

## Hunter 23

### Chapter 23: Progression

Feeling the warm glow run through his body from the level-ups was as comfortable as ever. He was equally as pleased to see that profession-experience also helped with his race level.

Looking at his stats, he noticed that he now had 6 unspent free points. Jake still felt very unsure of how to distribute them best. Was there some way to make an optimal build? Ultimately, he decided this wasn't the time to try and meta-game the system. You know, with his life on the line and all that.

So, having decided not to hoard the points any longer, he threw them in the stat best for alchemy according to all the books: Wisdom. He felt the warm glow once more before opening his status menu to confirm the changes.

#### Status

Name: Jake Thayne

Race: [Human (G) – lvl 5]

Class: [Archer – lvl 9]

Profession: [Alchemist of the Malefic Viper – lvl 1]

Health Points (HP): 380/380

Mana Points (MP): 192/240

Stamina: 235/250

Stats

Strength: 28

Agility: 31

Endurance: 25

Vitality: 38

Toughness: 16

Wisdom: 24

Intelligence: 16

Perception: 44

Willpower: 25

Free points: 0

Not much had changed with his stats besides wisdom getting a considerable bump upwards from the levels and free points. Nodding to himself, he closed the menu once more and turned his attention to the mixing bowl in front of him.

Looking at the completed batch of mana potions, he felt very satisfied with himself. Walking to the cabinet, he took out a handful of bottles and began putting the concoction into them. The bottles were perfectly sized to get the full benefit one could from each potion.

Jake had wondered what would happen if one drank an additional potion during the cooldown period. He and his colleagues had some theories, most of them determining it would end badly if one drank more than two within an hour.

But now he knew what would happen. And it was a big shocker. If one consumed two potions within an hour, the second could cause horrific consequences, such as being slightly less thirsty or having one less potion to drink.

Jokes aside, one could pour down mana potions for days without suffering any adverse consequences. It was basically just water. Of course, this raised countless more questions as to where the excess energy would go.

It was honestly frustrating how none of the books even bothered to talk about it. They were all just like: “So yeah, the second one doesn’t work because that’s how it is.”

Aka, system-fuckery is how potions work. The batch he had just made could be consumed as is, but would only have the effect of the single potion, so one was more or less forced to bottle it up. It also wouldn’t register as an actual item before being in a bottle or another similar type of container.

Moving on back to the present, Jake ended up with a total of only three bottles, something that, according to the books, was considered quite terrible. Not that Jake cared much, he was just proud of his accomplishment.

Using Identify on the potion, it only echoed how terrible they were.

[Mana Potion (Inferior)] – Restores 87 mana when consumed.

He remembered Caroline telling him that the mana potions that the system had given them upon entering the tutorial had given her at least 130 mana when she used one. He would have to thank Jacob for being terrible enough at combat the next time they met.

The fact that Jake could see the exact amount restored was also something new. He was unsure if it was due to Identify going up in rank or one of all the new profession skills. Or perhaps it was the presence of the profession itself.

Jake put the potions on one of the other tables in the laboratory with a smile. He planned on drinking them later, but he still had enough mana not to make full use of them. Having proven himself able to make something, he started mixing a second batch after cleaning up a bit.

However, his festive mood quickly died down as he failed the next two batches. Still, it was rapidly alleviated when the third batch of mana potions succeeded - another three potions, with exactly the same properties.

Seeing his mana had gotten a little low, he drank one of the potions he had made and felt his mana fill up to nearly full once more. He planned on drinking a potion every hour with the internal cooldown to keep working, with the only limit being his mental energy.

The mixing continued. A day and over a dozen mana potions consumed later, he finally started to get exhausted once more, and his last two batches had failed due to him not being able to focus.

It was hard work, but the results spoke for themselves:

\*'DING!' Profession: [Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 2 - Stat points allocated, +2 free points\*

\*'DING!' Profession: [Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 3 - Stat points allocated, +2 free points\*

\*'DING!' Race: [Human (G)] has reached level 6 - Stat points allocated, +1 free point\*

\*'DING!' Profession: [Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 4 - Stat points allocated, +2 free points\*

The levels were impressive, but it was, without a doubt, slower than leveling his class. He had spent more than 24 hours on the challenge already, and yet he was only level 4 in the profession. Compared to outside, where he in less time than that reached level 9. If he had been more efficient and gone solo earlier, he would, without a doubt, be well into the double-digits by now.

Looking at the dungeon challenge window, he noted the time.

Time remaining: 28 Days – 22:53:11

Walking back to the bed once more, he brought the book on health potions along for a quick read before taking another nap. He had decided to try and make them the next day, as the mana potion's experience had started going down and also because he had enough of them to keep himself going for awhile.

Health Potions were, according to the Alchemy for Novices book, the second easiest type of potion to make, just after the mana one. The process was very similar, with only slight variations. The pattern and method of injecting mana into the mixture was the most significant difference, and quite a lot harder than with mana potions.

Mana potions were quite natural to make. You did not need to change the properties of the mana injected; you just had to purify and inject it. With health potions, you had to change the nature of the mana. Ultimately, the potion was still a kind of condensed energy close to mana, and Jake had no proper understanding of how exactly it all worked, so he just left that up to the system.

He also wanted to start making poisons soon, but he felt it would be slightly more challenging than the three basic resource-restoration potions. The books agreeing with his intuition. From what he had briefly read, concocting poisons had many of the same methods as potions, so there was a lot of overlap, though, so it wasn't like his practice on potions was wasted.

In the end, concocting poisons was also primarily about injecting mana properly and controlling the crafting process.

After reading the book on health potions, Jake put it on the floor as there was no bedtable. Seconds after closing his eyes, he fell asleep. Dreaming of potions and alchemy, genuinely looking forward to waking up and continuing.

Jacob, Caroline, Bertram, Casper, Ahmed, and Theodore were all walking with a group of Richard's men as they were out hunting once more. The team they went with was the usual except for Caroline, who could join them as Richard was taking a rest back at camp.

Richard had reached level 12 earlier that day and had gotten a new ability at level 10 that allowed him to bash with his shield and send out a shockwave, knocking down anyone in its path. With it and his

increased stats, he had hunted many beasts over level 10, and they had even relocated their base once to get further into the forest and find stronger enemies to hunt.

The only one from their original group at level 10 was Caroline, who often went with Richard and his so-called 'elite squad'. Caroline had at level 10 learned a ranged version of her heal, much to the delight of everyone.

The entire camp had also expanded significantly. When they had joined, Richard's group was 26 people excluding them. Well, 20 people with the six that Jake had killed. After joining, they shot up to 29, and after recruiting some more, the group was now a bit over 50. Richard still in charge, of course.

They had only gotten one more healer, but he was only level 6, and Caroline had shown herself to be competent, so Richard kept her around in his squad. The passive regeneration aura alone was enough to keep a healer around initially. In combat, they often contributed little to nothing as their healing was touch-based, but with her now being able to heal from a distance, her worth shot up significantly.

Jacob was the leader of this small group that usually had to go without a healer. He was level 8, and the only one in their squad who was level 9, besides Caroline, was Casper. Dennis and Lina were both in another team. Jacob knew that this was due to Richard not wanting their group to all be together even if you considered Joanna, who was stuck back in the camp.

Speaking of Joanna, she had brought with her a pleasant surprise. She had started fixing up cloaks and robes for people and conjuring arrows for the archers after joining, trying to make herself useful. A couple of hours ago, just before they left the camp, Joanna had unlocked a profession.

This was the first instance of anyone obtaining a profession that they knew of. Joanna had been into stitching and sewing before the tutorial, which had likely helped her unlock it, to begin with. This was only a theory, though.



According to Joanna, the profession didn't give many stats per level, hers only offering 1 wisdom, 1 willpower, 1 agility, and 1 free point per level.

To see that the stat gains were so low compared to the time investment, Richard's interest significantly waned. That is right until Joanna got to level 1 in the profession, and as she was also level 3 in her class, she leveled her race too. This instantly reignited his interest. Every single race-level gave +1 to all stats and an extra free point, making them even more valuable than both class and profession.

His interest was further amplified after he experienced that leveling only got harder and harder, and level 10 seemed to be one of those difficulty-jumps. Hunting with a team also hurt his experience gain, but as he was more powerful in a group due to his class's nature, he had to be in one.

Making their way back to base, Jacob thought about what Jake was up to. It had been close to two days since he left, and they had neither seen nor heard anything from him. He and Richard had a tacit understanding never to mention him, but Jacob still wondered.

He was not afraid for Jake's well-being, more so curious as to what level he had reached by now. Okay, he was a bit worried, but the guy could clearly handle himself. At least he hoped he could, as Jacob had encountered some nasty things.

After a final fight with a small group of badgers, one of them being above level 10, they finally made it back. Talking of the badgers, those things turned out to get a lot more dangerous when they reached the double-digits. Not only because of their size but because of the venom their claws now secreted.

If Caroline had not been in the group, they would not even have tried fighting it. Another group had lost two people to one of the beasts, as they got severely poisoned from just a few minor scratches. The potions they drank only functioned to extend the suffering as they died. The importance of a healer was once again evident.

Back in camp, Jacob went straight to Richard, reporting how their little hunt went.

“Jacob, welcome back. Any difficulties?” the huge man said.

His shield was leaning on a stone next to him. It was not the one a heavy warrior started with, but a far larger tower-shield. He had gotten it earlier that day and was, according to Caroline, an uncommon-rarity item.

“No, nothing special. It’s getting harder and harder to find enough beasts to hunt, and those we do tend to be on the weaker side. Should we consider moving further into the forest?” Jacob asked as he took a seat on a stone across from Richard.

It was frustrating trying to level up at any decent pace. Whenever the group moved, Richard would have the light warriors and archers with stealth scout the area, and he would monopolize any strong beasts with his own squad.

“I guess we should. Double digits are getting scarce. Did you find any items or tokens while out?” Richard inquired.

Another one of Richard’s rules. All items had to be given to him, so they could be given out to those who could make the best use of them. Which is to say, every item was monopolized by Richard and his

buddies. Richard had known of items already the day they joined, and it did make Jacob a bit sour that they might have missed some as they made their initial trek in the forest.

He didn't doubt that many just kept them to themselves. It was risky as Jacob didn't want to learn the consequences of being found out, but he understood why some did it anyway. Jacob didn't hide them, though. He was playing the long game.

"Yes, Casper found a single common-rarity upgrade token," he said, giving it to Richard. "I think the number of boxes in the area are also getting scarce."

"Casper is the archer, right?" Richard asked, to which Jacob nodded. "he is getting close to level 10 already, right? Tell him to keep up the good work; a spot in the elite team may just open up. We're also getting some new members soon, so it may be necessary to have him help lead them."

"I'll be sure to tell him," Jacob answered, hiding his contempt. Yet another one of Richard's tactics. If a squad besides his own had anyone who stood out, he would try to separate them. He was not open about it and often backed his choices with sound logic, but Jacob had been in management long enough to recognize nefarious leadership like that.

Richard was actively trying to limit cohesion. He allowed enough for them to get used to each other and to be able to work together, but anything more than that he wanted to avoid. Jacob and his colleagues' position was quite unusual as they had all known each other before the tutorial. Richard and his gang of people being the only other group like theirs.

Most groups of ten that had entered the tutorial were strangers. Random crowds of people being thrown together. As the system had taken people close to each other physically as it transported them, at least to some extent, it did mean that many had ended up entering with at least one or two people they knew, though.

But Richard broke those small groups up whenever he could. He had a million excuses as to why it was for the best, but people mostly just did as he said out of fear. Not necessarily fear of being attacked, but also fear of being tossed out of the camp.

While the way stuff was run was far from ideal, it was far safer than likely anywhere else. One had to remember that not everyone was fit for combat or willing to risk their own lives. Many that joined simply huddled up in the camp. At least Joanna had now opened a path for them to progress without any need to face beasts.

As Jacob walked back to his colleagues, a young man wearing a robe, one that had clearly been upgraded with a token, walked by. The wand at his hip, another either upgraded or looted item. It instantly gave away his identity as a caster. The man, who was barely even a man at all, was in his late teens and wore a big stupid smile on his face.

His name was William, and he had joined after Jacob and his group. Richard knew little of this young man, only that he was clearly competent and had reached above level 10 before he even joined them. He was not with any group when he joined but had come alone.

His story was that strong monsters had ambushed them shortly after entering the tutorial, and he got away as the only survivor. Yeah, no one was buying that, but as they couldn't prove him wrong, they just rolled with it. The predominant theory was that he had run away.

Most surprising, however, was the young man still insisting on hunting alone even after joining. Richard initially wanted him in the elite squad but was declined. He had considered merely 'removing' the man permanently but had decided against it.

He could not do it openly after all, as it would be bad for morale, and Richard still had a shadow in his heart left behind by when Jake had killed his right-hand man and five others. The only survivor, a mess, who had still not left the camp since he returned. So, sending a group covertly after the caster was a risk. One he was not willing to take.

Instead, he went with the principle of keeping your potential enemies close.

"I heard you talk to that guy. I also think we should move further in. Nothing gives any experience points around here anymore," William said, sighing as he continued. "I'm afraid that boredom will end up killing me before any of those roided-out animals do."

"I hear you; I plan on moving when the last group returns," Richard answered, a bit annoyed at the teenager's flippant attitude to the whole tutorial.

"Great!" The caster answered with a smile. "Oh, by the way, I need more mana potions. Got any?"

"Go ask some of the others," Richard answered, trying, but failing, to hide his annoyance. William had already taken nearly all of their spare mana potions, and Richard only had the ones he purposefully kept hidden away. He wanted to save some for the healers in case of an emergency.

"Oh, okay," William answered as he turned around, happily walking towards the campfire where people were doing various tasks. Some were stitching, others trying to make something out of the leather, and there was even a guy trying to draw with some charcoal from the fire - all of them attempting to unlock professions.

As William walked away from Richard, he thought to himself how great this place was. He was finally free, his mind unshackled. Purified from all that suppressed him in the old world.

He had returned to perfection.