

Hunter 94

Chapter 94: Beers & Exposition

At the edge of a crater in the middle of the forest, two figures sat drinking. The crater's epicenter still carried the outline of what had once been a person with small smidgens of blood here and there.

Around the two people drinking were several empty bottles. They chatted as they drank down the familiar liquid that Jake hadn't tasted for over two months. It was oddly nostalgic despite it not even being that long. It took him back to simpler days with way less fighting and death.

Of course, he was still thoroughly grounded in his new reality by the scaled man he was drinking with.

They had chatted about useless stuff for the most part. Jake had asked a few questions about the system, though, and gotten some useful pieces of information.

Halfway through the conversation, Jake took out a small notebook he had kept with many questions he had built up surrounding the system. It took a bit of convincing, but he managed to get the Viper to spill the beans on some details. They both knew that it was just Jake's attempt to keep his mind occupied, but the god relented.

One of the questions were related to the dungeon titles:

"Nah, the dungeons titles are as normal as they come - 5 levels to the title at E-rank, increasing with every race evolution. Don't worry too much about it; you will get those done quite naturally more often than not. The stat bonuses increase as well. It is pretty normal for most everyone at the higher ranks to cap out at least the Dungeoneer title before every evolution."

Jake did try to get some info on actual dungeons but got shut down on that one. The Viper seemed quite adamant that for Jake to find out himself would be way more fun. The only thing he said was that dungeons came in many different forms, some of them not even recognized as real dungeons. They were also apparently temporal abnormalities that could “remember” who entered it and generated a new subspace for every new party or individual.

He also managed to get some precious info on the loot he had received:

“Gear? Eh, it has pretty set rules, actually. One can only get so much in a specific stat before equipment no longer gives anything - 20% per individual stat. But you can only get a maximum increase of 15% to your total stats, so you can’t get the full 20% in all of them. And yes, that’s after all other bonuses such as titles, skills, consumables, and so on. Making the number of stats you can get from gear increases even further. Strong gets stronger and all that. Though the stats from gear, as you have no doubt noticed, don’t receive any percentage bonuses.”

He even managed to get some excellent info on affinities.

“Affinities are just what kind of mana your body is naturally aligned with. Most of it is innate and cannot be changed unless you do some really wacky shit. Classes can also offer a skill that grants you affinity towards a type of mana - even one you usually would never be able to achieve.

“That isn’t to say that affinities are set. They get more locked in the stronger you get, but it is possible to influence them somewhat at a low level. Environmental factors often do play a role. In other words, if you are born on a planet filled with water, chances are you are going to have water-affinity.

“And if you wanted to, for example, get the water-affinity, it may be possible if you decided to reside within a space with only mana of that affinity for a long enough period. But your level of affinity likely won’t ever reach a high level, so most just stick with whatever they have.

“As for how many different affinities there are? Not telling!”

Jake had to be honest that he felt a lot better after only a few hours of chatting. He still felt like a piece of shit, but it was better. But the Viper did have one question.

“How did you know about Eversmile? Pretty sure time was stopped, and you looked like you were very much affected,” the Viper asked.

“I don’t really know. At one moment, I am just sitting there, and the next, I feel an influx of information in my mind, just a bunch of impressions bundled together. It showed the guy appear, make the corpse disappear, you coming, some talking or something, and then he was gone again,” Jake answered honestly, trying to describe the weird feeling.

It clearly came from his sphere. It was as if his sphere had kept observing even after his mind was stopped, and upon resuming, it threw everything that had happened at him. It wasn’t painful or anything, and the knowledge was way more comfortably digested and understood than even what he got through a skill by the system.

“Interesting. Not to snoop, but it is related to your bloodline, right?” the Malefic Viper asked.

“Yeah,” Jake answered, not wanting to hide anything. He knew that if the Viper wished to do him harm, he would already be a goner either way. And his intuition told him that the god in front of him genuinely didn’t have any malicious intent... despite his name.

“I figured as much. But the next time anyone asks you that, act stupid or something. Bloodlines aren’t to be spoken of liberally,” the Viper warned.

“Yeah, I guess you shouldn’t share the details of your skills,” Jake answered, seeing the logic in the words.

“Skills are one thing; bloodlines are another,” the Viper said, shaking his head. “The details of your bloodline should be your closest guarded secret. The fact that you have one cannot be hidden, but what it does most certainly can. And while even the general power of it can be sensed by certain means, the specific details are only ever known to you and those you have shared it with.”

“Why bloodlines specifically?” Jake asked, a bit confused. Yes, his was most certainly extremely powerful... but why did he need to keep it under wraps?

“Because bloodlines have a few distinctions that set them apart from everything else, one of them being...” the Viper said as he turned a bit grave. “...they are hereditary.”

“I remember reading it somewhere...” Jake said, before asking. “How the hell does that even work?”

“Jake, do you know what bloodlines even are?” the Viper asked, still sober.

“From what I gathered, innate abilities of some kind?” the hunter asked.

“They are so much more than that... and yet so much less. Bloodlines are innate, as you say, but to call them abilities would be wrong. Bloodlines simply are. The system has granted all the skills you possess; they are given. Controlled by a particular set of rules. Bloodlines aren’t.

“A bloodline exists outside the system. They aren’t controlled by it, simply interpreted. One could say that a bloodline is the one thing that truly belongs to you. That has always belonged to you, always been a part of you. Which isn’t to say bloodlines and the system don’t affect each other. They most certainly do. Just as much as any other part of what makes you, you. If not more.

“So I hope you can understand why many covet a beneficial bloodline. Why many factions, clans, and powers want to have a bloodline enter their fold. It represents a vast advantage above others. A bloodline doesn’t take up a skill slot; it isn’t capped or controlled. If it gives anything positive, it is pure gain with no drawback.

“I cannot even begin to tell you the advantage a good bloodline can give you. But remember that while a bloodline can be a blessing, it can also be a curse. Not just because others want it, but because the bloodline itself can be more a burden than a gift. From what I have gathered, you have one of the good ones. Treasure it, explore it, but keep that treasure buried deep and only share it with those you truly trust.

“I am not saying that you shouldn’t enter a faction or create connections with your bloodline as a bargaining chip. All I am saying is to do it with caution. And if anyone ever tries to force you... well, throw me a thought. I haven’t done a nice massacre for a while.”

The long speech contained a lot...

None of the books he had ever read contained even close to that much on Bloodlines. Everything he knew about them was from the system or some vague mentions during the challenge dungeon. He did ask Casper after he unlocked it back then, and he didn't know a thing. He had a lot of questions, but especially one burned in the back of his mind.

"How did I get a bloodline? And what determines what it does?"

"You didn't get a bloodline; you have a bloodline. And nothing determines what it does. You are your bloodline; to talk about the two of them as if separate is nonsensical. You have always had your bloodline, even before the system. Albeit far weaker and inactive for the most part."

"I think I would remember having supernatural powers before the initiation," Jake answered, a bit skeptical.

"It may have been inactive, but based on the feeling it gives me, I doubt it. Think about what it does very carefully. Can you truly say that you haven't felt even a tinge of its effects in your life? It wouldn't be much, just small occurrences or areas where you did almost impossible things."

Jake fell into thought at the question. Maybe he had? Thinking about it, his bloodline just made him better at ordinary things. It gave him great intuition, enhanced instincts, and great awareness of his surroundings if he had to boil it down.

He had always had a pretty good gut feeling about things, which is also why he did so well at his job. Of course, his personal fault of often ignoring his gut feelings to avoid problems hindered that effect a bit.

As for better instincts? Who is to tell? He had great reflexes and the ability to control his body – one of the reasons why he had been good at archery. His bloodline also increased the perception stat, and the only stat he had entered the tutorial with at 10 was perception. Which meant it was already as good as it could be.

“Yeah... maybe I did,” he said after a bit of thinking. It was honestly hard to say. It was as the Viper said. His bloodline just made him more... him. It increased innate things that all humans had. Everyone had gut feelings; everyone had instincts and that weird ‘eyes on the back of their head’-feeling if someone stared at them. Jake had just taken it all to the next extreme level.

“Just keep it to yourself is all I am saying. It is quite possibly your greatest advantage over others,” the Viper said, as he emptied the bottle in his hand.

“How common is it to have a bloodline?” Jake asked.

“Quite rare, though more common the higher rank you get. They are a lot more common for new initiates like you, but new bloodlines appearing in older universes are quite rare. Especially the useful ones,” the god said, fishing out yet another bottle from empty air.

“Why is it more common at higher ranks? Didn’t you say that it is something you are born with?” Jake asked, a bit confused.

“Yeah, that is how bloodlines appear. But it isn’t always how they are attained. Some bloodlines are also just awakened at a higher rank.”

“How could you then attain a bloodline at a higher rank? Is it possible to steal a bloodline?” the hunter asked, considering the horrible implications of that.

“Hah, no. I told you already, you are the bloodline, and the bloodline is you. Absolutely inseparable,” the Viper said with a small laugh.

“I guess I have to explain a bit about souls. The bloodline doesn’t really exist in your body but within your soul - the deepest part of your soul. A soul is made up of many layers, each serving a function.

“The outermost layer is what you use to interact with the world. It holds your senses, your thoughts. If it is broken, you lose consciousness. That layer will just regenerate with time. Heck, yours has already been broken a time or two. A lot of skills and magics interact with this layer.

“The second layer holds memories and experiences. This layer is far harder to get to, but it is possible through magic. This is the layer that many schools of magic, such as mind magic, hypnosis, and illusions, touch upon.

“The third layer is the subconscious layer. This is quite similar to the second layer in that it pretty much still holds everything the second layer does, just in a weird condensed form. This is where your personality and your motor skills and such reside. Touching this layer with magic is only done by the most powerful, and even then, it is often only to affect it slightly.

“The fourth layer holds your energies - your mana, your stamina, and your health. Affecting this layer is far easier than any of the others, funnily enough. But to permanently affect it is borderline impossible.

“Finally, there is the core. This is often referred to as the Truesoul. This part does only one thing, and yet it does everything. It holds your Records. Everything you are, everything you have ever done, all your stats, your skills. No skill can touch upon the Truesoul. It is only the system that can ever touch this layer.

“It is deep within this Truesoul that your bloodline dwells. It has come to be without the system, and it is intricately interconnected with your Records. In fact, some say that the Status Menu is just an overview of your Truesoul given by the system.”

Jake sat quietly listening to the useful exposition. Without a doubt, this conversation had been the most informative he had had since the initiation by the system. But one thing did bug him.

“You said that one could attain a bloodline though, and if it is in this Truesoul, then how can anyone get it? Didn’t you say that bloodlines were outside the system?”

“The system cannot create bloodlines, but it can recycle them. When you genuinely die, your Truesoul returns to... somewhere. It returns to the system. From there, it can be recycled. While the system cannot or perhaps will not, touch the bloodline, it can extract it.

“This bloodline can then be granted to someone else. This isn’t to say that it is easy to get one. It is among the highest tier of rewards the system ever gives out. It can only be earned through extraordinary means and/or incredibly difficult trials or tests. From this, it's quite clear how much the system values bloodlines,” the Viper finished as he handed Jake yet another bottle of beer.

“Kind of curious, do you have a bloodline?” Jake asked, knowing full well that he had just been told that sharing it was not advised.

“Well yeah, but I wasn’t a lucky bastard like you. Mine is the attained kind,” the Viper said in a mocking tone.

“Sorry for being born oh mister ‘I am a literal god,’” Jake joked back. “So, what rank were you when you got your bloodline?”

“Getting an inch and asking for a mile,” the poor god shook his head in faux disappointment. “I was already a god when I got mine. So yeah, I had to get all the way to godhood without being a cheat.”

“Once again, I humbly apologize, oh supreme one,” Jake snickered. “Does your bloodline also give a stat increase?”

Raising an eyebrow, the Malefic Viper asked: “Does yours? Percentage or flat value? What stats?”

“It increases perception by a percentage. Was 5% at that weird G-rank, 10% at F-rank, and now 15% at E-rank,” Jake answered as he took another chug of his beer, savoring the taste.

“And I assume this is far from the only thing the bloodline does?” the Viper asked.

“Nah, it does a bunch of other things. Even upgraded a rare skill straight to Ancient-rarity before just transforming it entirely and allowing me to make a Legendary skill. Oh yeah, that netted me another title,” Jake said nonchalantly. It shouldn’t be that fantastic in his own mind with how powerful bloodlines sounded, but still somewhat useful.

“Jake,” the Viper said. “From this day on, NEVER talk about the details of your bloodline again. Especially not the stat part and the skill.”

“Wait. Why? Is there something wrong with that?” Jake asked, taken aback. “Doesn’t your bloodline do something similar?”

“No, it doesn’t,” the Malefic Viper said with a severe look. “Not even close.”