

THE LAST PARAGON IN THE APOCALYPSE

Chapter 6: The First Hunt

Sunlight Forest used to be a place of peace and beauty, where people would come to relax, have picnics, or just enjoy the fresh air. But all of that changed about 50 years ago when the world started to fall apart. Now, it's a hunting ground for the Awakened, those who have gained special abilities to fight the dangerous monsters within for resources to sell and make money.

These monsters are unlike anything from the past. Some are massive, with thick hides that are tough to penetrate, while others are small and fast, using their speed to ambush their prey. The forest is alive with the sounds of these creatures, making it a place where only the brave or desperate dare to venture.

For the Awakened, Sunlight Forest is a place to test their skills and gather resources. The monsters there are dangerous, but they also carry valuable materials that can be used to craft weapons and for food. But every trip into the forest comes with a risk. Many who enter never return, lost to the creatures that now rule the woods.

It's a dangerous place, but also a great place for awakening. In the last 40 years, it has been segmented into three sections. From what is known, there are the outer, inner, and core sections. The outer section has only Tier 1 monsters. These are monsters on the same level as an Awakened human. It's also the place where awakens are taken to level up.

Klaus took a deep breath as he left his small home, the weight of the pouch of gold coins in his pocket reminding him of his promise to his mother. He headed eastward through the city, his thoughts focused on the hunt ahead. He needed to level up quickly to secure a better future for both himself and his mother.

After walking for half an hour, navigating through a maze of streets and alleys, Klaus reached the border of the Sunlight Forest. A tall, imposing gate stood before him, guarded by a pair of stern-looking figures. The area was well-guarded, as expected. Klaus approached cautiously, his heart pounding with anticipation.

"Stop there. Show some ID," a voice called out, echoing through the air. Klaus halted and reached into his pocket, pulling out his badge. It was a simple metal piece with his identification etched into it.

A light beam scanned Klaus and the badge, making a soft hum as it processed the information. After a few moments, the same voice spoke again, but with a hint of suspicion. "Where are you going?"

Klaus straightened up, trying to appear confident. "I'm heading into the Sunlight forest for a hunt. This is my first time going into the forest since I just Awakened"

The guard, a burly man with a gruff face, eyed Klaus critically. "First time, huh? You do know the risks, don't you? The inner section is no place for amateurs."

Klaus nodded earnestly. "Yes, I understand. I'm prepared and know my limits. I just need to hunt in the safer parts of the outer section."

The guard's gaze remained unyielding. "Prepared or not, the forest can be unpredictable. How do I know you won't get in over your head?"

Klaus tried to remain calm. "I assure you, I'm not taking unnecessary risks. I'll stay within the safer areas and avoid anything beyond my limit."

The guard crossed his arms, still skeptical. "And what if something happens? We have regulations for a reason. You might think you're ready, but you're still an Awakened. You also don't have someone to aid you in case anything bad happens during your hunt"

Klaus felt a pang of frustration but kept his tone polite. "I appreciate your concern, but I need to do this. I'm only asking to be allowed to hunt in the designated areas. I will stick to the outer sections"

The second guard, a lean woman with sharp eyes, stepped forward. "We have to follow protocol. If we let you in and something goes wrong, it's on us. Also, without a guardian, you are likely to get bitten by a Zombie, that will be bad don't you think"

Klaus's mood starts to change. He is being polite despite that being against his nature. He gave them face but just because he wasn't from any lavish family, the guards wanted to make things difficult for him.

Klaus's patience was wearing thin, but he calmed down and spoke. "I understand, but can you please just let me through? I won't be a burden or cause any trouble."

Klaus kept his composure as he listened to the guard's words. The suggestion to join a group of wealthy Awakened wasn't what he wanted to hear, but he nodded politely. "I will do as you say, sir," he replied, though deep down, he was fuming. These guards seemed more interested in making a quick profit than in doing their jobs properly.

The guard smirked, clearly pleased with himself. "Smart move. Now, for a hunting pass, you need to pay 100 gold coins. It's valid for one hunt only, so make sure you get your money's worth."

Klaus's stomach tightened. He knew the cost of a hunting pass was supposed to be 10 gold coins, but this guard was clearly trying to scam him. It was infuriating, but Klaus didn't let his anger show. Instead, he calmly reached into his pocket and handed over the coins, keeping his expression neutral.

The guard took the money with a satisfied grin, handing Klaus a small slip of paper—the so-called hunting pass. It was nothing more than another way for the Ross family to squeeze money from hunters. Klaus clenched his jaw but said nothing, keeping his thoughts to himself.

As he turned to leave, Klaus paused for a moment and looked back at the guards. "Thank you for your advice," he said, his voice calm but with an edge to it. "I'll make sure to remember this experience. Who knows, maybe we'll see each other again under different circumstances."

The guards, too focused on their ill-gotten gains, didn't catch the subtle warning in Klaus's words. They simply nodded, waving him off as if they had done him a great favor.

Klaus walked away, his heart burning with anger. He knew he couldn't do anything now, but the memory of this moment would stay with him. One day, he promised himself, he'd make sure these guards learned the true cost of their greed.

With that thought in mind, Klaus stepped into the forest disappearing into the woods.

As Klaus disappeared from sight, the guards couldn't help but laugh, feeling victorious over their easy scam. "What a doofus," the man chuckled, his grin wide with satisfaction. "He clearly has no idea he's been conned."

The woman guard didn't join in the laughter. Instead, she frowned, her mind lingering on Klaus's last words. "There's something about that kid that makes me uneasy. Maybe we shouldn't have conned him," she said, her voice tinged with concern.

The man waved her off dismissively. "Annabelle, you're overthinking it. That kid's a nobody. I just used my senses to probe him, and I can tell you, he's the weakest Awakened I've seen so far. Barely worth mentioning."

Annabelle nodded slowly, but the uneasy feeling remained. Still, she pushed it aside, convincing herself that the man was right. After all, they had seen countless young Awakened like Klaus, and nothing ever came of it. "Yeah, you're probably right," she finally said, though her voice lacked confidence.

Meanwhile, deep within the forest, Klaus moved steadily forward, his eyes scanning the surroundings with sharp focus. The trees grew thicker, their branches intertwining to create a dark canopy overhead. The further he went, the more the air seemed to hum with tension, as if the forest itself was alive and watching.

Klaus kept his senses alert, every sound and movement drawing his attention. He knew that danger could come from any direction, and he was ready to face it. His grip tightened on his weapon as he moved deeper into the forest, his heart beating steadily in his chest.

After what felt like hours of walking, Klaus came to a small clearing. The sunlight filtered through the gaps in the trees, casting eerie shadows on the ground. The air was thick with the scent of damp earth and something else—something faintly metallic.

Suddenly, the underbrush rustled, and Klaus froze. His eyes locked onto the source of the noise as a creature slowly emerged from the shadows. It was unlike anything he had ever seen before—a twisted, mutated version of a wolf, with matted fur and glowing red eyes. Its teeth were long and jagged, and its body was covered in rough, spiky scales.

The monster snarled, baring its teeth as it eyed Klaus hungrily. It was a Tier 1 beast, not the most powerful in the forest, but still dangerous enough to pose a serious threat. Klaus knew he had to act quickly.

"Jagged Spiked Wolf," Klaus muttered also locking eyes with the monster. It's a rare type of mutated wolf. From what he knew, this monster had no value,

aside from its spiked fur and Sabertooth. Those sell slightly better. Nobody likes the meat, so aside from those two, it's practically worthless.

"Well, poor man like me shouldn't be picky. Mr. Johnson, it's time to see whether your sword teaching was something or garbage," A long sword appeared in Klaus's hand. Immediately, he felt fearless, instead, he was filled with battle intent.

Klaus stared at the Jagged Spiked Wolf, its red eyes glowing with hunger. The creature growled low, the sound vibrating through the air. Klaus tightened his grip on the hilt of his sword, feeling its weight in his hand. This was it—his first real fight.

The wolf snarled again, its sharp teeth glistening in the faint light. Klaus took a deep breath, steadying himself. He remembered Mr. Johnson's words during his training: "Stay calm, watch your opponent, and strike when the time is right." Klaus muttered, the wolf also made its move lunging at Klaus with inhuman speed.