

## Hunter 84

### Chapter 84: True Protagonist

His entire body ached with pain. Pain, unlike any he had ever felt before.

But he could only smile at the sensation because pain meant that he was still alive.

When he had regained consciousness, he didn't know. But he did know that it had been several days since he had nearly fallen. His entire body cooked inside his armor, his skin cauterized, the blood in his veins boiling, and his eyes popping out from the heat.

But despite all that, he had lived. Held on to his last sliver of health. He should have died; he knew that. But hadn't because death was not his destiny. He was chosen, so his body refused to die, and slowly, he started to heal.

His entire body healed at once, meaning that all parts healed at a nearly equal pace. It only took a few days before his limbs started returning to peak condition, but his internal organs had still taken a long time to return to a functional state.

And today, for the first time, his sight returned. He could always see through the breastplate still on him, but now he could finally observe the world through his own eyes. Today, he was finally ready to make himself known once more.

The ash on him scattered as he moved his body. His skin revealed below, healthier than ever. His mind, sharper than before. William felt reborn like a phoenix experiencing nirvana. Reforged in both body and mind.

Looking around, he saw the now already half-eaten corpses of the ones he had slaughtered. He saw the dead rodents that had dared to think him just another cadaver to consume.

He had absorbed the armor and weapons of the fallen. He had regained his mana and was now far more potent than before. His skill to absorb metals had even upgraded in rarity, now allowing him to absorb even enchanted metals.

With his mind, he extended his armor to cover his entire body once more, only leaving his face visible. As he looked around for useful items, he was disappointed to find not a single enchanted item anywhere.

It didn't take him long to put and two and two together. The other survivors must have come to gather the loot. In the end, no matter a herbivore or a predator, humans would be forever greedy. William saw no scenario of them leaving good stuff laying around.

He was lucky they hadn't found him. He had been entirely burned, likely being why no one had recognized him as being alive. But luck was but to be expected. For a protagonist to experience supernatural luck wasn't out of the ordinary in the least. At least that is what William believed.

His domination of the tutorial was, however, not over. As his tutorial panel clearly showed, he had more to kill.

Tutorial Panel

Total Survivors Remaining: 49/1200

Duration: 14 days & 00:40:44

As he looked through his logs, he found an entry he had expected.

Tutorial Quest: A Leader is born

Objective: Become the sole leader of at least 90% of the other humans during the tutorial.

Current progress: 2%

Eliminate other leaders: 0/1

He had gotten it the moment he also got the notification for killing Richard - a sweet notification indeed.

\*You have slain [Human (E) - lvl 34 / Stalwart Bulwark - lvl 41 / Tyrannical Conniver - lvl 28] – Experience earned. 27.254.214 TP earned\*

Despite the level difference, William had gained several levels from that one fight. But then again, he had killed a lot of people.

He had gotten revenge. He had fulfilled the final wish of his first friend, Hermann Schmidt, and now he could return to his own agenda.

Over these last few days, William had a lot of time to think and dream as he slipped in and out of consciousness. With his body idle, he only had his own mind to keep him company. William had, for the first time, felt anger and had become illogical because of his emotions. And the feeling was oddly... liberating.

Before, he never felt anything when he killed, just a mild satisfaction from the levels and whatever else he got. He enjoyed the benefits from the kills, but not the act of killing itself. He did make a game out of it, but that was just to spice up the monotony.

The concept of emotions had been opened to him. He was acutely aware of it. But unlike an average person, William viewed it as only another tool. He had seen that emotions could allow one to perform feats above what they should otherwise. But he had also seen it corrupt them.

Herrmann had been corrupted, the trapper Casper had been corrupted. So many people in this tutorial had been infected with the curse that was chaotic emotions. By guilt, loss, depression, bloodlust, and uncontrollable urges for revenge.

He would not fall to the same fate. Yet, he could not simply write them off. Herrmann had made armor far stronger than he should have been able to make, and Casper had displayed power that even the current William couldn't comprehend.

It had been close during his fight with Richard. He had lost himself towards the end, felt the inklings of corruption enter his mind. His thoughts turned cloudy, his desires illogical. His actions... emotional.

But with a long time spent laying there, he managed to find his footing once more. He healed himself of much of the affliction that had come over him. He felt close to what he did before entering the tutorial once more. Through the many dreams that came to him, he felt enlightened as he came to a new understanding.

He was now beyond his prior definition of perfection. His potential had increased.

He had already reaped the benefits once. He would have never upgraded a skill like that without the massive stimuli from the near-death experience coupled with his raging emotions. It was a cocktail that forced him to overcome what he currently was, drag everything out from within to realize his desire.

And William was acutely aware of his desires. He wanted power. At first, he did so only as an instinctual craving, but now he truly desired it. He desired to reach perfection, to become an insurmountable existence, and he would stop at nothing to realize that craving.

Richard had held power, but it was the fragile sort. Power reliant on others. He had been betrayed by those he believed to be his allies, which had ultimately contributed to his death. A fate William had no intentions to repeat.

Which was why he didn't care much for the quest. William did not see himself as a leader. Not because he believed himself incapable of leading, but because it wasn't necessary. Yet his dreams made him aware that he was to complete it.

Right now, he had earned the loyalty of 2% of the tutorial. A rounded up number, he was sure. He was the leader of only one survivor, and that was himself - a fact he had no desire to change. Even in all his arrogance, William didn't believe it possible to make them all loyal to him, so he would have to do it the hard way...

There was also the other leader, who William already knew was Jacob. It had to be. Weirdly enough, he didn't really feel any desire to kill the man, but he knew he would have to. It was possible to force him into leading the camp into being loyal to him, but William had kind of killed his girlfriend...

So he started walking back towards the base. He hoped they had not scattered to the winds at the loss of Richard but had stayed. It would be easier that way, and he would be able to get the unpleasant business out of the way faster.

It did not take him long to return. He didn't even bother to attempt a covert approach as he simply strolled through the open gate. He feared for a moment that the survivors had left, but just as he entered, he spotted two people sitting just inside. Jacob and that warrior guy who was always around him.

"Hello, William," Jacob said, being the first to open his mouth. The warrior at his side, silently observing.

"Well, hello there, Jacob," William answered, returning the man's smile. "Been a while, eh?"

"It has. I see that you have healed up alright. You looked terrible the last time I saw you."

At that, Williams's eyes sharpened. Had Jacob found him on the battlefield? William didn't remember seeing him... which meant it was during the first days when he was still blacked out. But if that was true... why hadn't he killed him? The man in front of him was also clearly not on guard at all. He was too damn relaxed. He couldn't help but use Identify on him and was instantly taken aback.

[Human – lvl 37]

What the fuck? William thought to himself as he lifted his guard instantly. He also identified the warrior, with a level that at least wasn't much of a surprise.

[Human – lvl 26]

He had no idea what the hell had happened this last week. What had the otherwise utterly useless 'manager' done to become so strong? And his previous comment also vexed him annoyingly so.

"So you went to the battlefield?" William asked, the mana in his body churning, ready to strike at a moment's notice.

"I did. But I am not talking about your injuries. You looked confused, last I saw you. Distracted. Like you had lost something, and that you had a wrong you had to make right. And from the looks of it, you have succeeded in doing so," Jacob answered, still smiling at the young man in front of him. "I am happy for you that you have found yourself again."

What the actual fuck is wrong with this guy? William questioned. He knew Jacob was many things, but stupid was not at the top of that list. Naïve, idealistic, passive, a pushover, all of those were on the list.

But not stupid. He must know that William was the instigator of the slaughter that had happened. That he had been the one to kill Richard, and yet he seemed just not to care.

William had thought a lot about desires for the last week, which made it natural for him to ask.

“What the hell do you want?”

“Does it matter? You have clearly chosen your path already, and my wants won’t change your actions. You have come here with a goal to accomplish, and my words will not dissuade you,” Jacob answered.

“So you are just going to sit there and die, or what? While I kill you and everyone else here?” William asked, clearly annoyed. An annoyance that only got worse as the warrior didn’t even react at the apparent threat and Jacob just kept smiling.

“The others have already found their peace. I have no desire to die, but once again, my desires will not change the outcome. This is how it is meant to be. We can only hope to struggle against fate, and that hope is enough for me. I have altered the course slightly, made the transition ideal.”

“Oh, really?” William asked, as his mana churned. Without warning, a colossal sawblade was fired out from his hand, hitting the warrior. To which the warrior just tilted his neck upwards, displaying only a faint smile as the sawblade cut his head off. But before the severed head even hit the ground, his entire body turned to light that entered Jacob. William didn’t get a kill notification...

“Sorry, William, he does not die so easily. As long as I live, he will return to my side once more after a while,” Jacob answered the question the teenager had yet to ask. He didn’t even try to hide the sadness



of imagining his friend die. While death was not permanent, Bertram would still feel pain. But at least he had died nearly instantaneously.

Jacob knew this was not a fight they could ever win, not that he had ever had the intention to fight. Even with all the survivors in the camp, it would only be a one-sided slaughter. They had all known, and they all joined him only a few minutes before William arrived.

“Oh yeah, and what about the others?” William asked, trying to wrest back some semblance of control of the situation. He felt like he was just doing precisely what the fucker in front of him expected from beginning to end. A feeling he definitely did not desire.

“As I said, they joined me earlier,” Jacob said as he summoned a lantern. Around it, many motes of light flew. 45 motes, to be exact.

William instantly opened the tutorial panel with his mind and widened his eye at the number.

Total Survivors Remaining: 3/1200

“Wow, and people call me a psycho. You already killed them all,” William whistled. He honestly hadn’t looked forward to killing them. The thought of it alone made his still slightly rampant emotions protest annoyingly. So it was a welcome surprise that Jacob was just another hypocrite that-

“No, that wasn’t necessary. They simply accepted the inevitable and agreed to join me in reaching for a fate above their station. They put their hopes in me, a burden I agreed to carry happily, with a promise of deliverance to the Holyland,” Jacob said as he got up.

William considered attacking at the sudden movement but felt not an ounce of threat from the man in front of him.

“Come with me,” Jacob said as he motioned for William to follow, which he did, partly out of curiosity and partly out of some weird power compelling him to trust the man in front of him. A power which he was very aware of, but only piqued his interest more.

They walked to the middle of the base, where he saw a sight he hadn’t expected. 45 people sat with their legs crossed in the square. All of them pale with a smile on their lips. Not an ounce of life remained in any of them, yet not a single wound could be seen anywhere. In front, a woman William clearly remembered to be a colleague of Jacob’s... but she too sat lifelessly.

“I spared everyone from the unnecessary pain this act would bring,” Jacob said. “I apologize for making the decision without you, and I hope my death can help alleviate any frustrations. My only request is that you make it quick. I know my own fate, but I have never been a big fan of pain.”

William only got more and more confused. Had he walked into some freaking kool-aid drinking cult? The people were clearly deader than dead, and not a single one of them seemed to give a hoot based on their facial expressions.

“So that is it, you are just offering up your neck?” William asked, standing a few steps behind Jacob.

“William, you have already found a path. Your path. I cannot say if it is one towards oblivion or greatness, but it is yours. I have nowhere to guide you, and I doubt I would be able to even if I tried. You already have a teacher who can offer you far more than I ever can,” Jacob answered as he turned to

look at the teenager. “Besides, would you spare me if I struggled? That quest won’t be completed on its own.”

“You are fucking weird, Jacob, you know that, right?” William asked. “Just so you know, this isn’t personal.”

A spear appeared in William’s hand as he stabbed it through the head of the man in front of him. It pierced right through and out the other side as the curse within starting turning Jacob to metal. A process far harder than William expected as the curse struggled against the Augur’s high vitality and willpower. But with Jacob not struggling in the least, the curse quickly found purchase and transformed the still smiling man into a statue.

\*You have slain [Human (E) - lvl 37 / Augur of Hope - lvl 50 / Novice Tailor – lvl 24] - 94.541 TP earned\*

William didn’t feel an ounce of satisfaction from the kill. He did, however, take notice of the notification. First was the class, Augur. He couldn’t quite remember exactly what that word meant, but he was pretty sure it was religious or something. At least the guy had been preachy as fuck.

The second part was the lack of experience gained. Why hadn’t he gained any fro-

Just as he thought this, the statue before him lit up with light. It’s surface cracked and exploded as light consumed the entire camp. A beam descended as William was knocked back - knocked back, but unharmed. The final thing he saw a figure floating up before all light disappeared, and for a brief moment, the entire outer area of the tutorial was covered in darkness.

Once light returned, he saw that the metalized statue of Jacob was gone. All of the corpses of the crafters had also turned to dust.

William stood confused, wondering what the fuck was going on. What a peculiar fellow, he thought, as he actually found the developments welcome. At least it was interesting, and he had a feeling he would meet the Augur again sometime in the future.

Checking the number of survivors, he saw what he expected - no surprises there at least.

Total Survivors Remaining: 2/1200

This tutorial's final curtains were drawing closer, and with that the true protagonist of this trial was soon to be found. And William was more than confident that he would be the one standing in the end. Only a single afterthought remained - a single challenger.

A lone archer who William didn't even see as a threat. Just another bullet point to get checked off.

Tutorial Panel

Duration: 13 days & 23:51:10

Something he had plenty of time to do. Because if William's dreams had made one thing clear, it was that this tutorial was his stage.

