

## Hunter 78

### Chapter 78: Introspection

The otherwise peaceful pond was now disturbed by blood and dead beasts - a situation that seemed to not sit well with the Great White Stag as it slowly walked in.

Jake was a bit more than a hundred meters away at this point, as he observed from a small hill. His head barely popped up to the top of the grass, leaving it still partly covered. He was unsure if this distance was safe, but he guessed it was. If it weren't... well, he would handle that problem if it presented itself.

The Great White Stag slowly walked around the clearing for a bit, sniffing the ground here and there and inspecting every single one of the corpses. The three does following it did so silently, though Jake could clearly feel that they were very alert and ready to spring into action at any moment.

He couldn't help considering attacking now. The stag was alone with only its three usual followers with it. In the center, it was always surrounded by close to a hundred other beasts... but he didn't attack.

His mind told him 'yes', but his instincts and intuition gave him a resounding 'no'. Something felt off about the entire situation. Why would the big boss come here only with three followers? It seemed far too convenient.

So he waited.

The clearing's perimeter was scoured carefully by both the Great White Stag and its followers, forcing Jake to duck down a little lower. At one point, he felt his danger sense vaguely warn him that they got close. Too close.

The white stag kept sniffing around the area for a few minutes before it suddenly seemed to get bored. It bellowed at the does around it, as they all sprung into action. Jake momentarily thought he was discovered, but quickly calmed down when he saw what they were doing.

They bit into the dead deer that he had killed and started dragging them across the soil. The stag merely watched them work as they gathered up the corpses and put them all in a big pile. When they were all gathered up, the stag finally made its intentions clear as its antlers started giving off light.

Jake instantly felt it in the air. The very atmosphere seemed to change as the fake sun above darkened. The sky turned black as a bright white orb appeared - a moon.

Or, more accurately, a representation of a moon. It wasn't the moon from earth, but an entirely unblemished marble. There were no craters on it, nothing at all. It looked like a perfectly round pearl floating above. What happened next, however, made him aware that this was not merely an illusion.

The antlers of the Great White Stag pulsed with mana and light as the moon above came alive. A beam descended on the pile of corpses less than a second later, enveloping it entirely. It had to have a radius of at least 3 or 4 meters, with a mana intensity far above anything Jake had ever seen before. Discounting whatever the Malefic Viper had done, of course.

A few seconds later, the light stopped just as abruptly as it came. What was left was... nothing. Not a single piece of the beasts remained, not even a single drop of blood on the grass. Which lead to the second point... the grass was completely untouched. In fact, it seemed to have more vitality than before the light descended.

With its work done, the stag's antlers stopped glowing as the sky returned to normal. With its does in tow, it sauntered back towards the center pond once more.

Jake was left astonished by the display. The power behind it was above what he had imagined. But what was even more incredible was how the hell the beast had done it. He had a pretty good sense for mana by now, but whatever the hell it did, it didn't do entirely with its own power. It was like it had pulled pure unadulterated power out of nothing.

That, or it had somehow amplified whatever mana it did use to create a bigger phenomenon. Like how a single spark could lead to a house burning down, it too had merely released a spark starting the entire process.

He knew that the power he released from his Infused Powershot was more than just the sum of its parts. The system amplified it, but whatever the Great White Stag did was on an entirely different level. There was something more behind it, but he couldn't figure it out no matter how much he thought about it.

But for some reason, despite his astonishment, he wasn't deterred at all. Its display of power was noticeable, yes, but it wasn't above and beyond what he could face. It was more the concept behind the attack that stunned him.

In fact, the display only made him more excited to face it eventually. To discover what more it would have in store for him. For him to overcome it. But first, he still had a lot of other deer to kill. He could likely wait at the pond for another group to appear but decided to head north instead.

He would move swiftly from pond to pond and eliminate the groups one by one. Then finally, he would strike at the Great White Stag. Based on the number of enemies, he should easily reach level 50 in his class before the final battle, giving him yet another edge.

With a plan and tremendous motivation, he dove into the tall grass, already looking forward to the next battle.

William dreamt as he experienced memory after memory. Of the things he had done in the past and how he had dealt with it. Countless visions of his behavior and rationalization superimposed on each other, forcing him to reflect on his path, whether he liked to or not.

He remembered how he had killed his brother, the pain he had inflicted upon his parents, and all those he had hurt through his actions. The nurse who got fired and sued, the people he had manipulated to get what he wanted.

In some ways, emotions could be considered a weakness. In certain scenarios, they could lead you astray or to make the wrong decision at the wrong time. Get emotional and do something you would come to regret.

William had only two memories, where the emotions felt truly real. One was when Herrmann died, and the other was during the final battle. Where he had, for the first time ever, felt hatred and killing someone not for pragmatic reasons, but because he truly wanted that person dead.

How he, in the final moments, had displayed strength above and beyond what he should be able to. But it was chaotic. Uncontrolled. Too close to the weakness that led to the escalated war. The suicidal actions of Hayden and even Herrmann himself.

No, William would transcend above that because the dreams made something absolutely clear to him. This tutorial was his to claim, his foundation to build his power upon. He felt the whispers in the back of his mind, guiding him. The specter of Herrmann proudly showing him his rightful path.

William understood. Through this, he could reach beyond perfection because that was his destiny.

Jacob sat cross-legged in the square, surrounded by all the other survivors of their camp. He was speaking of hope and bringing up the spirits of the people.

Most of them had been non-combatants, to begin with. Most of the survivors were middle-aged office workers who never had any desire to fight. They were understandably distraught after the death of every single combatant except for Bertram. And it wasn't like he had ever been a top fighter.

But with his new class, all of that had changed. The hopeless had turned to an optimistic view of the future. Jacob spoke of the wonders of the system, the existence of gods, and how he had even met one. He spoke of a way out of this tutorial.

He had segued into the thought that perhaps death was not the final end. Everyone knew of religious messages, and with gods being a real thing, it led many to the natural conclusion of an afterlife existing. At first, he had met resistance, but as he got better, so did he get more convincing.

He had also disclosed his new class, not by name, but by function. He had called himself a guide of sorts. To prove his claims, he had enlisted Bertram's help to teach him a bit about combat. Just the theoretical stuff.

With this knowledge, he had taught the warriors, and in only a few hours, one of them got a level - a class level. The survivor was only at level 14 before he leveled, but it did prove the possibility of leveling a class without fighting. Which was, of course, another source of hope.

As for Jacob himself, well, his progress was on another level.

\*'DING!' Class: [Augur of Hope] has reached level 36 - Stat points allocated, +8 free points\*

In only a few days, he had gained 11 levels. From merely talking and teaching. He was ecstatic at the new possibilities opened up before him, and his enthusiasm for the system and his new class only seemed to speed up his progress further.

As one knows, an engaged and interested teacher is far better than a bored one. And Jacob was at the peak of interest.

At level 30, he had also earned another skill that only helped him further.

[Enlightenment of the Holy Pantheon (Epic)] – Blessed by the Holy Mother herself, you have become her spokesperson among your race. To fulfill your role, you must know what to teach. Grants knowledge of the teachings of the Holy Church directly from the Holy Pantheon itself. Increase the effect of all light-affinity mana. Grants a karmic path connecting you with the Holy Pantheon.

When he gained the skill, he felt an influx of knowledge like never before. He suddenly knew of many gods, and of course also of the Holy Mother herself. It was only surface-information about the specific members, but he did discover that the Pantheon consisted of many gods, with the Holy Mother being the supreme leader.

What he gained the most, however, was the knowledge of their teachings. Teachings of compassion and working together. Of the importance of cohesion and in guiding others towards a greater path. Teachings against the chaos that so often ruled.

To embrace fate and move to realize one's true destiny.

It was a path of order. To be civilized and taking care of one another. Compared to the tutorial nightmare, this path was far more aligned with the old rules of earth. But it did have some rather significant differences.

First of all, the act of killing was viewed as a necessity. In the end, the system was supreme, and to advance, combat and killing had to be done.

But it also recognized that perhaps not all were fit for killing and fighting. Instead, these people could support the warriors. They could walk the path of professions and only pick up their weapons in the greatest of emergencies.

The teachings were not complicated at all. They were simple and easy to understand. Like a normal religious text, the skill also granted Jacob a plethora of stories to tell - stories that exemplified the teachings.

Most important out of all of the teachings was the power of faith. The possibilities opened to mortals through aligning themselves with gods - the synergetic relationship between a god and his or her followers. The god and their followers acting as teachers and guides. Leading the mortals towards a brighter future, while the god would be supplied with even more followers and the power of faith.

The knowledge given by the system was far from complete. It was like a study-guide of information he could now access, giving him something to go through whenever he used his newly gained Meditation skill.

Jacob had also received something he didn't expect to. After he became an Augur and determined himself to lead them, the system responded as it gave him a quest.

Tutorial Quest: A Leader is born

Objective: Become a respected leader of at least 95% of the other humans during the tutorial.

Current progress: 98%

Quest Completed!

Reward given upon the conclusion of the tutorial.

After he got the quest, it only took a day to complete it. He didn't know if getting the quest was a good or bad thing, but he chose to believe it was good.



Looking out at the fervent believers in front of him, Jacob smiled, satisfied. All of them had come to follow him, and in turn, the Holy Church. It was incredible how easily people grab on to the slightest shred of hope in what they otherwise believed to be hopeless situations.

His only regret was the knowledge that this hope sadly wouldn't last... the fate of every single one of them, himself included, had already been written.