

Hunter 95

Chapter 95: Of Fate & Destiny

“Okay... no talking about bloodlines...” Jake said, a bit hesitant but not arguing back.

They both sat in silence for a while before the Viper spoke again. “But... it does explain quite a few things...”

“What do you mean?”

“About this entire tutorial of yours. This tutorial was more than a little... unique. Eversmile said that it was ‘ruined’, but I think ‘changed’ would be a better word.”

“... again, what do you mean?”

The Malefic smiled at him as he leaned back. “I guess we should talk about it... so let me tell you a story Jake... about a particular tutorial during the integration of the 93rd Universe.

“In this story, we have two main characters - one who enters with his nine colleagues, and one who enters on his lonesome. The lonesome one quickly finds his stride as he discovers a wand and kills the ones he entered with. This shall be the impetus for him to realize his destiny.

“As for the other, he struggles a bit more. But he has some competent people around him who help him in the start. But already on the first day, it goes wrong when a large beast attacks them, and they lose two.”

Jake looked confused as he interrupted. “That isn’t what happened, we-“

“This isn’t your story Jake, so stop interrupting,” the Viper said with a playful smile. “This is the story of what was to happen. A story of fate and destiny.

“Now, where was I? Oh yeah, two dead colleagues. Anyway, they struggle to survive and end up making camp to rest for the night. One of our protagonist’s colleagues sits watch alone for a while as they try to get sleep. But the night would not turn out to be a restful one.

“Three attackers appear in the night, and despite his efforts, the one on watch dies. Jacob mourns as he has lost three friends that day. Dennis, Lina, and Jake.”

Now even more confused, Jake did all he could not to interrupt, as he had even forgotten the bottle of beer in his hand.

“They fight off the ambushers but take injuries. They are soon found by a man named Richard and his lieutenant Nicholas. Half-coerced, they join him.”

After that, the Viper pretty much summarised what had happened to his colleagues while he was in the dungeon. How they had struggled and how many had died as they were split up. But there were some differences that Jake quickly noticed...

“I killed Nicholas,” he said, instantly giving an apologetic look as he had interrupted.

“That you did, Jake. You not being dead at this point sure screws up the story, right? Anyway, let me continue.

“Now, our second protagonist is our old friend William. The chosen one. Born with an incredible innate talent for mana manipulation and a mentality very suited for one striving for the top. Ruthless and determined.

“But he is also broken in many ways. He is arrogant, delusional, and most importantly, he is limited in comprehending the world. He does not understand emotions, which will come back to bite him in the ass down the line but is very beneficial in the early days.

“Ah, but I wouldn’t worry because the screenwriter will fix this through some character development. The screenwriter, Eversmile, will pay off other divine actors, and they will outsource to their mortal counterparts in the tutorial. Make sure he develops in the intended direction. Gets the things he needs when he needs them.

“He teams up with a few essential side characters. While Richard manipulates William, Richard himself is slowly being manipulated by his former right-hand-man, Nicholas.”

The Viper then once more summarized what happened after he left the dungeon. Again, with slight changes that the god made sure to point out. When he came to the final fight, he summarized it but added.

“Without Nicholas’ betrayal at the final moment, William got put out of commission for far too long. In this version, William is also betrayed because Nicholas fears his power, and he ends up fleeing the battlefield - wounded but still alive and able to keep up his leveling speed.

“Hayden is also still alive in this play, which is why the fight is so equal, to begin with.

“Nicholas returns to camp, where things go downwards. He is even crueler than Richard and forces the second protagonist Jacob to still work for him and keep everyone in line. Those who step out of line are openly killed... or worse.

“Yet Jacob holds on to hope and gives them hope too... finally realizing his own destiny as he becomes an Augur. He begins to truly lead the camp as he grows in levels, with even Nicholas coming to respect him as a spiritual guide, with Jacob happy to remain a supporting character.

“Until one day, William returns. Far more powerful than before, he slaughters every single fighter in the camp, Nicholas included. He did not come for the crafters, but he changes his mind when he gets the quest to be a leader. He is a perfectionist, after all.

“Jacob pleads, and in the end, is allowed to save the souls of the crafters. After that, he is ‘killed’ and ascends like in your version.

“After that, William goes and does his own thing, the sole survivor of the tutorial. With the quest in the bag, he travels and kills until the end.

“And as such ends perhaps the most interfered with tutorial of the 93rd Universe, if it isn't the most messed with ever. With Eversmile having spent far more resources than reasonable but getting a disciple out of it, the Holy Mother an Augur and your pal Casper still an undead. Counting the bodyguard of the Augur, Bertram, only four survivors out of 1200 remained. Me, still within my own realm, doing nothing.”

“But that isn't how it went,” Jake concluded.

“No, that is what was meant to happen. What fate had in store, and what had been divined by the most powerful of gods. Yet introduce one new element, one single actor not following the script, and destiny goes down the shitter.

“A single hunter that didn't die the night he was supposed to. Holding a bloodline that was not part of what was divined, and the will and determination to shatter the chains of fate over and over again.”

“So... to summarize, a bunch of dickwad gods played... well, gods, and manipulated everything in this tutorial to get what they wanted? Or at least tried to?” Jake asked, more than a little annoyed at the notion.

“Pretty much,” the Viper smiled.

“I am still not sure I get that whole destiny or fate crap,” Jake said, wondering out loud. “If a single variable, a single moment of chance, can alter the course so significantly, can you even call it fate?”

“Normally, yes. Fate, in my view, is just a glorified analysis of probabilities. With the support of skills, stats, and the system, they tend to often be correct. Especially when some are satisfied surrendering

themselves to their fates once they know it. Or go one step further, and try to realize an intended destiny, even if it is a bad one: your friend Jacob, case in point.

“Eversmile, The Holy Mother, and those gods that Eversmile paid off did much to direct fate in the direction they wanted. They divined what would happen and made slight changes to get what they wanted. Sacrificed pawns and played their game. Jacob being a willing pawn. This is likely why he could become an Augur, to begin with.

“Augurs don’t challenge fate; they work to realize it. And when fate is written by the gods...”

“Yeah, I get it... I still don’t like it, though. When am I to know if I am doing things because some god wants me to or if I make my own decision? How do I know I am not just following some fate or destiny that you created for me, and that this entire conversation is just an attempt to make me do something?” Jake muttered, clearly frustrated.

“You don’t. But I can promise you that I won’t try to guide you down some preset path I want you to walk. That isn’t how friendship works. I can give you tips and advice, but I will never tell you what to do. The reason why I gave you Shroud of the Primordial is because I abhor those who try to manipulate destiny and fate.

“With it, only the most powerful of gods can possibly influence it. You will be a constant spanner in their carefully constructed machine of fate. Every single one of your actions will fuck it up to the level of them not even bothering,” the Malefic Viper explained with a toothy smile.

“So... I will piss off a bunch of gods just by existing?”

“Nah, don’t take it that bad. Most gods don’t try to mess with fate. Even the powerful ones, such as the Holy Mother, only tend to follow fate and use it as a tool to judge who is worthy of uplifting and who is not. Only maniacs like Eversmile fuck with it on a large scale like this tutorial.”

“Wait, won’t William return to Earth too? Won’t that mean that Eversmile fellow will keep fucking with things there to try and... wait, what does he even want?” A question he should likely have asked a long time ago.

“I don’t know, but if I am candid, I don’t even think he is that annoyed at what happened here today. In his mind, it will just spice up whatever insane experiment he has ongoing,” the Viper said with a shrug. “Though I am positive he is at least a little annoyed.”

“This is all a lot of information I don’t have any idea what to do with...” Jake sighed as he looked up towards the artificial sun. “It all feels needlessly complicated...”

The Malefic Viper couldn’t help but hold back a laugh as he spoke in a cheerful voice.

“And that, Jake, is why I have never cared much for the concepts of fate and destiny. Because the actors that truly matter are unconfined by it, they are the ones who go above and beyond what their destiny has in store. Not a single god has ever been divined to godhood, not one genuinely remarkable being destined to reach their station.

“I was once divined to die at only D-grade. Tens of times at C-grade. Hundreds after that by seers, soothsayers, augurs. One after another, I shattered their feeble divinations.

“So all I ask of you, Jake, is to keep doing exactly what you already are. Keep telling destiny how much of a little bitch it is, and reach for power that was never fated to be yours. Because fuck fate, fuck destiny. The path you forge is your own, and don’t ever let anyone tell you otherwise.

“You call it complicated? Well, it fucking is, so stop giving a shit about it. You do you, and I think you’ll be just fine. Learn from your mistakes, improve yourself, never be satisfied with where you are or what you have.

“Anyway. Today you shattered fate and fucked up Eversmile’s plans with a slight assist from me. Just put William out of your mind and focus on what you need to do. If I recall correctly, you have another dungeon to clear.”

“All in a good day’s work,” Jake said, smiling. “Thanks, man... I needed to get my head straight.”

“No problem. That’s what your best-bud-god is for,” the Viper said, returning the smile.

“But there is one thing that has been bothering me for a very long time,” Jake said, as he suddenly turned severe. “Don’t you have a name?”

The Viper looked at Jake for a few moments before he burst out laughing. “I totally forgot! Man, this is just fucking awkward...”

Extending his hand forward, he made a big goofy smile. “Name’s Vilastromoz, better known as the Malefic Viper.”

Taking the hand, Jake shook it as he smiled. "Jake Thayne, better known as just Jake. Nice to meet you... Villy."

Grimacing a bit, the Viper chuckled. "While I have been called Vilas before... that one is a first. I am pretty sure I know of at least a handful of religious organizations who would have you lynched for such blasphemy."

"Oh, come on, Villy... what if I promise never to badmouth blue mushrooms again?" Jake laughed at the threat of being hunted down by several multiversal forces.

"Deal!" Vilastromoz, or Villy, said with a victorious grin. "You escaped righteous retribution this time!"

"Lucky me," Jake said before he actually turned a bit serious. "You told me he would bring William back to life, right?"

"Yeah, but it is a one-time thing through the method I am suspecting. The psycho kid won't be able to be revived again, so his next death will very likely be his last," the Viper explained.

"About that... could you promise me something?"

"Depends?"

“If I ever die,” Jake said without hesitation, “promise not to revive me.”

“Wait, why?” the Viper asked, genuinely confused.

“Because it would feel... hollow. I don’t want to have some divine measure up my sleeve that can save me or some literal deus ex machina descend to fix me if I fuck up... I want my battles to be of life and death. If my opponent is risking their lives, it would feel unfair not to do the same. It would take the excitement out of it... lessen the value of the challenge... it... wouldn’t feel right. To know that ‘I won’t really die’ would be... boring.” Jake said, trying to explain his emotion as best he could.

The Viper looked at him with hesitation before he answered... “Alright, as long as it’s your challenges and your fights. I don’t want you killed because of some rogue element who wants revenge on me through you. Deal?”

“Deal,” Jake said as they shook hands for the second time that day. “Anyway, time for me to head off... I got stuff to do, and I am kind of on a timer. We aren’t all bored immortal gods after all.”

“Yep, ya better get going. Cya around, and don’t get in over your head,” Vilastromoz said while he swept up all the beer bottles, making the area look like he had never been there.

The moment Jake was out of sight, however, he frowned a bit.

He had spoken a lot about fate... and how he had masked Jake through the Shroud of the Primordial. It was enough to hide him from any but the strongest of gods who specialized in divination and karma... even enough for it to obscure Eversmile’s sight slightly.

But... there still was one person who could predict it. Himself.

When he made his prediction to see what would happen if he made William go to Jake, Vilastromoz clearly saw the result. But he also saw a bit beyond that.

It wasn't perfect, as even his own skill obscured his prediction slightly... but he saw enough... and no matter how he looked at it, the result was clear.

Jake wasn't fated to win against the King of the Forest.