no, the Holy Mother, his Patron, spoke of.

But this was only the beginning as he had gotten quite the benefits.

Still sitting only a few meters from the nearly dead Savant, William, he went through all that had changed him, knowledge even entering his mind as he began going through all the notifications.