

Hunter 29

Chapter 29: It's just logical

He ran through the woods, feeling the wind whisk by as he made his desperate escape. This entire situation was so fucked up. He had gone out hunting with his regular crew like any other day the last two weeks. While that guy Richard and his camp had been causing trouble for them, it didn't normally disrupt his particular party's daily routine.

Their leader, some ex-military guy named Hayden, had told them to avoid hunting in the area in between their two factions. An order everyone gladly followed as no one wanted to risk fighting other humans. While fighting beasts was dangerous, other humans were just a whole different kind of danger.

Yet they had still been attacked. And not by a group, but a single person. No, a goddamn monster. He had appeared out of nowhere, not said a word, and just started killing. Daggers were flying everywhere, and what seemed like a giant freaking sawblade that cut their heavy warrior in two: shield and all.

It was mayhem with blood and body parts flying everywhere. Luckily, he had been scouting ahead, being an archer and all. With zero hesitation, he had taken off after he saw half their group die. Yet it was for naught.

A dagger hit his leg as he stumbled, followed by another, and then another. His legs got utterly destroyed as he screamed out and tried to crawl away.

"Damn, you're fast."

He heard a casual voice behind him as he turned to stare at the monster that had been chasing him - a young man with blonde hair and blue eyes staring back.

“Dude, come on, you didn’t have to bolt off like that. Do you know how much mana I wasted? Ah, forget it, just give me some good info, and I promise to let you go,” the teenager said as he walked closer, a big sinister smile on his face. The archer’s eyes, however, glued to the small red bottle in his hand. A health potion.

The archer finally saw just the tiniest glimmer of hope as he bit through the pain from his mutilated legs. He started explaining everything he thought could be of the slightest interest. Even seemingly unnecessary side notes and comments. It was a torrent of information as the archer just hoped that the monster would decide to spare him.

After a while, as he kept desperately throwing out words, the teenager finally raised his hand, motioning for him to stop.

“Well, I guess there was some useful stuff in all that senseless yapping,” the blonde teenager said as he shrugged.

“I told you everything, please just ask me about anything. I promise I will tell you whatever you want,” the archer pleaded, hoping to prove himself useful enough.

“Oh, it is quite alright. I think I got everything worthwhile.”

The archer breathed out a sigh of relief as the slaughterer started to walk away from him. But just as he got his hopes up, another dagger flew out from underneath the teenager's cloak and hit the archer straight in the chest, penetrating all the way to the handle.

The archer coughed up blood as he stammered: "Y... ou..."

"Oh yeah, I lied. Sorry mate, pretty gullible to believe I was gonna leave perfectly fine experience and tutorial points alone."

The archer only heard the first part before he passed away.

The teenager, William, walked away from the corpse without looking back. Leaving the dagger in the man's chest. He wanted them to know the killer was human, after all.

William was slightly disappointed in the levels of this group. Only a few of them had their class evolutions, which led to a rather dull fight. More importantly, it also meant less experience and tutorial points.

Not that he had expected much, just more than that. At least the tutorial points were worth his time. Not that he knew what they could be used for yet. He just liked to see the number go up. He especially liked to compare how many points he had to those killed - an objective measurement of how superior he was to all of them.

For William, who was already level 32 in his class, killing a bunch of humans barely gave any experience. Still, it gave more tutorial points than killing several beasts at, or above, his own level. After level 10, one had to kill around 10 or so beast at your own level, while above level 25, you had to kill even more.

Coupled with beasts over level 25 getting a lot stronger, it only made human-hunting even more worth it. The notifications did say he got extra experience from killing anything above his race level, but it honestly felt negligible.

William did admit that humans were far more dangerous in a straight fight, but they were also far more easily exploited. Their intelligence was both their greatest weakness and strength simultaneously.

What he had done held the same concept as how he got rid of his first group.

Richard and his flock had met another faction of roughly similar power and numbers. Around half of the remaining survivors were in those two camps combined, and more joined by the day, which was perfect for William.

Finding humans was perhaps the only thing harder than killing them. The forest was big, the beasts plentiful, and humans customarily grouped together. Having two figurative beacons attracting more humans made it significantly easier to keep track of them.

The merging talk was not ideal, so William decided to throw a small spanner in the works by wiping out one of Richard's squads, staging the battlefield beautifully to replicate what a big fight between two groups would look like.

He had then once more spread a few small rumors that the other faction had been behind it, putting on his naïve teenager act, easily convincing some of the middle-aged women working as crafters.

Of course, Richard had been skeptical, and talks had not broken down immediately, so William wiped out a group from the other faction too. That sure as hell sparked the flames.

Now there was a full-on war with daily casualties. While groups out hunting often avoided each other, they still got into fights if they did meet, and a few choice words were thrown.

Richard's plan to split up existing groups and spread them out, coupled with the system's selection method for entering the tutorial, ended up meaning that many had lost friends or family to the war. William didn't even have to incite violence anymore; it happened all naturally.

Which also meant that he could kill others as much as he wanted. As long as no survivors remained in the party, everyone simply assumed the other camp to be behind it.

William couldn't kill the more prominent groups in the double digits, but most were only five to six people, making them easy pickings.

He was still officially a member of Richard's faction, and he had even taken credit for a few kills, of course acting all shaken up and disturbed by having been forced to kill others.

The concept of acting all messed up just for killing someone was the natural reaction after all. Something William hadn't been particularly good at the first time he killed, but he was nothing if not a fast learner. Now he saw himself as an experienced mourner after many hours of practicing.

Not that William didn't still find the whole thing stupid. Especially here in the tutorial. Some people took days getting over having killed someone. He remembered one of the archers who were good at traps had acted like the world was ending just because his damn traps had done their job. What the fuck did he expect them to do?

William knew that he had to act illogical to fit in with others, though. As the saying goes, when in Rome do as the Romans do, and when among idiots, act like an idiot. Richard at least took killing people rather calmly, but then again, from what William knew, the man had prior experience killing people. Speaking of Richard, he couldn't help but lick his lips.

Without a doubt, the man was the one with the highest level and tutorial points besides himself. It would be glorious when he finally got to him. When it was finally time to cash in. For now, however, the man still had work to do, acting as an excellent little shepherd gathering more prey for him. He would have to bide his time.

It wasn't like he had confidence in just straight-up killing the man, especially not if he was with his entire squad. Everyone in that squad had their class upgrades, and William knew precisely how much of a boost that gave you.

William had evolved his class to become a [Metal Savant], which was a massive boost to pretty much everything. His existing skills got stronger, his control improved massively, and he even gained a few new skills. It also granted him the metal manipulation, meaning he didn't even need the wand anymore.

He could now even conjure a steel-like metal out of mana, which he mainly practiced by conjuring daggers. Which meant he didn't have to carry around a bunch of them all the time. Though he still always had a couple on him, as manipulating existing ones was less mana-intensive than making them.

Conjured metal also disappeared after a while, making it harder to stage fights. On top of that, it also took a lot of time to make just a single dagger, so he had to conjure what he needed before the fight. Of course, this was outside of other skills creating metallic objects such as the shield he could make.

Though it helped that one of the skills his evolution had provided allowed him to absorb metal. He could then conjure said absorbed metal, the mana cost dependent on the quality and quantity of what he made, with the skill also able to re-absorb conjured metal, regaining some of the mana.

The third powerful new skill he had gotten was one that summoned a massive spinning disc of metal that he could send flying in a straight line. This was the one he had used to kill the heavy warrior earlier, and the thing packed a massive punch.

His only real weakness was that he still lacked reliable defensive methods. While he could conjure a shield and manipulate his movements by wearing metal armor, he would have loved to be able to turn his skin steel or something. Stealth attacks were a particular concern.

Not that he had experienced being stealth-attacked yet. The funny thing was that he could often just walk straight up to people and attack them. The idiots gullible right until their deaths.

After a good 30 minutes, he finally made it back to camp, which by now was more a full-on base. Cabins were popping up every day, a wall of stakes slowly being built, and campfires everywhere. William had been assigned one of the cabins, which he shared with a bunch of the crafters.

William couldn't care less for all the silly politics going on in camp. The members deemed important got stuff first, and William had never gotten anything, which was to say he was not considered important. Just like he wanted it.

Well, he was a bit important. Richard was a sharp man, after all. He knew the teenager was not weak in any way. William seriously doubted the warrior knew much about him, just that he was one of the few people able to hunt alone.

He had even been invited several times to important meetings. He liked going to those and just listen in. Throwing in either a neutral or naïve comment here and there.

Even when Richard so clearly probed him to reveal more about himself, he never made his real opinions known. William did answer all his inquiries but kept up the persona he had so carefully crafted. He deemed it too suspicious not to answer at all.

William had, for many years, gone about pretty much everything wrong. He had thought one simply had to be themselves. But he now knew that you had to be what people expected of you. What they hope for you to be. If they have a positive impression, enforce that impression, and if they have a negative one, try to disprove that assumption.

That was precisely what he'd done. He also knew he couldn't be too dull, or it would get suspicious. He had to be shy and yet competent enough to not be ignored entirely. Attempting to be too ordinary ends up being abnormal.

He had a lot of time back in the center to figure all this out. That was until he was thrown to another center where they thought the best thing was to try and fuck him up with drugs. They just had to 'rehabilitate' him a bit and throw him back into society.

Though that never came to pass as the tutorial happened.

He was still mad at himself for getting thrown in the first center, to begin with. One mistake and everything had crumbled.

Shaking his head, he smiled to himself. None of that mattered anymore. No centers, no drugs, just him and an endless universe. In this new world, his abnormality was synonymous with strength - his 'defects' an ideal.

While thinking of the beautiful future ahead of him, he dozed off as he took a quick nap. Even with all the levels and evolution, one still had to sleep a bit once in a while. Only a couple of hours every couple of days, but you had to. It was not exactly physical tiredness, but the exhaustion of the mind. This need for sleep was reduced by every level and was significantly reduced in one go from the evolution.

Sleeping for only a couple of hours did more or less fully restore mana and stamina, though. So, it was not entirely a waste of time, as mana and stamina potions were very rare at this point, with only a few remaining, all hoarded by Richard and his elite. Even William only had a few hidden, as walking around with dozens would quickly become a bit too suspicious.

Waking up, he instantly felt fully refreshed as he jumped out of bed, ready for more hunting. It was still in the middle of the day, so none of his cabinmates had come by the cabin while he slept.

Exiting the cabin, he got his routine started. First, he went to talk to the crafters, chatting them up and making friends, and all that other social stuff. He had to keep up appearances. Also, it was beneficial when it came to getting his needs expedited.

He finished it off with a quick trip over to The Smith, by far the most interesting camp member, besides maybe Richard.

He was also the most useful besides the healers. William made no secret that he had a skill to manipulate metal, so he made it a habit to ask The Smith to improve his daggers. He had even convinced the man to help modify the armor he had, making it lighter and more suitable for him. Apparently, from what he could gather, the man had a son around Williams age.

Another weird, but nevertheless useful, sentiment humans had. William wasn't exactly sure why familial relationships had such an effect on people. He only knew that it did and that humans often got illogical and, therefore, easily manipulated when it came to family matters. He had learned that the hard way.

Not that William didn't see some logic in it. He understood why his parents had helped him and propped him up. They needed a caretaker and an income for when they became unable to get one themselves. Which only made their actions all the more perplexing.

Getting his daggers back, he thanked The Smith, who once again tried to convince him to pick up smithing. It wasn't that William didn't want to, but he would rather level his class for now. Once his class level got higher, he would switch to leveling a profession to boost his race levels.

Making his goodbyes, he once more ventured into the forest to hunt some more. He had gotten some useful information off the naïve archer earlier and decided to act on it. The main objective was still to hunt beasts and gain levels, but finding a small group of other survivors would sure be a welcome addition to his total number of tutorial points.

Three hours later, he was fighting a giant buffalo-thing, naturally winning. It didn't seem to possess any special magical powers despite it being above level 25. It was just big and could take one hell of a beating. Besides that, though, it was easy to fight. This had ultimately led to the buffalo being every survivor's preferred prey as less risk was associated with the hunt.

This mighty beast was mutilated by William's spinning metal disc of death. Like a saw blade, it penetrated into the beast, spinning as blood flew everywhere. The mana consumption was insane, but it only took a few seconds before the buffalo was cut in half at its mid-section.

Continuing its flight, the disc penetrated slightly into a tree, as William stopped the spinning. A few seconds later, the disc started smoking and soon disappeared into nothingness. Into pure mana that reintegrated with the atmosphere.

William was still a bit baffled by the trees' strength, as he was utterly incapable of cutting them in two, only able to penetrate the bark. Though it was only some trees, others could be cut down easily like regular pre-system trees.

His critical thoughts on trees were sadly interrupted as he heard the sound of people talking. The noise of his fight had apparently been loud enough to attract others.

Smiling, he levitated himself up to a tree by lifting himself up by his metallic armor as he hid among some leaves, eagerly awaiting the survivors coming to investigate.

He could only lick his lips as he saw five people. None of them were from Richard's group as he did not recognize them, though he had to admit he didn't quite know everyone.

As the survivors saw the beast that had been cut in half, they all stopped dead in their tracks. Before anyone could open their mouth, a giant spinning disc of metal flew out from one of the trees, cutting into their caster.

What followed was a mad scramble to get their bearings, which was ultimately in vain as daggers started flying at them from every direction, followed by yet another two discs of metal. The archer only managed to get off a couple of arrows before he too fell, all of which easily blocked by a wall of metal protecting the tree's crown the attacker hid in.

William, pleased with the worthwhile ambush, jumped down from the tree as he looted the corpses. All had been 25 or above, and all had plenty of points. As he looted, he thought about how it still wasn't really worth killing humans for the experience. He really hoped tutorial points were valuable.

William didn't hate humans. He just didn't really understand them most of the time. He did hate how they often acted. Their illogical approach to nearly everything. How they made asinine decisions that a million studies could tell them was stupid.

If the tutorial didn't encourage him to kill them, he likely wouldn't even have bothered with it. He would just have been a good little boy and made use of them for free healing and crafting. But the system rewarded him for killing them, so he would kill them. The system wanted there to be the fewest amount of survivors possible.

William could do that. He would make sure the number was as low as it could be. The teenager was also nothing if not ambitious. His final goal of how many he wanted to survive reflected that.

It wasn't personal; it was only business - pure logic to further himself and his strength. So he had concluded the optimal number of survivors to be: