

## Hunter 25

### Chapter 25: Enjoying life

Jake had never been a huge fan of salads. He could do cucumbers, tomatoes, and a bit of lettuce in a burger here and there, but the mere thought of living off salads was horrifying to him. One should understand why he didn't find his current meal the most pleasant with that in mind.

He was currently sitting in the library, with a bowl in front of him filled with water and moss. He had tried to eat the moss, but it was honestly disgusting. Not the taste, it was fine, but the texture and the aftertaste of dirt.

Instead, he plucked it, rinsed it with water, and used the cleaned mixing bowl to eat from. It was a rather disgusting looking soup. He didn't even have a spoon, so he had to use his hands to eat out of it.

However, the torturous meal was made acceptable by the feeling of knowledge and improvement from eating it. It was the same as with the Flyeater Mushrooms, though he made sure to control himself and not overeat.

After his wonderful meal, it was back to making potions. He had started alternating between health and mana potions to break the monotony. Not that it mattered much. He was also considering if he should give making stamina potions a shot, but according to the books, it was quite a lot harder than both health and mana. And not by a little either.

Stamina potions were essentially a mix of health and mana from a methodological standpoint. Quite honestly, the book's explanations were quite terrible, and Jake had no desire to attempt it currently.

One good thing about his improved wisdom was that he no longer needed to take notes. By now, he could easily remember everything. It was kind of weird and a bit scary when he thought about it more in-depth. He had not felt anything immediately, even when gaining a lot of wisdom at once, but it changed him without a doubt.

He already knew that the system could directly implant knowledge, and it could obviously also improve memory. Jake had always had a relatively good memory, but now he could verbatim recall the page-numbers of where everything stood in his alchemy books.

And if the system could implant both knowledge and make his memory that much better, what was to say it couldn't change something more fundamental. His intelligence stat had also been improved quite a lot, but he hadn't felt anything directly from that. Something that he was still unsure if that was assuring or concerning.

What was to say that his improved mental stats had not made some fundamental changes to who he was already. Would even be aware if it happened?

For some reason, he found his bloodline far less scary, even though it clearly was the thing introduced by the system that had affected him the most. But he was aware of it doing so. He had let his bloodline affect him; he had allowed his improved instincts to take charge during times of danger. In essence, he felt like his bloodline wasn't changing him, but merely bringing forth who he was in a more primal and instinctual form.

But ultimately, did such existential worries even matter in the grand scheme of things? If he had been changed, he would have no way of knowing. He remembered Descartes saying: "Cogito, ergo sum; I think, therefore I am," and he was undoubtedly thinking far too much, so he most certainly existed in his own mind. Also, damn the extra wisdom making him remember random quotes.

Nevermind that tangent, back to potions. Jake had needed to refill the barrels of purified water a few times already, but after his meal, he had to do so yet again. It was kind of insane that he could carry an entire barrel filled with water. It was with some difficulty, but it still clearly showed that his strength had reached superhuman levels. Especially considering the difficulty mainly stemmed from how unwieldy the barrels were.

After filling the barrels and cleaning the bowl after his mossy meal, he jumped right back into it - an entire day of mixing ahead of him.

William walked through the forest, alone as always. Richard had gotten a bit annoying the last few days, but it was not time yet. The man still had time to grow. William also still needed him, or more accurately, what his camp could offer.

The teenager smiled as he saw a group of big molerats. He knew these things had some annoying sound attack that hurt like shit, but they were pretty weak defensively.

He took out his wand, an item he had found within the first couple of hours after he got here. He had been with a group of nine others, just like everyone else apparently had.

He had no idea who any of them were. But then again, he didn't really know that many people before the tutorial either. His parents and his psychiatrist mainly. Oh, and the workers in the center, but they were all massive assholes.

Though let's be fair, pretty much everyone was a waste of space. Everyone was either obnoxious, pretentious, or just plain old annoying. So, William had always preferred activities where no one bothered him.

Looking at the molerats, he knew that he had to wait for an opportune time to strike. And strike hard he would. Admiring the wand that made this all possible once more, he only got happier.

[Exceptional Wand of Ferroras (Uncommon)] – A wand crafted by followers of Ferroras, God of Iron. The wand is made of a special kind of iron, only found in mana-rich areas. Grants the ability: [Metal Manipulation (Uncommon)].

Requirements: Level 5 in any class or race. Metal-affinity.

This wand had been his bread and butter since he got here, due to the skill attached. He discovered a box when he was bathing in a lake after seeing something glitter at the bottom. Diving down, he had found this wand. He was a bit sad that he could not use it right away, though. He needed a few levels, first using the terrible mana bolts. When he finally reached level 5, he could use the wand and see the ability.

[Metal Manipulation (Uncommon)] – Allows for control of metallic objects by spending mana. This skill falls under elemental manipulation, a prevalent brand of magic throughout the multiverse. Adds a small bonus to the effect of Metal Manipulation based on intelligence.

In concert with the many daggers he carried in his robe, this skill allowed him to dominate pretty much everything he met. His only weakness was his lack of healing outside of health potions, which was why he even bothered with Richard and his group. Oh, and his high mana consumption in combat, but he was sure that would get better with time.

His thought process was interrupted as he spotted his chance to strike. The molerats had jumped a group of badgers, allowing William to also make his move.

Focusing, he lifted the wand as seven daggers flew out of his robe, towards the closest rat. Their speed and power were far more potent than if he had simply thrown them. The daggers hit the rat in its head, cutting it to pieces.

Before any of the other rats could register that had happened, the daggers spread out, hitting the three others in their throats before they could do their screech.

The rats made gurgling sounds as they charged towards him. Raising his wand, he cast a spell towards the ground as a metal board appeared before him, blocking the rat's charge and obscuring their vision. At the same time, he lifted himself off the ground as he shot backward.

After killing a medium warrior, he had started wearing the chestpiece he had looted off the man. Hidden beneath his robe. While it was expensive as hell to lift his whole body off the ground, it gave him excellent mobility. As he dodged around, blocking off the rats with the metal barrier, and having the daggers penetrate the rats over and over, he felt quite wonderful.

As his mana was starting to get dangerously low, the last molerat fell to the ground, never to move again. Checking his notifications, he was delighted to get another level.

\*You have slain [Molerat Screecher – lvl 14] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 1500 TP earned\*

\*You have slain [Molerat Screecher – lvl 16] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 2000 TP earned\*

\*You have slain [Molerat Screecher – lvl 16] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 2000 TP earned\*

\*You have slain [Molerat Screecher – lvl 15] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 1750 TP earned\*

\*'DING!' Class: [Caster] has reached level 17 - Stat points allocated, +1 free point\*

Finding high-level beasts was still somewhat tricky, in his opinion. He had killed a good 20+ beasts above level 14 to get from level 16 to 17. Richard kept refusing to go further into the forest, which made William really wish for some kind of healing skill at level 20.

At level 5, he had gotten [Basic Stealth(Inferior)], at 10 [Conjure Iron Wall (Common)], and at 15 [Metallic Sight (Uncommon)]. The Iron wall was the skill he had used in the battle before, and the metallic sight was the passive skill that made his entire style possible. It allowed William to 'see' through the metal he was manipulating, allowing his flying daggers to act as really shitty, yet still useable, eyes.

The only annoying thing was that he had to 'attune' the metal he was manipulating. In other words, he had to fill any metal he wanted to control up with mana, linking it to him. This was done super easily with random unranked metal but was pretty much impossible for enchanted stuff. Well, he could still do it, but the mana consumption was insane and not worth it.

It was not that it made the skill terrible in any way; it just sucked that he couldn't make a warrior cut his own head off with his sword. Oh, or make an archer's arrows do a 180 hitting themselves. However, the saddest was his inability to lift a medium or heavy warrior up and smash them down again, or maybe use them as living wrecking balls.

The skill was also quite mentally taxing. When he first got it at level 5, he could only control two daggers at once, and lifting even a set of armor was challenging. By now, he could do seven daggers comfortably but could push it to 8 in a pinch, though it would hurt his versatility in using his iron wall and his own movements.

The skill was amazingly good in open combat, but he felt it worked even better at stealthily killing. Having picked up Basic Stealth being a lucky coincidence.

The group of 10 he arrived with was filled with the usual pieces of shit - pretentious idiots who kept talking about bullshit. None of them understood that things have changed. No, they were merely background-characters - unimportant fodder for the true players in this new world.

This new reality was clearly a game made real. William had enjoyed games and books his entire life. He understood the genre. One had to embrace the system, game it where possible, but otherwise, follow its rules and abuse them for the maximum potential. It was all about min-maxing.

And yet those bloody fools kept talking about working together, staying safe, finding other humans, and finding somewhere to hunker down for the entire tutorial. Didn't they understand this was a golden opportunity? This tutorial was the easy starting area that would give one a kickstart before entering the real game.

William was not a delusional idiot who believed this world to be fake. It was obviously real. Real, and yet still a game. Which was why he had decided to think of it as an ultra-realistic virtual reality MMORPG with permadeath. So far, he had never been proven wrong in that assumption.

His initial group of ten quickly outlived their usefulness as the only useful person, a healer, ended up dying due to their own stupidity. A light warrior had also died, so William gracefully offered to carry his daggers if anyone needed them later. The first fight after he reached level 5, one of the other casters suspiciously died, stabbed in the back of the neck by a dagger.

But dear William had been standing right beside the archer leading their group, so it couldn't possibly have been him. With the seed of discord planted, he managed to easily split the group. A little word here and there about how the third caster had asked for one of the daggers he had been carrying earlier, and then afterward finding it in said caster's satchel had only sealed the deal.

It was like screwing with stupid NPC's in an otherwise well-made game. It took him only a couple of hours to kill all of them; no one suspecting the small and scared teenager. Well, except the archer at the end, who in his very last moments seemed to finally see through him. Not surprising, considering they were the last two alive.

The idiot yelled a couple of vulgar obscenities before he too died.

Looking back, that first day had, without a doubt, been the best in William's 19 years of life. Everyone had always treated him like shit his entire life, no one ever getting him. The worst part was that some of them even thought something was wrong with him.

Oh, how he had wished he could just get rid of that stupid teacher who kept pestering him in school. But he knew he couldn't. At least not without getting caught. The rules of society had held him back for so long, limited him in so many ways.



But here? No police, no law enforcement, no shrinks or therapists, no drugs being pumped into your system day in and day out to try and make you 'normal'. The system had fixed all the harm the drugs were doing, restored his body and soul, freeing him.

Entering that tutorial had felt like waking up from a long hazy dream. But now William was awake, and he was aware. He understood his new reality far more so than he ever had the old one.

Currently, he was quite a bit of distance away from Richard's camp. He still needed them for now, as they had a healer and all, and some of the professions that people had started acquiring turned out to be very useful, allowing him to get his clothes fixed and cleaned.

After walking a bit, having recovered a good portion of his mana, he saw movement out of the corner of his eye. Crouching down, he snuck closer, raising one of his daggers with metal manipulation using it to see what was going on. Three silhouettes were at a small pond, two in the water, and one person standing guard it seemed.

The Metallic Sight skill was not good enough to see any details. But it looked like no one was looking William's way. Looking from behind a tree, he saw two females who were not wearing anything in the water, with a third woman standing outside the water in a full heavy warrior outfit.

Looking around further, he spotted a robe and a cloak folded at the edge of the water - one caster robe and one archer cloak.

No healer, huh, he thought disappointed. He didn't recognize any of them, and a quick look around with his metallic sight and a dagger spotted no one else in the area.

Oh well, no reason to keep them around, he thought. The system did say that the final reward from the tutorial was based on the number of survivors. He had read that as the fewer survivors, the better. Also, humans were so much easier to kill than beasts, honestly. Because they had one fatal weakness...

As he was preparing to strike, the heavy warrior, for some reason, turned around and looked straight at him.

"Who are you!" The woman yelled in an annoyingly loud tone.

William knew he was spotted, so he didn't try to hide. No, he could do far better than that. "I am so sorry, miss! I got lost after my team got attacked, and I thought I heard someone," he said with a deliberate shyness in his voice. This 'shy vulnerable kid'-act worked well with older females. And worked it did.

The warrior's gaze visibly softened as she saw the young man before her - a handsome shy young man who looked incredibly scared. "Oh, I see," she said in a calming tone, as William spotted the two naked women now getting dressed, both looking very flustered. He estimated them to be around his own age and likely related to the warrior based on their looks. Their Mother? Aunt? It didn't matter.

He started walking towards them cautiously, bit by bit, as the woman spoke again. Making sure to shiver slightly with every step. It took a long time to get that one down.

"Do you know where your team went? What attacked you?" the warrior asked as she got a little closer.

William acted scared at her coming towards him and backing away with big steps, staying in character.

“It’s okay, we’re not going to do anything,” she said, as she stopped going closer.

“O...Okay” William stammered as he stopped backing off. The woman kept walking closer to him until she got to the spot where he had backed off from.

From below the leaves, four daggers flew up, startling the woman. All of them found purchase in the gaps of her armor before she even had a chance to react. A fifth dagger simultaneously flew out of William’s robe, hitting the woman in the face, killing her instantly.

The two other women were still only halfway dressed, as more daggers flew for them, and they only managed to give out brief screams as the daggers struck them. They tried to defend, but neither of them had their weapons ready. It didn’t take long for both of them to fall to the ground, their half-naked bodies covered in cuts.

After making sure they were all dead, William checked his notifications, disappointed. The warrior had been only level 10, with the two younger ones at 9.

“What a waste of time,” he muttered to himself as he looted their remaining potions and the archer’s dagger.

“Oh well, better luck next time,” he said, smiling at the three mutilated corpses, as he turned for the trek back to Richard’s camp. His mana was beginning to get a bit low, so he would have to take a break. Sadly the caster didn’t have any mana potions left.

He could not help but whistle a happy little tune as he walked. True, it didn’t reward much to kill the three of them, but it was kind of fun. Oh, how he loved this new wonderful world.