

Hunter 28

Chapter 28: Base building

Jake knew that he had some long days of alchemy before him. Looking at the dungeon challenge window, he exited the bedroom to the laboratory.

Time remaining: 26 Days – 6:21:57

He had only spent a bit over three and a half days in this dungeon. He had, in his mind, plenty of time to find a cure, but not enough time to slack off. With his evolution out of the way and being completely refreshed from the process, he had no excuse not to get to it.

He had days of hard work ahead of him. No way he was going to die here. A plan was already beginning to form in his mind on how to pass the challenge. One he could only snicker at for its sheer stupidity. But sadly, the plan did not include him leaving early. He knew there was an entire tutorial going on outside, but that could wait. Jake couldn't help but think of his colleagues still outside and decided to check the tutorial panel.

Tutorial Panel

Duration: 58 days & 11:22:58

Total Survivors Remaining: 754/1200

A bit more than a third had died by now. Jake dearly hoped that his colleagues were not among them. While he held no love for Richard, the guy seemed competent enough, and he knew that if Jacob was good at anything, it was to get in the good graces of others. He believed their chances were good unless something very unpredictable happened.

Shaking his head, he threw the thought away. It was a waste of time to worry about others when he was already battling death. He would seek them out when he got out of there. For now, there was nothing he could do to help them in any way. The best way to help them was to help himself.

Determined, he cleaned the bowl, got the ingredients, and jumped right back into making more poisons and potions. He had a long grind ahead of him.

Jacob dragged his fingers across his chin, feeling the stubble that had now grown into a full-on beard. He hadn't had a beard for years now, always going with the clean-cut style. Not that he thought there was anything wrong with having a beard. He avoided one mainly for professional reasons as, while the company dress-code did not directly prohibit beards, it strongly discouraged them. It was a silly rule, but the company directors were quite conservative and believed beards to be unprofessional for some reason.

Not that any of that mattered anymore. The world was fucked. Jacob did feel rather sour in having spent so many years climbing the corporate ladder for it to all turn out to be a massive waste of time. That time would have been better spent going to self-defense classes. Fencing or archery or pretty much any sports teaching you just minor combat skills would be more useful.

He had never been a fighter. At least not in the literal sense. He had never been in a fight his entire life outside of maybe minor scuffles as a child. Instead, he focused on studying, excelling in academics, graduated top of his class in university, and became the youngest department chief the company had ever seen.

But now, in this tutorial, he was low on the ladder. As it turns out, Richard owned a private security firm before the initiation and had come here with many of his employees. Of anyone Jacob had met so far in the tutorial, Richard excelled the most.

He was also the first one Jacob knew of that had evolved and then afterward even the first to also evolve his class. Jacob himself was only level 19 in his class still, but he had evolved his race. The entire race evolution thing was... perplexing.

When someone evolved, they would disappear for a few seconds before appearing again in the same place. The effects of evolution were also interesting. After evolving, one could vaguely feel something in the air. Some kind of energy. It didn't take long to conclude that this new energy was mana. Not that anyone knew what to do with this new mana sense.

By now, they had been in this damn place for only a bit over two weeks. Even in the beginning, Jacob was well aware of his own lack of combat prowess, but it had only become more apparent. He wasn't the lowest level among his peers, but far from the top.

Out of the original 10, they were 7, maybe only 6, left as he had neither heard nor seen anything of Jake since he left their group.

Theodore had been the first among them to die. They had been fighting some more of those cursed badgers when he got unlucky and nearly tripped, allowing one of the beasts to bite into his neck. He had not died instantly, but they had run out of health potions. With no healer in sight... he bled out on their way back.

Caroline, the premier healer in the entirety of Richards group, was not with them at the time. In fact, they only had four healers in their entire camp, despite having already surpassed a hundred people. The highest leveled healer was Caroline, having upgraded her class a day or two ago.

According to all those who had, leveling got a lot slower once more after that. The first 10 levels were relatively easy, then it got a bit more difficult between 10 and 25, and then even harder once more after that. Jacob had no idea what level Richard had reached, just that he was very likely still the strongest member of their camp.

The two other former colleagues that had died were Dennis and Lina. Jacob still remembered the two vibrant youths when they parted. Both stronger than him at the time. Yet they died. And not by beasts either.

Another huge camp had emerged, with nearly the same amount of survivors as them. Negotiations had been going well for a while, and there were even plans of merging the two. Then Lina and Dennis's group got ambushed by the other camp.

Afterward, everything just went to shit for a while. Someone from Richard's camp must have taken the initiative on their own to strike back, as a group from the other camp also got wiped out, and from the state of the battlefield, it was clear that weapons had been used.

This enraged the other faction as they had adamantly claimed they had nothing to do with the first attack. Fights broke out daily after that.

Looking at the tutorial panel, it was depressing to see the number of total survivors falling by the day.

Tutorial Panel

Duration: 49 days & 14:45:06

Total Survivors Remaining: 599/1200

The number of survivors dying had slowed down for a while after the first four or five days, but it still flared up on days where larger groups from the two camps encounter each other. On the worst day, 21 people were killed split between their two factions, and that was even excluding random deaths to beasts. Naturally, there were also other unaffiliated parties out there.

Both factions had, however, done a lot to attract survivors. Smoke-signals, casters shooting spells into the air, and many more things had been done. It had worked for the most part and was likely why their two factions were in such proximity. They had attracted one another.

Jacob was currently standing at one of the many fires spread around their camp. They had reached rather far inwards at this point, and finding beasts below level 10 was borderline impossible at this point. Most in the immediate area were around level 20, but only a short walk away, and one would run into plenty above level 25.

The reason for the growth was not only due to the change in geography. It was across the line that the beasts grew in level. Jacob doubted there even existed any beasts below level 10 in the entire forest at this point. While this was generally considered a positive aspect for those seeking to grow stronger, it was a clear negative for those merely wishing for survival.

Beasts once more grew immensely in strength at 25. It was manageable as they also had people with classes above level 25, but for lower leveled groups like his own, those beasts were formidable. Many of them had magical abilities or just incredibly powerful bodies.

The crafters, which they had come to call the ones focusing on professions, would not stand a chance if they faced any such beasts, despite many of them having decent levels.

Talking of professions, Joanna, who had been the first ever to get one, was still the highest leveled crafter. While she was still a bit away from her profession upgrading at 25, she had gotten her race evolution at 10.

While many were disappointed at the evolution's effects, Joanna's case had been far from disappointing. Her leg had regrown. The wooden leg had simply been whisked away, and a newly formed leg had appeared.

She was far from the only individual with lasting damage or handicaps in their camp, and her case had given them all newfound hope, and given all those with professions vigor like never before. Even Richard had been very pleased and gone to congratulate her and offered for her to be the crafters' official leader.

Joanna rejected it at first, but she had eventually caved with the urging on from the other crafters around her. It had only been two days ago, but she held quite the political power within the entire camp by now, as professions' value had started to show. She had thrown most of her new responsibilities to Jacob, which he gladly took upon himself to be useful.

As a group, they had learned a lot about the usefulness of professions, with Jacob mainly in charge of gathering information on what people were now capable of. No one could make potions or anything like that, but some had gotten a cooking profession. The food cooked by them allowed wounds to heal

faster, and many could even help the body fight off potential infections or poison. Other than that, the food tended to provide additional bonuses, like increased mana and stamina regeneration, the best of it even giving a temporary bonus to the endurance stat.

The most noteworthy crafter of them all wasn't Joanna, though. It was one of the people who had joined their camp later on. He was a large man who had worked as a foreman in a steelworks before the tutorial along with being a heavy warrior, who had even chosen a hammer as his starting weapon. As it turned out, the man even did smithing in his free time and had selected a hammer as it felt more natural in his hand.

With all those factors coming together, it was no surprise that the man had gotten the smithing profession. But more so than that, he was also a talented warrior. He had been the second person to evolve his race after Richard, and if Jacob's predictions were correct, he was currently the highest leveled when it came to race in their entire camp, despite not having upgraded his class yet. However, he was likely still above level 20 in his class. Even with professions taking longer to level, Jacob deemed him still to be around level 14 or 15 in that, if not even higher.

Jacob didn't know the man's name; he just went by The Smith. Without a doubt, he had proved himself invaluable as time went on, and many of their weapons started to require repair. Many upgrade tokens had been found, giving the equipment self-repair, but it only accounted for less than a fourth of their weapons and armor.

A smith could also temporarily improve weapons and armor, and according to The Smith, he could also permanently increase their performance if he had the right materials. He did all of the work for free due to the experience he gained from doing so, which made Jacob consider the impact a leveling system would have had on the labor market pre-system.

Throwing the thought away, he started walking over to his cabin. The cabin was constructed by another one of the newly discovered professions, one going by the name of 'builder'. As the name implied, they could build houses and even possessed landscaping skills a bit reminiscent of earth-magic.

Speaking of magic, Ahmed had managed to upgrade his class a few days ago. He had chosen to be a caster attuned to frost magic. After his evolution, he packed quite the punch, throwing out sharp shards of ice. On a side-note, his new abilities were also quite useful for cooling down drinks and preserving food.

Of the six survivors in their group, only Jacob and Joanna had not gained a class upgrade. Bertram, who had been at Jacob's side through everything so far, had gotten to 25 earlier that same day and a class focusing on defense. Casper had also gone through his class evolution.

Casper never got comfortable with the bow and instead ended up getting the trapping skill at level 5. He still used his bow, but now mainly to lure his enemies into traps.

The reason why Casper had leveled up before himself was due to the conflict with the other faction. Night-raids had started happening four days ago, and Richard had increased the number of people on watch significantly. A job that was mainly given to the archers due to their high perception and Archer's Eye skill.

What Casper had done was to set up a lot of traps around their camp, and yesterday that had borne fruit. He had single-handedly killed four attackers above level 20 and captured two others.

Neither Jacob nor Casper liked the thought of killing others. One could understand why the archer had been shocked when he was awoken in the middle of the night to system messages telling him he'd killed people. The coming class evolution gone through while he was filled with negative emotions.

Jacob himself had yet to take someone's life. Something he hoped wouldn't change before this hellhole of a tutorial was over.

After checking in with some of the builders, he arrived back at his cabin. He opened the wooden door and was greeted by Caroline, who must have just returned from another excursion with Richard and his squad.

"Hey, how was the trip?" Jacob asked as he went over and sat on the bed beside her.

Caroline, leaning on his shoulder, answered. "The same as always. Did anything happen today? Is Casper doing better?"

"Yeah, he is holding up. We all are, I guess," he said, after hearing the concern in her voice.

"It's going to be fine, Jacob. We're going to be fine," she consoled him as she snuggled closer to him.

Feeling her intent, he wrapped his hand around her shoulder as they both fell back on the bed, cuddling.

Another significant change was their relationship. Jacob had known that Caroline liked him as more than just a colleague for a long time. As her superior, though, he had chosen to try and ignore it, as fraternizing never was a good look. He also didn't want to subject her to his family politics.

But here, no one cared. So, when Caroline made her move, he had no reason to reject her. Jacob had never even considered her before due to their professional relationship. He had to admit that she was attractive, with the evolution at 10 only making her more beautiful. It may just be the suspension bridge effect, but he didn't really care at this point.

Caroline being the 'breadwinner' in the relationship hurt his vanity a bit, but he could see the humor in how their roles had completely switched compared to how it would be before the system.

You could say a lot of bad about Richard, but he treated the ones he deemed important well. With Caroline at the very top of his list, she was naturally treated extremely well. The fact that they had their own cabin for just the two of them was clear evidence of this.

Her status had trickled down to Jacob also being treated better, despite his lacking abilities in combat. Jacob was not a deadweight, however. When a camp grows to the triple digits, some amount of management becomes necessary.

One could say many things about Jacob, but if he was good at anything, it was management. This led to him being in charge of constructing the camp, making shifts, and keeping track of all their members. He was a bit disappointed he had not gotten a manager profession. He had been offered a skill related to management, though, despite being a tailor, which was a bit interesting.

Their camp had grown, not just in people, but also in complexity. With individuals able to construct buildings quickly, cooks, smiths, etc., the need for a more permanent solution became necessary. A wall had been under construction for a few days now, traps laid out mainly by Casper and one other archer who had to upgrade his class, and several other plans were underway.

As he pondered, he looked at Caroline. She looked back at him, staring into his eyes. He smiled as he leaned in and gave her a peck on her forehead.

“Yeah, we’ll be alright.”