

## Hunter 86

### Chapter 86: The right way

Jake walked through the shithole that dared call itself a dungeon with sloppy steps. Once in a while, a damn rat jumped out at him before swiftly being executed. He had stopped caring about elaborate tactics many hours ago.

The first few hours went fine and all. Shoot a burning arrow, kill rats, repeat. It got a bit tedious after the tenth time, sure, but Jake kept it up. The experience was frankly shit compared to what he had gotten in both of the other two dungeons.

He had kept up his tactic of following the left wall all along, but he felt like he was getting nowhere. That was until he saw the corpse of a rat he had slain earlier, meaning he had started circling back again. Jake kept going, however, thinking at worst he was just going to end up at the crossroad around the beginning of the dungeon.

It was as expected when he came across a bunch more corpses, but it started getting weird after that. Taking a few turns, he found living rats, which he quickly got rid of. A few minutes later, he once more found himself in front of the same dead rats from earlier.

Jake began marking the walls here and there, something he should have likely done far earlier. It took him hours where he kept walking, seeing his signs left behind at times, but when he came across his first sign for the second time in an hour, he started to realize that something was well and truly off.

After several more fruitless hours, he finally found the problem; the damn walls were moving. Or at least something made the layout change all the time. In other words, following the left wall had proven not to be a foolproof strategy.

He had to find some other way out... and sooner rather than later. He was still on a timer if he had any hope of facing the King of the Forest. Two days had already passed since he entered.

It wasn't all bad, though. Jake had managed to gain two levels during those two days. It was far less than the other dungeons, sure, but it was something. Still faster than the outside too probably.... the darkness was a bit tiring, though.

This had put him at level 59, only a single level away from his next class skill gain. He couldn't help but be hopeful of unlocking something akin to his Moment of the Primal Hunter once more. His speed had been fast if he said so himself, even considering the bullshit that was this dungeon. But he had a strong feeling he shouldn't bank on getting random legendary skill upgrades.

The rest of his time, he had just spent trying to practice with his mana threads. They were far harder to summon in here as the mana in the air seemed to suppress it. It made him consume far more mana than usual and make the threads disappear the instant he stopped focusing on them.

Weirdly enough, he hadn't needed to drink a single mana potion, though. For some reason, his mana regenerated far faster within the dungeon than outside. Likely because of the high mana density he theorized.

He also began to be able to make his threads of mana last longer and longer. He wanted to find a way to let his threads remain in the air without him having to provide them with massive amounts of mana continually.

The method he was trying was to make use of the mana in the atmosphere. He would do this by mimicking the mana, allowing his own to 'survive' within it. Maybe even tap into the mana around him to be self-sustainable if he really outdid himself.

So far, it was actually looking promising. Jake seemed to slowly adapt to the environment as the dark-affinity mana became more familiar to him.

Another thing he practiced was his senses. He had relied overly much on his sphere and sight for the entire tutorial he had begun realizing. If he was in an environment where the sphere got completely suppressed along with his sight, he would have no recourse at all.

Which was why he also tried using his hearing and, with much suffering, his sense of smell. The molerats could somehow smell him despite the all-encompassing stench permeating the sewers. He wanted to see if he could replicate some of that.

It had been... less than successful, especially on the smelling side. Jake had started getting used to the stench, but whenever he tried to focus on his sense of smell, he felt like someone threw a stink-bomb in his face.

In the hearing department, he had some more progress, though. He had gotten better at zoning out unnecessary noise, but it was far from having any practical applications yet. But as he had fuck-all else to do while walking through the shitty maze, he decided to at least be constructive. The one thing he wanted to avoid was not doing anything.

Not doing anything meant that he had time to think about things he didn't want to think about - distracting thoughts unrelated to his current goal of defeating the four Beast Lords and finally the King of the Forest. And that was something he wanted to avoid at all cost.

He continued his multitasking practice as he kept himself entirely occupied both mentally and physically as he continued walking forward. He decided to ignore his stay-on-the-left-strategy and switched to a just-go-whenever-strategy.

Which turned out to actually help as in only a few hours he found himself back at the crossroad he had first chosen to go left at. He decided to check the dungeon's entrance and found it exactly where it had been before. However, he didn't even consider exiting. He had come here to defeat the dungeon boss, cost what it may.

So, he turned back and delved into the dungeon once more. He didn't turn left this time but decided just to sit down and meditate at the crossroad. He wanted to learn how to properly control his strings before he continued. So with his full focus on the dark mana around him, he entered meditation as countless strings of mana sprung out from his entire body, as he also began formulating a plan.

He walked through the grand hall with a relaxed smile on his face - a silent guardian walking by his side, marveling at his surroundings.

As fate would have it, Jacob had not perished, but he still instantly knew that he was no longer in the tutorial. He had 'failed it' if one could say that.

His tutorial panel was still there but was inactive. He had lost half of his tutorial points, not that there were many of them to begin with, and he could no longer see the number of survivors. The only thing he could see was his amount of points and the countdown for it to end.

Not that he ultimately cared much for the entire tutorial. In fact, he was happy to no longer be there. He was unsure what his future would be like, but he was looking forward to whatever was ahead. After leaving, he had tried to divine the future, but it had been far too vague for him to see anything. Confirming to him that the tutorial had been... abnormal.

As to how he had survived? His legendary skill One More Light.

He was still unsure exactly how it had worked, but he didn't feel everything suddenly becoming black after he died but was instead surrounded by light.

After what could have been hours or days, he found himself standing on a magic circle. His spirit form was enveloped by light as he once more returned to life. Shortly after reviving, a slight tug was felt in the back of his mind. He responded to it as he knew exactly what, or more precisely who, it was.

His mana, health, and stamina all drained down to less than half as it poured into an outline of a tall man beside him. It didn't take long for the process to complete and Bertram to appear.

They had one minor problem, though. Both men stood naked, clothes apparently not being transferable across realms in the form of a spirit.

A problem that was quickly resolved as they looked around the room they had appeared in. Everything was made of what appeared to be pure white marble, with only golden motifs and patterns as decorations. There was nothing really in the room, except for two white robes laying on a small table right in front of the circle.

Jacob and Bertram took the hint as they got dressed and walked out of the room, and now they walked through the hall. Bertram looking all around him with Jacob simply feeling genuinely relaxed and serene for the first time in a while.

“Does this whole resurrection thing mean you are immortal?” asked Bertram after a while.

“Pretty sure being immortal means not dying of old age, something I am pretty sure I still will,” Jacob answered jokingly.

“Very funny. You know what I mean,” Bertram answered, not as amused by the joke as his young master.

“No, I won’t simply be able to cheat death once more. The skill was called ONE More Light for a reason. It only works once. I still have the skill, but I can feel that I would truly die if I were to die once more. Maybe things will change later, but for now, I am as mortal as anyone else,” Jacob answered thoughtfully.

“Disappointing,” Bertram grunted as they continued walking in silence.

The hall was long, far too long for what could be considered reasonable. Then again, it was likely not made with weak mortals like Jacob and Bertram in mind. Countless rooms were on either side of the hall, all closed off by shut doors.

They didn’t try to enter any of them. It was faint, but they both felt the call from the end of the hall. Something, or someone, was making it very clear that they were supposed to go there. So they did.

Half an hour later, they found themselves exiting the hallway as they entered yet another, somehow far grander, room.

Golden chandeliers hung from the ceiling, tiled white floor, and furniture that looked to be made of silk. The most interesting thing, however, was the walls. All of the walls were either covered by indentures of bookcases or beautiful floor-to-ceiling paintings, all depicting female figures in an abstract style.

The paintings gave off a strong feeling as they stared at it, and both felt themselves be drawn in by the absolute beauty of the artistry. In particular, they both stared at one showing a woman in a yellow robe, surrounded by children. However, even more so than the artistry of the piece was the strong mana and aura given off by the painting, giving them both a feeling of relaxation and inspiration.

"A fine piece, is it not?" they heard a voice speak out behind them. Turning, Jacob and Bertram saw a woman in a white robe, not much unlike their own. Her appearance could only be compared to the beautiful paintings around them, with her perfect unblemished face and long blonde hair.

"Indeed it is," Jacob said, quickly collecting himself. Not because of her beauty, but because of how much she resembled Caroline... almost eerily so.

"A gift by my sister; I will be sure to share your admiration with her next we meet," she answered with a smile. "Perhaps she will even gift you one in appreciation."

"I am unworthy of such a kindness, miss...?"

"Priestess Inera," she answered as she bowed slightly. "It has been a while since anyone arrived here, everyone being busy with the initiation and all."

Jacob raised his eyebrows but kept his composure as he joked.

“Apologies, I still had a bit of dying to do.”

“What?” she asked, clearly quite confused by the guest. “What happened?”

“Complications, no biggie,” he answered as he touched his forehead where the spear had gone through. “Not a pleasant experience, I must say. But enough about me, could you tell me what we are here for?” Jacob asked as he led the conversation forward.

“Oh, yes! Sorry, I was just distracted a bit!” she said as she scrambled over to one of the desks to pick up a weird-looking gem. “Where did you say you come from? It is unusual for new members to come here directly. I haven’t seen you before, so I assume you are new, right? Ah, but I also just started, so if you have been here before, I am so sorry!”

Jacob was amused by her panicking. He had spent far too many years around people faking everything about themselves, and he could tell that the girl in front of him was genuine.

Of course, it only got more comical considering her aura. Jacob couldn’t feel it clearly, but she was clearly stronger than him. And not just by a bit. He felt a bit of suppression from her but managed to keep his calm. A lot better than the sweating Bertram at least.

“I came from the tutorial,” Jacob answered, not thinking much of it.



“Huh?” she turned her head with a look of shock.

“What?”

“What tutorial?”

“The one run by the system, dear,” a man’s voice interrupted as yet another figure entered the room.

It was a tall man, nearly two and a half meters tall, who made even the tall Bertram appear tiny. He looked not a day older than Jacob himself and was solidly built, muscles practically brimming beneath his simple clothes. What was more noticeable was his aura. Far beyond anything Jacob had ever felt before.

“Da...Grand Master!” Inera spurted out, bowing deeply. Jacob was about to repeat her action when the man stopped him.

“There is no need for that, Augur,” the man said, as he stopped Jacob from bowing.

“By the will of The Pantheon, I am to be of assistance until it is time for you to return to your own universe once more,” The Grand Master said, as he motioned to the still bowing priestess. “I believe you have already met my daughter.”

With a nod, Jacob confirmed as the man continued.

“Our time is short, so let us not delay. Over the next few days, we shall prepare you for your return and study. Let us together bring the glory of the Holy Church to the 93rd universe and spread the word of our Holy Mother.”

Jacob felt an almost magical pull from the words but resisted it. “No, not yet.”

The Grand Master looked at the Augur, confused for a moment before Jacob summoned a lantern with 45 motes of light floating around it.

“I have done as I was meant to, and now it is time for you to do what you have promised,” he spoke into the open air. The Grand Master was confused as to whom the Augur spoke, as he cut in.

“We can handle this at an opportune time, but for now, it's more important t-“

“No,” Jacob answered.

\*‘DING!’ Class: [Augur of Hope] has reached level 51 - Stat points allocated, +8 free points\*

“We made a deal.”

\*'DING!' Class: [Augur of Hope] has reached level 52 - Stat points allocated, +8 free points\*

\*'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 38 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points\*

His aura soared as the Grand Master finally became aware of who the Augur spoke to. His face went white and then red as his eyes were wide at the audacity. "I am aware of the pact, but as unblessed mortals, they will first need to be-"

"I didn't make any deal with you," Jacob dismissed him as he looked towards one of the paintings on the wall. "I made it with you."

\*'DING!' Class: [Augur of Hope] has reached level 53 - Stat points allocated, +8 free points\*

A divine aura spread in the room as the Grand Master, Inera, and Bertram were all brought to their knees, only the latter against his will. The motes of lights stirred as they entered the largest painting, the one depicting the Holy Mother herself. Not long after, each of the motes disappeared.

\*'DING!' Class: [Augur of Hope] has reached level 54 - Stat points allocated, +8 free points\*

\*'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 39 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points\*

Jacob smiled as he saw the final wisp disappear, and he knew he had done his part. While he could not save their bodies, he had at least saved their souls. Fate had been realized, even if it was an unpleasant one.

\*'DING!' Class: [Augur of Hope] has reached level 55 - Stat points allocated, +8 free points\*

"Pleasure doing business with you," he said with a smile said towards the painting as the divine aura faded, him still the only one able to remain standing. "Now, let us prepare for what's to come."