

Hunter 18

Chapter 18: Finding a challenge

Jake ripped his knife out of the fallen Irontusk Boar, the same kind he had killed when he was still with his party. The level 10 beast had been quite the challenge for their entire team then, but this time he took it down solo with little trouble. It still took a bit more than twenty arrows in total, but the beast did fall. It was by far the most resilient beast out there.

Like its brethren, this one was surrounded by a bunch of small level 1 and 2 boars. All of which were quickly culled during the fight.

The boar was strong, fast, and a boss when it came to taking hits. But all it did was charge back and forth, attempting to trample him. He just had to kite it around and make it smash into things until it died.

However, his reason for attacking this particular boar-group was not solely for the sweet experience. The reason was that he had spotted an object in his Sphere of Perception hidden within a hollow log in the middle of the pig's clearing.

In the log was hidden a small box. However, this box was not a nice jeweled one, but just bronze. Using Identify confirmed it indeed wasn't as good as the jeweled one.

[Magical Bronze Lockbox (Common)] – A system-created magical lockbox enchanted with the ability to block off all types of attempts to peek inside before opened

Nevertheless, beggars can't be choosers. He opened the lockbox and found a small round object. It looked like a stone coin. Not wasting any more time wondering what exactly he was holding, he identified it.

[Tutorial Equipment Upgrade Token (Common)] – Upgrade any basic starting item from the Tutorial to common-rarity.

An item that was by far the most game-like he had encountered. Just a straight-up upgrade token. Not that Jake was in any way disappointed by the result. The thought of upgrading his cloak or bow was a welcome one.

He did not even consider upgrading his knife despite how much he used it. After all, his goal was never to use the dagger unless absolutely necessary, and a stronger bow would allow him to kill things easier.

His quiver was also out of the question because it was already common-rarity. Quite self-explanatory, really.

It was a toss-up between the bow and cloak then. Looking at this cloak, it was tattered and badly damaged, so Jake wondered what the effect of upgrading it would be. If it mended the thing, it nearly made it worth it.

The bow would likely increase the damage he could do. He had thought that his increased strength would make the bow less effective by now, as he would draw it fully. He even feared that he would end up snapping it at one point. However, the bow held up strong, and he did not feel its durability reach any limits quite yet.

In fact, it almost felt like it kept getting more durable along with him. Like it somehow adjusted to his higher stats and kept the string taut and the wood healthy and resilient. It was a bit like some of the more modern compound bows with adjustable draw-strength.

Those used technology and physics, though. While Jake's current wooden bow used magic or system-fuckery of some kind. Ultimately it didn't matter much; what mattered was that his current bow was still capable of fully supporting his fighting style.

Thus, he decided to try and upgrade his cloak. He took it off and laid it across a stone as he held the token up. He wondered how to use it as a window popped up.

Use [Tutorial Equipment Upgrade Token (Common)] on [Archer's Cloak (unranked)]?

He quickly agreed as the token turned to dust that was carried off by the wind. At the same moment, his cloak rapidly mended and was cleaned of all the blood and dirt. It was like new again. It didn't look like it had changed much except for a good dry-cleaning in a quick visual inspection.

Touching it, however, it felt far less coarse than before and far more comfortable to wear. Jake quickly focused on it and used Identify.

[Archer's Cloak (Common)] – A cloak handed out for the Tutorial, now upgraded with a token. Made of resilient cloth that is resistant to slashing attacks. Enchantments: Self-Repair.

Requirements: Tutorial Attendee. Archer Class

While certainly less impressive than his bracers, the self-repair enchant itself made it worth it. Finally, he would not walk around looking like a murderhobo. Well, he kind of still looked like a murderhobo, just one wearing a nice cloak.

He felt quite a bit better now that he didn't have the constant smell of sweat and blood enter his nostrils at every moment. He proceeded to scout a bit around, looking for more lockboxes. Finding nothing, he noticed it starting to get a little darker. He opened the tutorial panel to see what the time said.

Tutorial Panel

Duration: 62 days & 15:22:58

Total Survivors Remaining: 965/1200

TP Collected: 7335

It had been around noon when they entered this place. With the timer saying 15 hours now, that meant it had to be around 6 pm or so?

He thought about what his plans for the night would be. He did not feel tired in the least as of yet, the improved stats doing work. He also took small breaks between battles. While the physical exertion did matter, mental exhaustion was the real killer. He had to stay sharp.

Hunting in the night was certainly an option, but he had no idea how the beasts would react. They seemed not to be very active, but he doubted they would just leave him alone if he started to attack them. The problem, however, would be finding them hidden in the shade of the trees.

His Sphere of Perception offered him a great way of scouting his immediate surroundings, but it provided no way of seeing far ahead.

But then he thought of some caves he had seen earlier when he looked for loot. His sphere would be incredibly useful in a small closed-off space. And it would be completely dark, something mattering little to him with his sphere, but it would likely handicap the beasts living in there somewhat.

He did realize that caves were not the ideal place to fight for a ranged combatant like him, but he decided to give it a shot anyway. Besides, what place would be better to hide lockboxes than caves?

But before then, he still had daylight to burn, beasts to hunt, and loot to... well, loot.

He spent the next couple of hours looking for boxes and killing beasts, but quickly noticed the issue of finding high-level beasts. He still had the stag to go back for, but the beast still gave him a distinct sense of danger.

He tried to ignore anything below level 8 but did kill a couple, but quickly noticed a huge issue. Humans.

Several groups were still up and about, walking the forest in groups. Jake avoided them like the plague, but that did result in him missing out on several beasts to kill. He wasn't going to attack other humans either. While Jake had killed quite a handful already, all of them were in self-defense. Alright, he did bait some of them to attack him, but it was still kinda self-defense.

Either way, he wasn't going to go full psycho and begin hunting people. So he stayed hidden.

By the time the moon was out, and it was starting to get really dark, he had barely killed anything, and found no lockboxes or gotten any levels.

The only positive aspect was that his new cloak turned out to be great, especially when he combined it with his new bracers. They were incredibly strong, and he even had a level 9 badger bite down on them, discovering that its teeth were unable to pierce all the way through.

The cloak also got some tears and a few small holes during his hunt, but they repaired themselves quickly.

He was currently sitting on a root leaning against a tree as he conjured more arrows. It started to get too dark to hunt properly, and the beasts had also begun going idle. He had seen a group of deer that all seemed to be sleeping.

He decided to finally head to one of the caves he had seen embedded in a hill earlier, with it being too late to hunt anymore. Or perhaps calling it a hole in a hill would be accurate, as it did not actually consist of rock.

He got to the cave, which, yes, he had decided to call it a cave anyway, and looked inside. It seemed rather unassuming like most of the other caves he had encountered, but this one gave him a bit of a special feeling. He couldn't quite put his finger on why, but he felt like there was something special about it.

Walking inside, he quickly found himself in complete darkness after barely entering and taking a single turn. The hill hadn't been that big from the outside, but the path was sloping downwards.

As he walked, he found no beasts or enemies of any kind. All he saw was a musty cave. As he got in further and further, he spotted faint light in the distance. His sphere instantly made him aware that the source of light was small fungi.

Getting closer to them, he saw they were glowing blue mushrooms. Intrigued, he tried using identify, only to be met with a generic [Mushroom] message. Yeah, he was going to avoid touching those as he walked in further.

He quickly noticed that he was walking in a circle, with the downward pattern continuing like a spiral staircase. The mushrooms only got more numerous as he descended, soon not only being on the ground but also the walls and the ceiling.

When dark-green moss also started appearing on the wall, he considered going back. He was not very educated when it came to fungi, but he knew that they could be dangerous even if you didn't touch them.

And he currently found himself in a small closed-off space surrounded by them, with potentially deadly spores floating in the air all around him. His Sphere of Perception was quite overpowered, but it did not allow him to spot minuscule objects like spores or particles of dust.

Fungi liked to grow in damp places, with the cave certainly fitting that criteria, but so do human lungs. The fact that a fungus can take root inside the body was precisely why they could be so dangerous.

He remembered some friends of his family who had a bad case of mold in their house, and they only found out when their youngest kid got really sick. It was an invisible, silent killer.

And these were glowing magic mushrooms. Even if they were just normal ones if they managed to infect him and take root within his body, would healing potions even do anything? Would his vitality simply accelerate their growth?

But on the other hand, this place was unique. And if Jake had learned anything from videogames or novels, it was that unique and interesting places contain something equally unique and interesting. That, or it was a bad game.

No risk, no reward, he thought to himself as he kept walking.

More and more moss and mushrooms were growing on the walls as he got further in, and by now, he could not avoid stepping on mushrooms as he walked. Small spores were swept up, visible in the blue light, as he touched the mushrooms.

He covered his mouth with the upper part of his cloak, trying to minimize his intake of air as much as possible. His danger-sense was silent, but then again, he had no idea if it worked on passive threats like this. Assuming it was even a threat.

After another ten minutes, he had descended quite a bit, and the mushrooms were at peak-growth. The moss had also gotten so bad that it hung from the ceiling.

Turning back now would be too late if these things were infectious anyway, so he decided just to keep walking, hoping to find something worth his time.

After walking for over an hour, he started to regret ever going to this place. Nothing had changed for the entire hour; it was just more of the same. He even guessed he was stuck in a loop or something and tried stabbing an arrow into the dirt-wall to serve as a marker.

After walking for another half an hour after that, he had still not encountered his arrow. If he wasn't walking in a circle, exactly how far had he gone? He had to be hundreds of meters down by now.

The only positive aspect was that something good just had to be down here. Either that or the system was a massive troll.

A quarter of an hour later, he finally reached the end of the tunnel. What met him was not a dirt wall, however, but a wooden door. The door looked rotten like it had been here since ancient times, with no apparent door handle.

Looking at his Sphere of Perception, he saw nothing behind the door, making him wonder if this was even a door or just a door-shaped wooden wall. Was it some kind of big wooden shield, maybe? He tried to use Identify on it but got nothing.

Getting nothing from any of his usual means, he did what any reasonable person would do in his situation. He poked it.

Tutorial Challenge Dungeon Discovered!

Challenge Dungeons found throughout the multiverse offer danger and rewards hand-in-hand, being known as natural treasures. This variant is only found within the Tutorials provided by the system to newly integrated races. Enter at your own risk.

Requirements to enter: Must be below level 10 in any class or race. Must not have a profession. Must be top 5% in Tutorial Points.

Requirements to enter met.

WARNING: Challenge Dungeons cannot be entered in groups. Only 1 challenger allowed per dungeon.

Enter the dungeon?

Y/N

I found something for sure, he thought.

Earlier, he thought that lockboxes with loot in them were the most game-like element he had discovered so far, but this was literally a dungeon. Okay, maybe the whole stat-thing is also very game-like, but seriously, dungeons.

It was well hidden, and he had no doubt it would be dangerous. The requirements to even enter were also quite something. As it required one not to have a profession, did this mean it was related to unlocking one? Or did it have something to do with how strong he was allowed to be?

The last tutorial points were also interesting as it confirmed him to be in the top 5%. With less than a thousand people alive, that put him in the top 50. He wasn't sure if he should be happy about it, though, as he knew the only reason for that was killing humans.

Not entering the dungeon did not even occur to him. The thing he desired the most was a good challenge. And this dungeon literally had 'challenge' in the name. How could he say no?

He checked his equipment, making sure that everything was as it should be. His stamina was still high, and he did not feel even a whiff of fatigue.

He didn't hesitate any longer as he accepted the challenge with great excitement.

The 93rd universe had been integrated. The enlightened natives had entered their tutorials as the multiverse's forces moved to capitalize on the great shift. Capitalize on the natives and even the tutorials themselves.

For a new universe to be integrated was not a monumental event only for the universe in question, but the entire multiverse. It brought not just expansion but change.

Powerful entities moved to take advantage of the changes. Paths had been opened to even the mightiest of beings. It was an excellent opportunity to break through their limits or further expand their influence.

Others were fearful of the change. Feared what it would bring. These did all they could to solidify their positions.

But some... some did nothing.

An entity laid in its realm of desolation as it was stirred awake by the great shift. Its eyes opened as it stared into the void.

“The 93rd era has begun, huh,” it muttered listlessly before closing its eyes once more—the significant expansion and change of little interest. Yet it couldn’t help but hope that this time something would change. A hope it quickly quelled from its mind as it entered meditation once more.