

## Hunter 96

Chapter 96: William & Jake

The smiling white-haired man stepped through the void, into what appeared to be an ordinary western suburban house. But outside the windows was not the streets of the suburb, but a vast void of nothingness.

He waved his hand and summoned a broken, nearly body-shaped mess of metal, blood, and gore. With another wave, time itself reversed, and the armor returned to pristine condition once more. Everything returned to normal, except for the life of the person inside the armor.

Death, even with the system, was not that easily circumvented. To restore a broken body was simple. But to truly revive someone who has died... difficult. Difficult and costly. Even to the gods of the highest order.

Even if one managed to revive the dead, it often came with several drawbacks - mental issues, inability to utilize their stats, missing skills, etc. But perhaps most crippling was the loss of a future. The inability for the revived to progress properly further on their own path.

There were ways to truly revive the dead. Ways for it to have not a single drawback... but that required several conditions to be met, and often special items or skills with a considerable cost. Luckily, Eversmile had all of those.

Flicking his wrist, he took out a small golden leaf. [Golden Leaf of Yggdrasil]. An item far from easily obtained, and one that couldn't be bought no matter how much money one spent. To Eversmile, it had cost him a favor to the old tree herself. A hefty price, but he had believed it to be worth it.

Yet, it had cost him another favor for something as simple as retrieving the body of an E-grade mortal. A cost he had not expected. Eversmile did feel an ounce of annoyance towards his fellow Primordial for exploiting his desires, but it was par for the course for the Malefic One.

Eversmile moved the body of William to a bed in the room and lay the leaf on the young teenager's forehead. Moments later, it started shining and sunk into his brain, disappearing.

Moments later, the teenager's eyes opened wide as he screamed towards the ceiling.

William's last memories flickered in his mind. The sudden pain, the shaking, the disorientation, and the feeling of powerlessness. And then... nothing.

He had died. William felt it. He remembered dying; he remembered how it all turned to nothing. Everything he had been, everything he could be snuffed out in mere moments.

"Good, you seem awake and aware," William heard a voice say as he sat up with shock. He saw a weird-looking man with a creepy smile on his face.

"What the fuck happened, and why am I here?" the teenager asked as he jumped up from the bed.

"You died, of course," the old man said, "and I revived you."

William looked with wide eyes at the creepy old man as he kept smiling. He had really died...

“Why would you do that?”

“Because, little one,” he said as he ran his hand through his beard, “I find you worth studying.”

“So, what, you revived me to be some fucking guinea pig or something?”

“No, no, not at all. I revived you for you to continue being you. Of course, your death changed things a little, but perhaps I can turn this to my advantage,” Eversmile said, smiling as always.

“What would you say to becoming my disciple, little one? To become my student, and on your path to power, so shall I learn from you. I believe this would be very mutually beneficial.”

“Disciple? What are you on about? Where the hell am I, and what happened to the damn tutorial? What the fuck is going on!?” William asked, distraught at the situation.

In a few minutes, he had gone through dying, being revived, finding himself transported to who knows where, and now asked by a creepy old smiling man to become his disciple. What the hell was this?

“The tutorial is over for you. You failed it the moment you died. But don’t worry, you will still get a reward of some sort. But you have lost half of your points and the qualifications to receive any extra bonus awards based on what happens in the tutorial moving forward,” Eversmile answered patiently.

“I took your body from the tutorial to where we are now. Just a small spot I picked, and I hope you like the surroundings. I hope they are comforting.”

William looked around him for the first time and noticed... this was his damn house. His parent’s house. He saw the familiar globe on his desk, his bookcase, dresser, and he had been lying on his own bed.

“Are we on Earth?” he asked, his eyes darting around the room.

“No, it is still transforming. I just assumed that familiar surroundings would prove helpful.”

“Where the fuck are we then? And how did you get my house to wherever here is?” William yelled out as he tried looking down a window. A window that only showed pure darkness.

“This isn’t truly your house; I just remade it to look like it. Copied it, if you will. Why, do you not find it suitable?” Eversmile asked, raising an eyebrow.

“No, I fucking don’t! This is creepy as fuck, you are weird as fuck, and this entire fucking thing is fucked!” William screamed out.

“Now, now, calm down, little one,” Eversmile said, still smiling amicably. “I do not wish you any harm at all. I understand your frustration, but please, ask of me anything, and I shall try to accommodate or explain.”

“First of all, get me out of this creepy ass house and tell me who the fuck you are already!” William yelled, veins showing on his neck.

“The first one is easy,” the old man said, as he waved his hand.

The entire house turned to small wisps of lights little by little as William lost his footing but kept floating where he had been. The whole house disintegrated in a matter of moments, leaving the two floating in the vastness of nothing, the only source of light left a single lamp from the building still suspended between them.

“As for who I am?” he said, his smile growing a bit larger. “I am known as Eversmile of the Twelve Primordials. I am a god, but more than that, I am a scholar. I hold many other titles, little that hold any meaning to you; just know that I wish to learn about you. From you.”

Having once more lost his bearings, William looked around at the void surrounding him, as he felt genuine fear. He felt that with a single thought the being in front of him could make him cease to exist or condemn him to live out the rest of his days in this... nothingness.

“Wha... what do you want?” William stammered out.

“I want you as my disciple. My follower. I wish to teach you and see you prosper from that knowledge,” Eversmile answered, unconcerned with the mortal’s apparent fear. His aura was bearing down on William, indifferent with the distraught it brought him.

“Why... what do you want me to learn?” the teenager got out after a bit.

“Karma, little one,” The old man said. “The bonds that bind us all together, the connections we form willingly or unwillingly. The feeble strings of fate that bind us together, the unbreakable chains that make two lovers inseparable.

“The power that binds our words and actions together, the power that judges the truth from the lies. A concept none can escape from, that affects us all. The favors owed, the promises made, and, perhaps, the one most interesting of all for you, the blood debts owed.”

William just looked at him, unable to comprehend what was going on, but a single figure appeared in his mind when he heard the last part.

He shook unwillingly as the memories just before he felt his mind rattled come forth like a tidal wave. The final word he heard a cold “die,” the last thing he saw was those two eyes staring at him... William was afraid... he didn't want to meet those eyes again... ever... they regarded him like he was some pathetic bug...

“I...I don't-“ he muttered.

Eversmile just kept smiling as he saw the young man before him slowly deteriorate mentally.

While Vilastromoz and his Chosen had sidetracked his experiment, it didn't mean it was ruined. Oh no, far from it. This was good too. But he did plan on making sure that the subject didn't encounter the Viper's Chosen any time soon. He had a feeling the results of that would be... unfortunate.

And not for the Chosen.

Jake walked through the forest once more, still savoring the taste of beer in his mouth. It was amazing how something so normal for him less than two months ago felt so damn good now.

He had learned a lot from the conversation... and it had helped him get his head straight.

It felt nice to know that apparently, his bloodline was pretty damn good. The things about fate and destiny and all that crap were really far above his paygrade. Jake just wanted to hunt and challenge himself right now... he didn't want to or feel like he had the time or desire to think about such needlessly complicated subjects.

Also, it made him think back on something he had asked just after the Viper had summoned the beers:

"Won't it mess up the tutorial that you have come here?"

"Nah, I didn't do anything, did I? The system can be pretty lax when the interference is non-existent like this. But if I went and actually did something to help you... well, I don't even think I could," the Viper had answered, shrugging.

Jake wasn't sure exactly how much or how little the gods could actually do in the tutorial. He assumed there were some limitations. Why wouldn't Eversmile have just saved William before Jake killed him if there wasn't?

Walking through the forest, Jake was finally able to think a bit more clearly about what had happened. The entire fight, if you can even call it that, had been over in an instant.

William had clearly not been prepared and had underestimated Jake to the extreme. He hadn't been even five meters away at the end, hadn't been on guard at all.

If he had been ready, perhaps it would have been a fight. But instead, he was smashed into the ground before he could react, the dark mana, as well as the impact, disorientating him. He hadn't managed to muster any retaliation as Jake had bombarded him with blasts of mana right after.

The caster had low vitality and toughness, something entirely normal for a caster. Jake had far higher agility, as one would expect from an archer. Coupled with a powerful weapon, a rare quality skill, and the element of surprise, it wasn't that surprising of a result.

Opening his notification, he finally saw the messages he had received - the first one of the kill itself.

\*You have slain [Human (E) - lvl 42 / Metal Savant - lvl 60 / Novice Smith – lvl 24] Experience earned. 72.654.214 TP earned\*

He was a bit shocked that he had reached level 60 in his class, especially considering how easily he had died. Also... what was better, prodigy or savant? Maybe similar? Damn, he should have checked the notifications before the Viper left so that he could have asked him.



The other part that surprised him was the number of tutorial points. That was actually a lot. Jake had more than William, even before he had just gotten half of his, but that still meant William had gathered nearly 150 million tutorial points.

That was the same as around 4000 level 40 mobs, which quite honestly was just far more than Jake had imagined. But if he thought about it... how many beasts did the parties kill to clear the entire outer area? And William had apparently killed close to every other survivor. The number of creatures they must have killed together had to be... immense. And William had gotten half of that.

Now Jake had gotten half of his. He opened the tutorial panel, the full one, for the first time in a while.

[Tutorial Panel]

Duration: 5 days & 23:16:41

Total Survivors Remaining: 1/1200

TP Collected: 257.547.125

His tutorial points were honestly quite insane. 257 million. More than 100 million of those from the sewer dungeon alone. He had killed a lot of rats. A lot.

He had spent around 5 hours talking with the Viper. Considering how little time he had left to clear an entire dungeon and then face the King of the Forest, it did seem like a waste of time on the surface. But Jake didn't regret it at all.

Mentally he had been a god damn mess, and he honestly still was. At least it wasn't repressed anymore, and he could face it openly and work to better himself.

He already had very few people in his life he considered close. It was just a few of his close colleagues, most now dead, and his immediate family. His parents and brother, to be more exact. He had steeled himself to seek out his family first thing after the tutorial.

He did miss them. He hoped that they survived, and now actually had started thinking about it. Before, it was just another thought he had ignored. But now he had faced it, and perhaps even begun preparing himself a bit mentally. Their death was probable, especially if you took his tutorial as a reference.

The fact that he was the only human left in the tutorial did weigh on his mind quite a bit, but it was manageable. If he had to look on the positive side... it did mean that there would be no more disturbances. That he had absolutely no excuses anymore to not succeed in his quest to slay the King. His only source of failure would be his own incompetence. He preferred it that way.

Jake had to admit that no matter how many soul-searching conversations and meaningful reflection, he was still, in the end, very much a one-track-mind type of guy. He excelled when he had a goal to work towards, and he was good at doing just that. Now he just had to try and not let it destroy everything else around him.

Returning his attention to his system messages, he went to the last thing on the list, which he had neither expected nor ever thought of. Upon killing William, he had received and apparently completed a tutorial quest.

Tutorial Quest: A Leader is born

Objective: Become the sole leader of at least 90% of the other humans during the tutorial.

Current progress: 100%

Eliminate other leaders: 0/0

Quest Completed!

Reward given upon the conclusion of the tutorial.

He had never asked for nor wanted this quest, and yet he had completed it. He didn't know why he got it, and he honestly didn't care. If Jake was sure of one thing about himself, it was that he wasn't suited to be a leader. He was already terrible around people; he could only imagine how awful he would be at leading them.

Who knows, maybe the reward will be okay? Jake thought as he tried to cheer himself up a little.

Closing the notification menu, he moved on to the next course of business, which was the second-largest mountain-like volcano in the tutorial area - the location of the final dungeon and the final Beast Lord.

But before that... it was time for some spring cleaning.