

# THE PRIMAL HUNTER

## Chapter 1 - Another Monday Morning

It was just another boring Monday morning. The sparse rays of sunlight that found their way through the blinders' narrow gaps did little to disturb the man sleeping deeply on the bed. However, the serene peace was short-lived as the accursed sound of his alarm began its daily ritual of ruining a good dream.

Jake, previously enjoying the sweet embrace of his blankets, was startled awake, fumbling around until his hand finally found his phone. Grumbling, he rolled out of bed and started his usual morning routine, preparing for yet another day at work.

He went for a warm shower, a quick breakfast, got himself dressed, before he finally grabbed his stuff and headed out the door. The entire morning routine was done in less than half an hour.

Walking down the stairs to his car, he had an intuition that the day was going to be interesting. He didn't know why as everything was as usual so far, but he couldn't entirely dispel the feeling. Maybe someone brought donuts?

Traffic was terrible as usual, living in a big city and all. He spent most of the time not actually driving but sitting in the endless queues of the morning rush. He had considered cycling or maybe running to work, but then he would have to shower and get dressed at work, and that just sounded bothersome.

As he finally pulled into the parking lot, he got out, grabbed his bag, and headed on inside the corporate office that had been his workplace for the last couple of years. The building itself was a massive monstrosity of glass, with way too many floors. It wasn't all that out of place, though, being surrounded by similar structures.

As he got inside, he was greeted by the receptionist, Joanna. She was a middle-aged woman, who always wore these large earrings, and more makeup than an entire class of high school girls would need in a week. If Jake had to describe Joanna in the easiest way possible, it would be a soccer-mom stuck in a perpetual mid-life crisis. The reception was located only a couple of meters away from the elevators, so greeting her in the morning was a natural routine for most employees.

"Morning, Jake, had a good weekend?" she asked, with far too much energy for this early in the morning.

"Same as always, how about you?" Jake answered politely, knowing what was to come.

"Oh, it was great! You know me and Mike tried to..." she replied with vigor, explaining in great detail, giving Jake déjà-vu to last week, where the exact same scenario seemed to have played out.

After the far too long conversation about inane subjects with her, the arrival of the elevator finally saved him, allowing his escape as he headed on up to the 14th floor.

Stepping out of the elevator, Jake was met by a calm, open-office space. Seems like I was one of the first to arrive today, he thought, as he found his way to his desk. Booting up the computer, he started going through the emails that came during the weekend.

Jake had worked in this office for a bit over two years now. His job was what many would describe as boring, yet he somehow found it peaceful to immerse himself in the spreadsheets, financial reports, and whatnot. He worked in the financial department, and if he said so himself, he was rather good at what he did.

He mainly worked with investments, his official title being a business analyst. Jake had a knack for picking out the excellent stocks and avoiding the bad ones. He had always had a good gut feeling about those kinds of things.

The office slowly got filled up as more and more made their way off the elevator. After the initial morning greetings and polite social exchanges, the noise slowly died down as everyone got busy with their respective tasks. No donuts, he noted internally with great disappointment.

As he sat there, having finished up the most immediate tasks, he began to feel a bit tired once more, clearly having not gotten enough sleep. Most others in the office had learned by now that he wasn't one for small talk, so most left him alone. Just the way he wanted it.

Jake had always been a rather laid-back person. Cautious and a bit withdrawn. He had always been a bit of a loner and chose activities based on not interacting with others. Heck, when his dad forced him into doing some kind of sport to get him out of his room, he chose archery as he could do that entirely on his own.

All in all? Jake was content with his life. He had a well-paying job, a good family, a nice apartment, great colleagues, and his future was looking bright if he said so himself. He wasn't an extraordinary person, but just another face in the crowd. And he kind of liked it that way. Standing out meant unnecessary attention, and he would prefer to avoid that.

As he finished his thoughts, his superior, Jacob, walked over with a big smile on his face.

"Hey there buddy! Me and the others are heading out for lunch, you wanna come?" he asked cheerfully.

"Eh, sure, sounds good," Jake replied tentatively.

He liked Jacob. Jacob was the kind of guy that people would call a born leader. Excellent social skills, an affinity for reading people, and making you feel comfortable around him. He was one of the few people that Jake called a friend.

Following him was a guy called Bertram. Big and brooding would be one's first assumption, but he was actually a big softie. Apparently, he had taken care of Jacob while growing up and was something like a butler or something.

All he knew is that Jacob's family was filthy rich. It was quite honestly a miracle that Jacob hadn't turned out to be an entitled brat, instead of the man he was today. He was popular in the office by every metric, especially with a certain clientele.

His handsome looks, tall stature, and overall charm certainly did him no harm when it came to the women in the office. His hair always seemed to sit impossibly perfect, his suit always worn perfectly, and what seemed like an eternal relaxed smile adorning his face.

They managed to get along mainly due to the man's ability to carry a conversation longer than a few sentences, even with someone like Jake. The fact that Jake wasn't the type to create problems in the office, but only deliver reliable results, naturally only made their relationship easier for both sides.

Which was also the reason why Jake agreed on going to lunch. Because with Jacob along, he knew it wouldn't be entirely awkward.

Jake got up and made his way to the elevator together with Jacob and Bertram. Talking along the way about work and the meeting they had planned for after the lunch break.

He spotted Joanna with Mike, her husband, getting into the same elevator he, Jacob, and Bertram were heading into. Said elevator quickly got cramped, as three others were already in the elevator waiting to go down.

One of these three being Caroline. Caroline was a coworker working in the human resources department, who shared their office space with Jake's department. She was a year younger than him, slim, blonde, and quite frankly everything that Jake would refer to as 'his type'.

He was aware that this was likely just due to her being one of the only women around his age that he interacted with regularly. Just two people of the opposite sex in close proximity. Which is one of the reasons why he never acted on the emotion. Along with quite a few others. He wasn't really the romantic type, and his prior experience in

romance didn't exactly pan out. Well, he thought, her cheating on me with my best friend, does count as 'not panning out', right?

Thus he only managed to give her a nod and a small "good morning" to her, despite it being noon. Jake was barely able to hold his embarrassment back from showing, but luckily she appeared to just take it as a bad joke.

Jake was perfectly aware that Caroline barely saw him as a friend and had no romantic interest in him whatsoever. Jacob, on the other hand, she clearly had her eyes on. Not that he could blame her. Jacob was a great dude, no matter how you put it, and he could simply not bring himself to dislike him, despite him being Jake's unaware, one-sided, rival in love.

Jake himself was what one would describe as rather average in the looks department. Not too fat, not too slim, short brown hair, brown eyes, and a face that couldn't be described as handsome nor ugly.

The only thing he had going for him was his above-average physique, mainly stemming from him still doing archery for fun in his free time, even having a homemade practice range at his parent's place. This, coupled with his gym membership (and actually going), made him maintain his healthy lifestyle from back during a time he still dreamed of being an athlete.

\*DING!\*

The sound of the elevator closing quickly brought him back to reality, as the descent towards the ground level began. And just as his thoughts began to wander on what to get for lunch, his thought-process was interrupted once again.

\*DING!\*

A sound, eerily similar to the elevator, filled his head, while simultaneously, words appeared before his eyes; in his mind. He barely managed to make them out before he blacked out.

\*Initiation of the 93rd Universe confirmed. Introduction and tutorial sequence commencing\*

## Chapter 2 - Introduction

\*Initiation of the 93rd Universe confirmed. Introduction sequence commencing\*

\*Welcome to the introduction. Preparing...\*

As Jake opened his eyes, he was greeted by the voice once again welcoming him to an... introduction? And something was preparing? What the hell was going on?

Several seconds passed, and despite his eyes being open, he saw only complete darkness. His body felt numb all over, and the only thing he could feel was a creeping headache. He tried opening his mouth to no avail, as he started panicking internally. Had he been

kidnapped by aliens? As his thoughts started to spiral, the voice suddenly sounded out again.

\*Preparations complete. Starting introduction\*

Light filled his eyes as he was temporarily blinded by what seemed like a huge spotlight shining in his face. As his eyes slowly adjusted, so did the feeling to his limbs return. He found himself looking down at his legs, noticing himself sitting in a chair. As he slowly looked up, he found someone sitting across from him with a table placed in between.

The room itself reminded Jake of an interrogation room with the two chairs, a table in a small closed-in space, bar the two-way window. The other difference was how perfectly clean everything was. The walls and floor were white, the table white, the chairs white, and despite there being no apparent light-source, the whole room was somehow still well lit.

“Hello?” Jake cautiously asked at the... person across from him. He/she looked human at a glance but had no discernable features. A bald head, completely white eyes with no pupils, and a chest that looked far too flat and undetailed to be natural. Not a single spec of hair could be seen on the body, and despite him being unable to see due to the table, he had a creeping suspicion this... thing didn’t have anything down there either. As his internal assessment was finishing up, the “human” opened its mouth.

“Greetings, human. I oversee your introduction. In this introduction, I shall explain to you the circumstances of your new reality,” the thing said with a voice that sounded synthesized by mashing a bunch of both male and female voices together. As he was about to open his mouth to respond, it started talking again.



“First of all, allow me to welcome you to this new chapter of your life. Your universe has finally passed the minimum threshold required to enter the multiverse and has thus been initiated. Now, do you have any questions before we move on to the subjects pertaining to the tutorial?” the thing finally finished up.

Jakes's mind was in turmoil. Multiverses? What threshold was passed? And what does it mean with a new chapter? But instead of any of these actual meaningful questions, he asked the most mundane possible:

“Who, no, what are you?” he blurted out, stumbling over his words.

“I am the entity in charge of greeting you and introduce you to the new world, and the circumstances of your new reality” It answered promptly, making no indications of elaborating further.

“What new reality?” Jake asked.

“The reality named by the first enlightened races as ‘The System’,” it explained.

“How do I see this sys...” Before he managed to finish his words, a screen suddenly appeared before his eyes:

Status

Name: Jake Thayne

Race: [Human (G) – lvl 0]

Class: N/A

Profession: N/A

Health Points (HP): 90/90

Mana Points (MP): 80/80

Stamina: 70/70

Stats

Strength: 7

Agility: 8

Endurance: 7

Vitality: 9

Toughness: 7

Wisdom: 8

Intelligence: 8

Perception: 10

Willpower: 6

Free points: 0

Titles

N/A

Well, that answers that question, Jake thought. He was starting to form an idea in his mind of what was going on and decided to just roll with it. He was kind of under the impression that this was likely just a weird lucid dream, so he saw no reason not to entertain himself a bit. So first of all, he did what he thought was fun and started analyzing the stats.

So, nine different stats, on a range from 6-10 points in each... His stats were very balanced, with only willpower and perception being stand-outs. Did willpower being only at 6 indicate that he had a weak will? Or is 6 even low for someone in his situation?

His race says human, that part being quite self-explanatory, but what did the 'G' mean? And he was apparently a level 0 human. And he seemed to neither have a class nor a profession. Though he would argue himself to be upper-middle-class, with his profession being a financial consultant, he doubted that is what the system meant with those two.

No titles either, and health and mana being at 90 and 80, led to his assumption that they were based on one of his stats, by a factor of 10. Vitality being the only stat at 9, led him to conclude that it was the stat determining health. Mana was a bit more difficult, being at 80, with both Wisdom and Intelligence at 8, one of those two likely determining factors. Stamina was at 70, which following his prior deduction, meant it being either linked to Strength or Endurance, Endurance being where he would put his money at.

He tried to focus on the different elements on the screen, seemingly to no avail. It simply informed him that strength meant strength, and that class means class... As he tried to focus on his race, however, it did yield a result:

Human (G) – The lowest level of humans in the system. This type is found only in newly initiated worlds. The human race is known as one of the most balanced and numerous amongst the myriad races of the multiverse, being able to walk many different roads on their path to power. Stat bonuses per level: +1 to all stats. +1 free point.

Thanks for calling me the lowest level of human, I guess? Jake thought. The description does kind of confirm more races being out there, and also that more humans exist out there in what that thing called the multiverse.

He fiddled a bit more with the menu, trying out pretty much everything he could before he looked up at the weird human-like thing again.

“Hey, can I ask about the different stats on the status screen and their effect? Such as what different stats are linked to health points, or if there is a link at all?” he asked.

“No. It tells you what you need to know for now,” It answered, still as monotone as ever.

“May I ask how I am supposed to get a class and profession? It mentions a level here, how do I level up? What does the ‘G’ after my race mean? Also, why am I here to begin with? Where did the others go?” he asked, coming off a bit overbearing. Not that he blamed himself, this situation was without a doubt the most bizarre he had ever experienced.

“Your class is chosen upon entering the tutorial. This class shall be the starting point of your journey and help guide your path. A profession becomes available through performing associated tasks with said profession, either for a long enough period of time or through competence in said tasks. Classes are focused on the pursuit of strength, while professions are the path of creativity, rarely offering direct increases in strength. You level up through a wide variety of actions. The ‘G’ after your race states the current rank of your race. You are here because you entered the introduction. By “others,” I shall deduce that you mean other earthlings and said other earthlings are now also in their own respective introductions,” It explained concisely, not giving much detail, but at least giving Jake a far better idea what was going on. It was especially good to know that his coworkers were relatively fine and likely in a similar situation as him.

“Now on to classes,” The thing said unprompted.

Before he could even open his mouth, he was interrupted by a screen appearing before him, showing quite a wall of text. He quickly collected himself and started going through the classes one by one:

Warrior (Light) – Basic starting class. A light-class warrior focused on quick attacks, evasion, and finesse. While faster than both the medium and heavy variants, it comes with a decrease in attack power and survivability. Mainly uses weapons such as rapiers, daggers, small hatchets, and throwing weapons. Stat bonuses: +2 Agi, +1 End, +1 Str, +1 Vit, +1 Free point.

The first class appeared to be a light-class warrior, perhaps something like a rogue? Did mention both daggers and throwing weapons. This appealed to him slightly, though he was quite reluctant to be the guy fighting up close and personal. He did choose archery and not fencing after all.

Warrior (Medium) – Basic starting class. A medium-class warrior, focused on a balanced approach to combat, finding a compromise between speed and power. While faster than

the heavy variant, it is slower than the light-class warriors. While survivability and power are higher than the light-class variant, it is lower than the heavy-class warriors. Able to use a vast array of weapons of both the heavy and light variants. Stat bonuses per level: +1 Agi, +1 End, +1 Vit, +1 Str +1 Tough, +1 Free Point

The second one looked like the choice one would make if they wanted to be a warrior but was clueless in which direction to specialize themselves in. Though perhaps it did provide some versatility.

Warrior (Heavy) – Basic starting class. A heavy-class warrior, focused on power and survivability while sacrificing speed and variance. The heavy-warrior is slower with a less varied approach than both the light and medium class, but in turn, gains great power and survivability. Mainly uses weapons such as a combo of one-handed and a shield or a two-handed weapon. Generally lacking solid ranged options. Stat bonuses per level: +2 Str, +1 Tough +1 Vit, +1 End, +1 Free Point.

The beefy-boy option of the warrior-archetype. Big and heavy, in his mind wearing full plate armor and a huge tower-shield. Or maybe a super muscular bare-chested bearded Viking with a huge axe? Yeah, he couldn't see himself being either of those.

Archer – A basic starting class. A class focused on ranged combat, mainly using bow and arrow, coupled with light options for melee such as short-swords and daggers. The class is fast and flexible, focusing on agility over strength. Stat bonuses per level: +2 Per, +1 Agi, +1 End, +1 Str, +1 Free Point

Well, here we go. Without any surprises further down the list, this seemed like the most appealing choice by far. Disregarding the light options for melee, if he had to fight in any way, which he had a strong suspicion he would have to, he would, without a doubt, prefer to do so with a bow.

Caster – A basic starting class. The caster is focused on the magical combat, favoring wisdom and knowledge over brawn and speed. The basic class is non-attuned, meaning not yet specialized in any element or type of magic, thus limited in power, but wide in scope. Casters wield powerful destructive abilities, though often lacking in defensive options. The class mainly uses catalysts such as staves, idols, relics, or wands in order to amplify the power of magic. Stat bonuses per level: +2 Int, +1 Wis, +1 Will, +1 Per, +1 Free Point.

Well, this, if not everything before it, confirmed magic being a real thing. While the concept of being a fire-flinging, lightning-bending badass did sound appealing, he would honestly prefer to just have a bow.

Healer – A basic starting class. The healer can mend injuries, remove afflictions, and amplify the power of themselves and/or their comrades. The basic class is non-attuned, meaning not yet specialized in any deific powers or types of magic, thus limited in power, but wide in scope. The class is weak in solo combat, lacking offensive options, but powerful when surrounded by allies. Stat bonuses per level: +2 Will, +2 Wis, +1 Int, +1 Free Point.

And the last option seemed to be a healer. All classes were ‘basic starting classes’, meaning no special overpowered starting classes. At least not for him. He also noted that all classes provided a total stat boost of 5 per level and one free point. Compared to race, classes seemed to offer more specialized stats, but less overall, though that may just be due to him being human. The healer class did not appeal to him at all, though it did have quite an interesting line about deific powers. Does this imply the existence of gods? Could you become a priest of some kind down the line, perhaps?

“Hey, can you tell me anything more about these classes? Any advice or tips?” Jake asked, hopefully.



“Your path is for you to discover. Now choose a class before we proceed,” the thing responded, leaving little room for further discussion.

Realizing he may as well pick the class he planned on all along, Jake chose the Archer class.

You have chosen the Archer class. Confirm?

Looks like even the mighty system is prone to security prompts like these, Jake thought as he affirmed the system of his decision.

\*You have obtained the Archer class\*

As soon as those words appeared before his eyes, he felt a weird tingling in his head, neither unpleasant nor comfortable. At the same time, some items appeared on the table in front of him. Before he had any chance to look at them further, he was once again greeted by several system messages:

\*Gained Skill\*: [Basic Archery (Inferior)] – An Archer's best friend is the bow in his hand, and the arrow in his foe's heart. Unlocks basic proficiency with bows, crossbows, and adds a minuscule bonus to the effect of agility and strength when using a ranged weapon.

\*Gained Skill\*: [Basic One-Handed Weapon (Inferior)] – The Archer may not be a master in the arts of close combat but is far from helpless. Unlocks basic proficiency with most one-handed weapons and adds a minuscule bonus to the effect of agility and strength when using a fitting melee weapon.

\*Gained Skill\*: [Archers Eye (Common)] – The eyes of the Archer are trained to track down and spot the weakness of their foes. Allows the archer to more easily spot prey. Passively gives a minor increase to the effect of Perception on visual organs.

As he read through the three messages, his suspicions of this new system being extremely similar to videogames or perhaps tabletop RPG's was once again confirmed. All three seemed rather basic, especially the two skills that literally had 'basic' in their names. Both only being 'inferior' in what he assumed to be their rank. The last one seemed a bit more interesting being less basic and even considered a common-rarity skill.

Furthermore, he instinctively knew how Archer's Eye worked. He tried to focus and suddenly felt his vision become far clearer than it was before. It was like he gradually switched from low quality to Full HD in around 5 seconds or so as he focused. He looked around, enamored with how distinct everything appeared. As he deactivated the ability, and his vision returned to normal, he looked at his resources and saw that stamina had dropped from 70 to 68, with mana and health both remaining maxed out.

He closed the window and looked towards the items on the table. He looked at the thing sitting eerily still, and inquired: "I assume these things are for me?"

"Yes," it answered. "They are basic starting equipment based on your starting class. Now, on to the final step of the introduction. Some necessities are given to all new initiates of the system."

And as it finished those words, Jake was once again greeted by a screen appearing before him.

**\*Gained skill\*: [Identify (Inferior)]** – Basic identification skill, known by all but the smallest of children of the myriad races. The skill allows you to attempt to identify any object or creature you are focusing on.

A skill that would actually allow him to get some semblance of information, maybe? Something he felt like he severely needed. Only more and more questions kept appearing throughout this entire introduction ordeal, with little to no answers.

“The time allotted for the introduction is coming to an end in 10 minutes, and you will be transported to the tutorial. It is recommended to acquire the equipment given before the end of the introduction, or the items will be lost,” It said, making Jake panic slightly as he went up to grab the stuff on the table.

The items included a bow and quiver, a brown cloak, a knife, and a small satchel attached to a belt. They all looked rather medieval, the bow being wooden compared to the modern compound bows he was used to, normally made of aluminum and other modern composite materials. The string itself was made of what seemed like silk, perhaps. He was honestly unsure.

The cloak was from a rather coarse material, reminding him of burlap, but it seemed quite durable. The quiver was made of wood with leather spun around it, and a leather harness to wear it on the back.

The knife seemed to be as simple as they come and was just a steel blade attached to a wooden handle. The quality of all the items was rather good, in his opinion. Last but not least, he looked at the small satchel, and upon opening it, found a couple of small bottles.

As he wondered what they were, he nearly slapped himself across the head, remembering his identification skill. He started focusing on one of the bottles containing red tinged liquid, and after 3-4 seconds, a new screen appeared:

[Health Potion (Inferior)] – Restores health when consumed.

What did he expect? As simple as they come. He used Identify on the other items in the satchel one by one, finding a total of 3 health potions, 3 stamina potions that did the exact same thing as the health potion, but for stamina. As he closed the satchel, he moved on to the other items. The bow, knife, and cloak yielded no result, simply informing him that the wooden bow was a wooden bow and that the brown cloak was a brown cloak. With little hope, he inspected the quiver, being positively surprised:

[Enchanted Quiver (Common)] – A quiver enchanted with the ability to conjure common-rarity arrows when injected with mana.

That sure as hell seems useful, Jake thought. As he was finishing up his inspection, he was once more kindly reminded that he did not have infinite time.

“Two minutes till the start of the tutorial.”

Jake, in a rush, got the cloak over his head and started attaching the belt with the satchel on it and threw the quiver over his shoulder. Luckily it already had dozens of arrows in it. The belt also came with a small sheath, which he promptly placed the knife in, and closed the small leather buckle meant to keep it in place. Finally, he took the bow in his hand, having no obvious place to attach it to his person. After a bit of thinking, he put it over his shoulder and stood ready for whatever was to come.

“10 seconds to the start of the tutorial,” the humanoid thing reminded him.

“It was nice to meet you, I guess, whatever you are,” he said as he waved it goodbye. A bit afraid, but more so than that, he felt a small sense of excitement build up in the pit of his stomach.

\*Introduction sequence completed. Transporting to tutorial...\*

## Chapter 3 - The Tutorial Commences

Jake felt like if he had simply blinked his eyes and then suddenly found himself somewhere entirely different. There was no prompt except the system message, no feeling of being thrown through time and space; he just kind of... moved.

He found himself in a...room? This one was far larger than the one before. Scratch that, calling it a room was a bloody understatement. Despite him being able to see the ceiling, he could only barely make out what seemed like a wall far off in the distance to one of the sides. On the roof was a huge circular light that appeared to act as a sun.

Looking from the ceiling to the wall, this entire place seemed to have some kind of circular design, like a huge dome. He was standing on what he could only identify as a huge pillar, one of many that were spread in all directions.

Where one would expect the floor to be, one instead saw a vast forest spreading out in all directions. Yet none of the trees even reached close to the top of the pillar. Not due to the trees being small, some looked easily over a hundred meters tall, but due to the pillar being so monstrously tall itself.

As he was starting to wonder if the system had somehow forgotten him or what exactly was happening, the trusty window and voice appeared again.

\*Welcome to the tutorial\*

He felt a warm glow in his entire body as he heard the sound of yet another accompanying notification.

Title earned: [Forerunner of the New World]

A title? One that I assume everyone gets, Jake thought, quickly checking it out.

[Forerunner of the New World] – Complete the introduction and enter the tutorial as a forerunner of the New World. +3 all stats. Grants the skill: [Endless Tongues of the Myriad Races (Unique)].

Three to all stats out of nowhere could only be welcome. Likely also the source of the warm glow from before. Though he still was far from sure exactly how much that would help. The skill, however, was a bit more tangible as he looked at what it did.

[Endless Tongues of the Myriad Races (Unique)] - Allows you to communicate with the myriad races throughout the multiverse. A unique skill granted for free to the forerunners of a newly initiated race.

The skill somehow allowed him to communicate with other races. Was it only speech, or writing too? Again, more questions, and attempting to focus on the skills yielded no further results. He even attempted to use his newly acquired Identify skill, with nothing happening.

Hearing something behind him, he was startled and quickly turned around just to see that someone else had also been transported to the same platform. With a hand on his knife-handle, he noticed who it was.

“Jacob?” he asked rhetorically, looking at the man before him. Jacob was no longer wearing his suit but was instead donned out in chainmail, gauntlets, and what looked like leather pants with a pair of sturdy-looking boots, the entire thing looking like it was taken out of the costume rack from a medieval movie.

Jacob also appeared flummoxed by the entire situation as he took a second or two to collect himself before hearing and seeing Jake.

“Jake!? Oh, man, is it good to see you! Have you seen any of the others?” Jacob asked with his usual high energy in a hopeful voice.

“Nah, I am just as surprised to see you here. After we entered the elevator, did you also –  
“

But before Jake had a chance to ask, another flash of light appeared, and yet again, before he could even see who it was, another flash of light, and then another, until they were a total of 10 people on the platform before the flashes stopped.

Jake instantly recognized all the people, as 5 of them had been in the elevator with him, and 4 who were other employees at his company. To his relief, Caroline was amongst the new arrivals and looked to be fine, now donning a white robe with what looked like a small wand at her hip.

“What happen-“

“Hey, why-“

“You seen Mike!?”

“Where is-“



Everyone began speaking over each other: all confused, but some more than others. Jake simply stood back as he tried to internally grasp the situation while, of course, listening to the others. After the initial panic had settled, they all calmed down and began assessing their situation. They were all professionals, after all. It had nothing to do with Jacob trying to calm them. Not at all.

After a quick round of questions and answers, it seemed like they had all been transported to their own respective interrogation-like room and had gone through roughly the same ordeal as Jake had. However, Jake did learn that he had apparently missed some questions, as the others had discovered a few more details. One of which was that new skills could be earned every 5 levels with their classes.

As they moved on, they also did a tally on their different classes. They turned out to have 1 light, 2 medium and 1 heavy-variant warrior, 2 archers, 3 casters, and 1 healer. Rather balanced, something Jake suspected the system had done on purpose. Or maybe just luck.

Their armors and outfits also greatly differed. No longer all wearing their nice dress shirts and 'presentable' clothes they usually wore. The light warrior having on leather armor, medium warriors, Jacob being one of them, having on his chain-mail set, the heavy warrior wearing what looked like rather poorly made iron armor.

The other archer, whom Jake recognized to be Casper from R&D, had on the same cloak as him, wielding a wooden bow like him also. Casper was one of the few other people Jake always got along with during work. They had to interact a lot due to what they did and naturally hit it off. Both were rather introverted and happened to possess some of the same hobbies. He wasn't sure if he could classify him as a friend, but close acquaintance at least. Also, they both sucked at anything romantic, making them kindred spirits in that department.

Joanna was one of the people panicking the most, with her husband Mike not being amongst them. She herself had chosen to be a caster, perhaps just due to it seemingly

being the least physically demanding. Though thinking of it, she once said that she and her kids really liked a certain book about a scarred boy wizard.

He also learned from the conversation that apparently you could have asked for a different weapon in the Introduction, something he had been unaware of. Maybe he could have gotten a modern compound bow... though he doubted it, considering the whole medieval theme going on.

The last two classes were two other casters, all wearing brown robes very similar to the one he had on, seeming to be quite a bit more comfortable, their material more akin to silk. They all had wooden sticks in their hands, something he assumed to be wands. And finally, there was their one healer, Caroline, in her white robe, also seeming to be very silk-like, with her smaller white wand.

Another topic discussed was naturally the skills granted. As Jake expected, everyone had gotten Identify and the translation skill included in the title granted upon entering this so-called tutorial. Class skills were another story though.

Light warriors had a dual-wielding skill, which gave a boost while wielding two weapons, a throwing weapon skill, and a common-rarity skill, the counterpart to Jake's Archer's Eye called Quickstep, allowing the warrior to make quick bursts of speed. In reality, however, the skill just made one take a step slightly quicker than normal, being thoroughly underwhelming in practice.

The medium warrior had five skills, though all with Inferior rating. They had a skill for one-handed, one for two-handed, one for sword & shield, throwing weapon skill, and an ability called Balanced Approach, which gave a small bonus to all stat effects while wielding any weapon. It was one so small that neither of the two medium warriors could even tell the difference.

The heavy warrior had the same sword & shield skill, a two-handed weapon skill, and a skill called Toughen Up, which allowed the warrior to make the effect of toughness increase temporarily. That too, was incredibly underwhelming, not even having any visual cue at all. Also, Bertram said it still hurt when Jacob jabbed him, making even the effect questionable.

The archer skills Jake already knew, of course.

Casters also had three skills, the first skill called magic-tool proficiency, which allowed them to use their wands and other magic items, an attack skill called Mana Bolt, and a defensive skill called Mana Barrier. The barrier sucked too, being so weak that a casual swipe with a sword could break it, but the mana bolt seemed quite powerful.

The healer class had 3 skills also, one called Heal, which unsurprisingly enough, allowed the healer to heal things, one called Regeneration, which turned out to be a passive aura that allowed allies of the healer to regenerate health faster, and the last skill the same one as the casters allowing them to use magic items. Of these skills, Jake was especially interested in the aura, and how exactly it determined who were allies and who weren't.

Another thing they also determined was that the identification skill didn't work on other people. It did not even return a basic message. There simply was no response. It seemed that either the rarity of the skill was too low or prohibited for some reason. Jake looked towards Caroline and decided to ask about the aura, but he was interrupted before he had any chance to.

"Everyone! Look at the other platforms. I think there are other people on them," The heavy warrior Bertram said, grabbing everyone's attention. As Jake looked over at the

nearest platform, his improved vision came in handy, as he was able to make out some details.

There appeared to be 10 individuals on the other platform too, and as he looked around, so were there on all the others around him. He still saw some bursts of light on some of the other platforms, but after a minute or two, it was all silent, and the tutorial started for real.

\*Tutorial commencing\*

[Tutorial Panel]

Duration: 63 days & 21:47:11

Tutorial Type: Survival

Completion Criteria: Survive the duration of the tutorial

Tutorial rules: Collect Tutorial Points (TP).

Tutorial Information: The Great Forest below is filled with danger and opportunities for the new initiates to experience. Beasts roam the forest, hunting for prey. Kill the beasts to

acquire TP while gaining strength. Perhaps even a chance to hunt the Beast Lords will present itself...

Tutorial Point Rules: Gain TP upon killing beasts split amongst the contributors. Upon killing another initiate, half their TP will be split amongst the contributors.

Final Rewards based on TP and the number of Survivors

Total Survivors Remaining: 1200/1200

TP Collected: 0

As Jake read through the information, he suddenly felt the pillar under him shake slightly, as it slowly began being lowered. He quickly collected himself and checked that all his equipment was properly in place. As he did this, he wondered how he could be so calm despite the situation and noticed that everyone else was also oddly calm, even if it did vary from person to person. Perhaps it had something to do with willpower, or more likely it was due to reliance on a certain individual.

Throughout the conversation, Jacob had been the guiding light for everything. He had made sure one person spoke at a time, that useful information was extracted, and that everyone got their turn. It was an unspoken rule that he was the leader of the group. One that Jake, of course, had absolutely no intention of opposing.

The group calmly discussed their plan of action during their descent, Jacob instantly taking the lead once more, of course.

They agreed to focus on the first aspect of this entire thing: Survive. They all had weapons, and all had potions; warriors and archers had 3 health and 3 stamina potions each, while the casters and Caroline had 3 health and 3 mana potions instead.

Besides that, all they had were the clothes on their bodies. The rest of the internal discussion mainly revolved around the tutorial's weird details, such as the seemingly utterly random duration. They also reached an agreement that hunting down beasts was a necessity. None of them was a fan of it, but they had to eat somehow. Based on the tutorial rules, it didn't appear possible to shy away from violence. They also collectively agreed that they wouldn't antagonize any other survivors unless they didn't have any other options.

Jake didn't agree with everything but didn't want to play devil's advocate or start any unnecessary fights. He had already noticed from before that maybe he was a bit of an outlier. He didn't really understand the unwillingness to hunt. He himself felt quite excited at the notion.

“First of all, we will have to locate water, food, and shelter. The flora does not appear to be the same as that on earth, so we can't trust our current knowledge of what is and what isn't safe to eat. We should try to see if the identify skill can help with distinguishing edible from poisonous plants. The system also mentioned beasts, so hunting will likely also be an option, if not necessary, to secure a source of food,” Jacob said. “But we also have to be wary of the other survivors. We shouldn't be aggressive, but let's not be taken as pushovers either. Chances are we will have to hunt beasts as the system says to get stronger and survive. If we work together and do our best, I am sure we can all make it home safe.”

The small speech was a bit superfluous, considering they had already gone over those points but seemed to get everyone on the same track. Jake was once again reminded of why Jacob was the youngest department chief their company had ever had. He had achieved this, relying solely on his competency and charisma, plus a bit of nepotism, but that was almost expected in the job market in this day and age, or, well, before this day and age.

The only thing that put Jake slightly off was spotting Caroline staring at Jacob with stars in her eyes. Not that this was either the time or place for such silly thoughts. The pillar was getting closer and closer to the ground.

As they finally reached below the crown of the trees, Jake was able to spot several bird-like creatures hiding in the trees, though he was unable to make out any details. Two months... he would have to survive two months in this forest.

When they were only a few meters from the ground, Jake steeled himself for whatever was to come.

The pillar finally reached the ground, and they found themselves in a clearing. The pillar below them oddly seemed to phase through the ground, only leaving grass beneath their feet, leaving no evidence of the massive pillar ever having existed.

Taking a deep breath of the fresh air Jake clenched his fist around his bow. He felt a bit nervous. But more than that, a weird feeling began bubbling up from deep inside of him. Excitement.

His boring world had changed, and he had no intention of making this damn forest his grave.

## Chapter 4 - First Battle

The group had previously considered their immediate plan of action upon reaching the ground, with the first objective being to find somewhere safe to set up a camp. The artificial sun in the sky seemed to have moved a bit during their short stay, indicating a day-night cycle.

Bertram had made the educated guess that nighttime would prove even more dangerous than daytime. If beasts filled this forest, they guessed some of them had to be nocturnal. One couldn't ignore the threat of other humans taking advantage of the cover of darkness either.

After walking out of the clearing where the pillar had sunk into the ground, they wandered into the forest. The tension of everyone increased as they found themselves in a far more confined space. The first objective was to hopefully find a source of water to place their camp close to. Due to the trees' dense crowns, it was impossible to spot anything from up on the pillar, so they had to go in blind.

As they walked, gawking at the environment, Jake was weirdly relaxed. Despite his vigilance of whatever may lurk behind the trees around him, he had a feeling that nothing would sneak up on them. He listened for potential dangers still, of course, a difficult task as it wasn't exactly the silent kind of forest. Birds sang, distant roars of beasts rang out frequently, and the rustling of the leaves as the wind swept through was louder than what he was used to. This was likely linked to his slightly higher perception.

As their frontline heavy warrior, Bertram, went over a small hill, he suddenly came to a stop. Jacob quickly walking up to stand beside him. Jake was all the way in the back, but he could still hear them due to their proximity.



“What are those things?” Bertram asked as he looked down the hill at another small clearing. Jake walked up beside them, being the last to arrive. He looked down at a group of what he assumed to be the mentioned beasts of some sort.

“They look like large badgers. Though judging from the deer-like thing they are eating, I think they have upped their diet quite a bit,” Jacob answered, turning to the rest of the group. “We already agreed that we might need to hunt. These things don’t look very dangerous, so we should be able to handle them. Any thoughts?”

Jake looked at the big badgers. Four of them, each the size of German shepherds. From how they ate the deer-thing, they without a doubt had sharp teeth and claws, as they ripped the flesh off the thing. The perception of their surroundings seemed lackluster, though, to say the least as none of the things had noticed him or the others in his group yet, despite them only being 30 or so meters away.

The feeling they gave him wasn't one of danger at all. In fact, he had a feeling that handling them would be easy.

Interrupting Jakes thoughts, the other archer, Casper, pitched in:

“I vote for hunting. From the roars in the distance, it sounds like much more dangerous things are around, and they may even be our source of dinner tonight. They seem to be low-level beasts,” he said, getting a nod from Jacob. Hearing the word, level, Jake mentally slapped himself in the face yet another time today, wondering why he hadn't tried to use Identify yet. This is what the damn skill is for, he thought grumpily.

Focusing on the beasts one by one, as he phased out the conversation around him, he got what he hoped for, somewhat

[??? - lvl 3]

[??? - lvl 4]

[??? - lvl 3]

[??? - lvl 3]

“... I'm just saying, maybe they are closer to ferrets than badgers!”

“I'm not saying they are not slightly ferret-like, I'm saying that you're confusing ferrets and weasels!”

Jake finally zoned back into the conversation, hearing Dennis, the light-warrior of their little group, and Lina, one of the casters, arguing about something pointless. Not exactly surprising. They were cousins and had an ongoing, never-ending charade of pointless discussions going on, some spanning days or even weeks before they finally decide to ‘agree to disagree’.

Jake had to confess he couldn't see the resemblance to either creature... but then again, he didn't know the difference between the two anyway. But he was pretty sure of one thing. Ferret or weasel, an arrow to the heart or head was lethal either way.

Breaking up the inane argument between the two cousins, the other medium warrior besides Jacob, Theodore, seemed to have had the same idea as Jake. "Guys, I just tried to use identify on one of them, and it was level 3. I couldn't see the name, though."

"Oh, great initiative! Why didn't I think of that!" Jacob cheered and patted Theodore on his back. Turning to Jake, he asked. "Hey Jake, do you have any thoughts on what to do?"

"No, but I also tried identifying them. Three of them are level 3, and one of them is 4," Jake added. He had never done well in big groups like this, especially when all nine of the others turned his way. Seriously, he just hoped for the useless chatter to stop and the fighting to begin.

They were ten versus four. They had the jump. Every advantage was theirs, so this posturing felt... pointless.

"Okay then, it seems like fighting them is the decision. Now for our tactical approach..."

Several more minutes passed laying down a strategy and deciding on how exactly to engage the beasts. After the earlier discussion, they had retreated behind the hill again to avoid the things spotting them. Peeking up over the hill occasionally, the badger-maybe-weasel-maybe-ferret-like beasts did not seem to be in any kind of a hurry with their meal.

The plan was simple, fire off ranged attacks from a distance, trying to damage or maybe kill one or two, with Bertram trying to go in the front with his shield and get their attention, while Jacob and Theodore flanked him to cover his sides. The plan held the assumption that the beasts were stupid and aggressive if attacked.

Planning so much was maybe a bit overboard for overgrown badgers, but no one seemed willing to take any risk. A sentiment that Jake understood, but he disagreed with it. Wouldn't a fight without any risk be a bit... boring?

The only problem with the plan was that apparently the casters only had around 10 meters range on their bolts, any longer than that and they would fizzle out of existence according to what Ahmed, the last of the casters in their group, had been told during the introduction.

This left Jake and Casper, easily dismissing Dennis with his throwing daggers, having no faith in his accuracy at 30 meters, or 10 meters for that matter, if he could even throw them that far. And as for Casper... the first time he had ever held a bow in his life was earlier that same day when he got it from choosing the archer class.

"So, Jake. You got confidence to hit one from here?" Jacob inquired, seemingly not holding much faith in the plan they had spent the last 10 or so minutes making. That the planning had been a waste, Jake agreed on. The beasts would already be dead if it was up to him.

"Of course," Jake answered, once again slightly less awkward than before with everyone staring at him. His well-hidden frustration at the passive group outweighing his social anxiety.

He took out an arrow from the quiver on his back and inspected it. Wooden shaft, steel tip, with fletchings made of a kind of feather he did not immediately recognize. The weight was good and balanced, the arrowhead sharp, and overall it seemed to be of good quality.

“Okay, ready when you are,” Jacob said, getting ready along with everyone else. From the looks of everyone, the lack of confidence was all around. They weren’t fighters. The only one who appeared to have some kind of proper training was Bertram.

Jake walked up over the small hill, followed by everyone else just behind him.

He looked at the beasts and nocked the arrow. He raised his bow as he focused. His vision instantly sharpened, instinctively knowing that Archers Eye had activated. Time seemed to slow down ever so slightly as he pulled back the string.

For the first time today, something felt right. The morning routine, work, the introduction, and everything else was just... wrong. But at this one moment, as he held the bow, everything felt like it was as it should be. He smiled, took aim, and shot the arrow. Before even seeing the result, he had already taken out another arrow, preparing to shoot once again in one fluid motion.

The arrow had been aimed for the neck of the strongest beast, the one at level 4. He had briefly considered the heart or the head, but he had limited knowledge of their physiology. The heart couldn't be placed where he assumed, and the hardness of the skull was way too unpredictable. The arrow flew in a straight line, with more speed, power, and accuracy than Jake had ever shot an arrow before.

The arrow hit the beast straight in the throat as it raised its head from the carcass of its prey a mere moment before the attack arrived.

It fell back over, and before the other badgers had even registered what had happened, the second arrow arrived, hitting the left-most badger square in its chest, penetrating deeply. The remaining two badgers looked over at the hill and instantly charged at Jake, showing no regard for their lives.

Before they had even moved 5 meters, another arrow arrived. This time they were ready, however, and dodged a head-on hit, only leaving a shallow scratch on the one on the right as it dodged. Jake only managed to get off two more arrows before they arrived at the group, both only leaving minor injuries on one of them.

Before the beasts could sink their teeth into Jake, a huge figure moved in front of him, carrying a huge shield and a short-sword, followed by Theodore and Jacob off to each of his sides. Jake flanked around, still hidden behind the three men in front of him, trying to see if he could get off another shot.

The first badger to reach them was the uninjured one, smashing into Bertram's shield, predictably getting knocked back from the impact. Following just behind it was the injured one, this one slightly more cautious as Jacob tried to keep it at a distance by pointing his sword at it, making threatening motions.

As Jake took his time to line up a shot, the beast that had smashed into the shield was stabbed by Theodore, who had somehow managed to get it in its hind legs. With the thing disabled, the two warriors quickly managed to hack away at it.

Jacob was still attempting to take on the injured badger, swinging his sword back and forth, with the beast jumping around trying to attack him while not getting hit by the sword. Jacob had gotten several scratches on his arms already, and the badger also seemed to have taken a couple of hits.

Jake aimed his bow, and just as the badger jumped away from the swipe of the sword, Jake released the arrow, hitting the badger in the side. Before the thing had a chance to collect itself, Jacobs's sword fell, cutting into its head, promptly ending its life.

Bertram and Theodore had also managed to finish off the last badger around the same time. Looking at the two initial ones he had hit, both were also dead. The first one he had hit in the throat had died instantly, while the other one had managed to run a couple of meters towards them before it succumbed to its injury. Judging from the blood, Jake had hit something important, likely even the heart.

“Holy shit, we did it!” yelled Theodore, swinging his bloody sword around. Behind them, Caroline was rushing up to Jacob. She started mumbling some words, and a white light appeared around her hands as Jake saw cuts and bruises on Jacobs's arms slowly heal. Jacob thanked her and looked over at Jake with a weird look in his eyes.

Jake did not feel like having any unnecessary social interaction, and as the adrenaline slowly wore off, he looked at the system messages he had missed during the fight.

\*You have slain [Badger Cub – lvl 4] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 8 TP earned\*

\*’DING!’ Class: [Archer] has reached level 1 – Stat points allocated, +1 free point\*

\*You have slain [Badger Cub – lvl 3] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 4 TP earned\*

\*You have slain [Badger Cub – lvl 3] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 2 TP earned\*

\*'DING!' Class: [Archer] has reached level 2 – Stat points allocated, +1 free point\*

\*'DING!' Race: [Human (G)] has reached level 1 – Stat points allocated, +1 free point\*

\*You have slain [Badger Cub – lvl 3] – Bonus experience earned killing an enemy above your level. 2 TP earned\*

Well, Jake thought. That was a bit more than expected. He felt good. Right. The warm glow from the increased stats sure helped, but it was more than that.

He had won. It was an easy battle, but it still felt great. The feeling when he hit each of the badgers still clear in his mind, the satisfaction that came with every kill. He wanted to hunt more.

## Chapter 5 - Big Pig



As Jake was still basking in the feeling of his level-ups and post-battle euphoria, he opened his status window. The reverie of his colleagues was of little interest to him, as while he enjoyed the victory, he didn't exactly view it as some monumental achievement. They were overgrown rodents... badgers are rodents, right? Probably not. Moving on.

## Status

Name: Jake Thayne

Race: [Human (G) – lvl 1]

Class: [Archer – lvl 2]

Profession: N/A

Health Points (HP): 130/130

Mana Points (MP): 120/120

Stamina: 111/130

Stats

Strength: 13

Agility: 14

Endurance: 13

Vitality: 13

Toughness: 11

Wisdom: 12

Intelligence: 12

Perception: 18

Willpower: 10

Free points: 3

Titles

[Forerunner of the New World]

Thinking back, he hadn't opened the window since the introduction. Not even to confirm his class or title. And it sure had grown. His agility alone had nearly doubled with the title and levels added together, going from 8 to 14. With Perception being the stat increased by 2 points per archer level, it had grown by an entire 8 points. And he could feel it. Sounds were clearer, his vision sharper than ever, save for when he focused on using Archers Eye.

It could be his imagination, but he felt like his perception was still increasing as he stood there, venting down. Either the new stats only applied their bonus gradually, or perhaps one simply needed time to get used to them. Got to experiment with it, he thought, as he smiled to himself.

Stats were truly a weird thing. During the fight, he had moved faster and been stronger than ever before at the level of an athlete in peak form, at least. Yet it had all felt so natural that he hadn't even questioned it for a second. It was almost scary how easy it was to adapt to your body's performance going through such huge changes.

Deciding to write it off as system-magic, he dismissed the status screen, finally noticing that everyone was either staring at him or the dead badgers.

“Thanks, Caroline,” Jacob said, as he gently pushed the now blushing Caroline away from him. Turning to the rest of them as he praised them. “Good job, everyone. Especially you, Jake.”

Jacob seemed back to normal again, the same passive smile and glint in his eyes as before. The tension after the fight had left everyone by now. On a side-note, Jake had entirely ‘ruined’ their carefully made plan by killing half of the beasts before the fight even began. The only beneficial part of the plan still applicable being what to do with the corpses after. They needed a source of food, so... badger meat. Yay?

Figuring out how to transport the badgers was a hassle, as no one wanted to pick up the dead and bloody animals. Especially not the one killed by Bertram and Theodore as it was a complete mess, filled with holes. They ended up only taking the two killed by Jake at the start of the fight, as they were the most whole. The carrying went to Ahmed, who felt bad for not contributing in the battle, and Dennis, who just seemed eager to help. No one even addressed or asked Jake to take anything. Not something he was going to complain about.

As they walked forward, still looking for any source of water, Jake checked his quiver and took note that he was down to 54 arrows, having fired 6 in the previous fight. Focusing on the quiver, he once again identified it:

[Enchanted Quiver (Common)] – A quiver enchanted with the ability to conjure [common] quality arrows when injected with mana.

Now I just have to figure out how to inject something with mana, he said to himself... only to figure out four seconds later that injecting something with mana was way easier than he had anticipated. He just had to hold it in his hands, and then think really hard about doing it. It was almost instinctual.

As the mana slowly left him, it felt a little weird, but not really uncomfortable. In the quiver, he saw arrows slowly appear, seemingly growing out of the sides of it. After half a minute or so, there were once again 60 arrows in the quiver. Trying to inject any more mana seemed to have no effect at all. Looking at his mana, he saw that he was down to 102/120.

So, three mana per arrow. Got it. Damn, this would have been useful back in the day, he thought to himself while admiring the magical quiver, before adding, or not, as I didn't have mana...

He had considered recollecting the arrows, but there were several reasons not to. First of all, he would have to clean the arrows somehow before they were useful again. Secondly, their penetrative power would be reduced if already used once, if only by a little. Third... he could just magically conjure them. And if he started getting low on mana himself, he could just have one of the warriors fill it back up since they didn't use their mana for anything else.

All of that was ignoring how time-consuming it would be to recollect the arrows when it only took seconds to conjure new ones.

As they kept walking, Jake quickly ended up at the front, walking beside Bertram. Bertram seemed to hesitate about something, but eventually opened his mouth,

“Jake... were you in the military or something? Or maybe you went hunting from time to time?” he eventually asked.

Jake was a bit taken aback, not expecting that kind of question. “No to both. But I did a lot of archery when I was younger, and still practice when I visit the old folks back home. Why are you asking?”

Jake was honestly confused. If he had to say so himself, he did decently in the last fight, but that was it.

“I just thought you handled yourself so well back there, nothing more,” Bertram said, not pressing further. Though he didn’t seem like the answer satisfied him whatsoever.

Jake nodded at him and turned his head forwards again, scanning the foliage. One thing he had noticed was the complete absence of insects or grubs or any of the smaller animals, really. There were birds up in the trees, but even they were all roughly the size of pigeons.

No insects were good, though. Normal animals seem to have mutated, or perhaps become something else entirely. Imagining mutated mosquitoes, ticks, or spiders, he could easily see their entire group being wiped out without even knowing how they died.

The forest was extremely dense and full of hills, fallen trees, and giant bushes, which made knowing what was 10 meters ahead of you an uphill task. This made them move rather slowly, barely keeping up a walking pace.

After a couple more minutes of walking, Jake finally spotted some movement off to his left. He instantly poked Bertram in the side, who followed his line of sight, also seeing the rustling bush. Bertram lifted his arm, motioning the rest of the group to stop. Jake took the bow off his shoulder and took an arrow out of the quiver, nocking the arrow. Ready for whatever was in there.

After a few moments, the bush stopped rustling, and everything went silent once more. As the seconds passed, everyone seemed to start relaxing. Everyone but Jake. His intuition told him there was still something in there.

He focused and used Archer's Eye, observing the bush very closely. He spotted light being reflected between the leaves, and without any hesitation, he loosed an arrow.

A huge shriek was heard, and stumbling out came a small boar, no taller than up to their knees. After stumbling for a few steps, It fell on the ground, an arrow sticking out of its left eye.

\*You have slain [Boar-Beast – lvl 1] – Experience earned. 1 TP earned\*

Everything was once again silent as they stared at the dead pig. Jacob opened his mouth to say something but was interrupted by an even louder sound.

“SQUEEEEEAL!”

A loud squeal sounded out, followed by the sound of stomping, causing the ground to vibrate slightly.

“RUN!”

Jake had no idea who had yelled, and he didn't need to think twice before following the advice. He ran back and found his way around one of the larger trees. Without hesitation, he took out his knife and another arrow from his quiver and slammed them into the tree, penetrating easily.

He started climbing as he registered the rest of his group, all running to hide behind the trees. Bertram was the only one still out in the open holding the rear. His shield aimed towards the direction of the stomping.

Just as Jake was making rapid progress climbing up the tree, the bush where the small boar had come from earlier was torn apart. A massive boar, taller than even Bertram, the tallest member of their group, emerged.

The boar completely ignored Bertram and the others and charged straight at the tree Jake was climbing. It smashed tusk-first into the tree, making it shake excessively. The impact made him lose his grip on the arrow, but he managed to hang on to the knife and avoid falling to what would most likely be certain death.

As Jake stabilized himself by taking out another arrow and plunging it into the bark, the rest of the group just stood frozen gathered around another tree nearby with everyone



just gawking at the huge beast. Finally, Jacob got his shit together and called for the casters and Casper to start shooting spells and arrows at the thing.

The beast, completely ignoring the group of 9 preparing to engage, instead kept smashing its head into the tree while making loud squeals. A bad move by it in retrospect, as it allowed enough time for the humans to attack.

Three bolts of mana, followed by a lone arrow shot into the boar's side, finally making it take proper notice of the other humans. The mana bolts made small explosions as they smashed into it, leaving small holes and burnings its hide, while the arrow seemed unable to even penetrate the hide.

The massive boar, now with new, far more reachable targets, started stomping towards the group. No one, not even Bertram, had any intentions of having a head-on test of strength with the thing, as they all started running behind the trees.

This had the effect of making it unable to charge towards them, as it tried in vain to impale anyone. They kept dodging behind trees, making use of the beast's inability to make tight turns and maneuver properly, buying time for Jake to climb up to a branch and secure a foothold.

From his new vantage point, Jake started shooting arrows at it. Compared to the arrows fired by Casper, Jake's penetrated its thick hide and embedded themselves in the beast. Once more, it tried to charge him, but it only ended up smashing into the tree harmlessly again in its stupidity. Doing more damage to itself than anyone else.

What followed was what seemed like ages of Jake shooting the boar, the casters firing mana bolts whenever possible. Meanwhile, the warriors tried to keep the beast's attention on them by making loud noises and waving their hands and swords at it.

It all seemed to be working rather well until they all heard a yelp. Jake saw that Joanna had fallen over something and was now lying prone on the ground, within mere meters of the boar. She appeared completely out of it from the fall and didn't even look like she was trying to get up.

The boar was stupid without a doubt, but it was at least smart enough to recognize a vulnerable prey when it saw one, as it instantly shifted its attention to her. Bertram tried running to help her without hesitation, but he was too far away and too slow as the beast charged Joanna.

It didn't even try to skewer her on its tusks, it simple charged over her. Its massive hoofs smashing down on the ground with every step. As it ran over her, a loud snap was heard, followed by Joanna screaming in pain.

Before it could turn around and attack her again, Bertram finally reached it and stabbed his sword into its side, penetrating with nearly a third of his sword. The blow made it instantly change its focus to him as it apparently completely ignored the screaming woman.

With a fast swipe of its head, it smashed its tusks into the heavy warrior sending him flying back and into a tree with a loud thud. Still leaving the sword stuck in the side. However, this entire sequence of events did allow Dennis to reach Joanna and start dragging her behind a tree.

From his vantage point, as he continued bombarding the beast with arrows, Jake saw everything. Nothing to do about it, he thought as he kept up the assault. He should at least make use of the space created by the woman's ineptitude.

The beast was starting to look like a porcupine with all the arrows sticking out of it, and with the occasional mana bolt burning its flesh, the beast had started getting visibly slower in its movements. It huffed loudly, now staring red-eyed at Dennis, who was covered in Joanna's blood.

Before the beast could start another reckless charge, it was hit in the eye by another arrow fired by Jake. Attempting to grab another, Jake noticed his quiver was empty, as the beast charged the tree he was in once more. The blood was visibly pooling in the undergrowth, and the boar itself looked like it had been dipped in a bath of red paint. Another two mana bolts hit the boar in its hindquarters, and Casper was still firing arrows, though only dealing minor damage.

The beast was on its last legs by now, and the warriors finally felt confident enough to go closer. All of them started stabbing it, save for Bertram, who had been knocked into the tree pretty hard earlier. He was still conscious but struggling to get back up.

With a few more stabs, the warrior's swords, and the continuous blood loss, made the beast finally fall.

\*You have slain [Irontusk Boar – lvl 10] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. Experience split with the rest of your party. 302 TP earned\*

\*'DING!' Class: [Archer] has reached level 3 – Stat points allocated, +1 free point\*

Jake felt the warm glow of the levels but decided that bothering with the notifications could wait. Jake jumped down from the tree and rushed to where Joanna was lying. Caroline was already with her using her healing magic. As he got closer, he was initially relieved that she was still alive, until he saw her lower body. One of the legs was completely ruined, while the other was missing entirely from the knee down. The massive weight of the boar having smashed it entirely into paste.

“Use the healing potions too!” Ahmed yelled, taking out one of his and handing it to Dennis, supporting her head. He quickly uncorked the bottle and poured the red liquid into Joanna’s mouth.

The effect was immediate as the smashed leg started rapidly healing, and Theodore quickly grabbed it and put it in a proper position, ignoring the screams from the former receptionist. The leg healed, but the situation on the dismembered one was less positive. While the wound did close, no new limb was regrown.

Bertram slowly walked over, holding an empty bottle in his hand. Judging from his condition, he must have also consumed a healing potion. Joanna had lost consciousness, likely due to the pain, and the mood had turned even more somber than before. There was no post-victory celebration this time.

“We need to move. This much blood is bound to attract something,” Ahmed said with a sigh. Dennis and Theodore decided to carry Joanna with one supporting each shoulder. The two badger corpses had both been dropped when the boar rushed at them, and quite frankly, no one felt like looking for them. That is if they hadn't been utterly trampled to pieces by the jeep-sized beast.

As they started walking, Jake took his quiver in his hand and began conjuring more arrows in case another fight broke out. They couldn't let a minor setback like this stop their hunt. There was still daylight left.

Just as 4 arrows had been generated, Jacob and Caroline both slowed down and ended up walking beside him. Jake was confused about what they wanted when Jacob turned to him and looked him in the eyes.

“...Why did you do that?”

## Chapter 6 - Questioning

Jake was taken aback as he looked at Jacob with confusion clear on his face. “Why did I do what?”

With a lowered voice, making sure no one else could hear them, Jacob elaborated. “Why did you decide to provoke the boars without any thought, not consulting anyone in the group? Look what happened, Joanna lost her damn leg, Jake. We are in a god-forsaken forest filled with monsters that want to eat us, and within mere hours, one of us is crippled.

“What do you suggest we do now? Bunker down and hope nothing finds us for over two whole months. Or what, leave Joanna behind to die? What exactly was your plan when you decided to shoot into a bush, without having any goddamn clue what was in there? There are other people in this forest too, what if it had been one of them? What the fuck is wrong with you?”

Jacob got visibly redder in his face as he kept barraging Jake, also getting louder and, of course, getting the attention of the others. Everyone was staring at them by now, and looking around, Jake spotted open hostility in some of their eyes, with others looking down at the ground. Bertram and Casper the only ones truly neutral, both just looking sad. That is beside the one person who didn't have any emotions visible on his face, Ahmed. However, he didn't seem inclined to voice his opinions.

Jake had never seen Jacob this angry before. Right, what was I thinking? He just saw a reflection of something. In hindsight, it was the eye of the small boar. Something in his head told him to shoot. It was just... instinct.

He indeed hadn't been thinking. From the beginning, he hadn't. Except for his internal pondering, when it came to any kind of combat or tense situation for that matter, he gladly ran on auto-pilot. Allowing his instincts to take over and intuition to be his guiding light when making split-second decisions.

"I... I am sorry, I was just... I don't know..." Jake couldn't properly express himself, his incompetence at social situations once again evident. On the one hand, he did feel bad about the outcome of the situation, but he didn't truly think it was his fault.

Not taking the shot would have been stupid too. It could have been a predator waiting to ambush them or even a trap of some kind. Besides, it was a foe they could clearly handle. The only reason why Joanna ended up like she had was that she screwed up and tripped.

"You don't know? Well, you should know! Just think for god's sake! We are humans, not beasts who attack anything we see. Think about the consequences. We are a group. A team. What would have happened if we weren't here? What if you had been alone?" Jacob got more and more aggrieved with Jake's passive demeanor and lack of feedback to his

critique. Not due to Jake not taking it to heart, but because he simply had no idea how to respond.

He took the question very much to heart. What would have happened if he had been alone? Replaying the fight, he began from the beginning.

He was climbing the tree when the boar came out of the bushes and ran towards him, already out of reach of the beast. While it did make him temporarily lose his grip, he was never really in any danger of falling. The increased stats made him stronger, faster, and he had no problem holding himself up with only one arm. With his stats, he would have thus been able to climb the tree quite easily.

The arrows he fired into the beast did more than enough damage to make it bleed to death too eventually. Towards the end, more than 50 arrows had penetrated it, and even if he did run out, he could start conjuring more. Ultimately the boar would be forced to leave or stay below the tree and wait for him to keep shooting. And judging by the behavior of the thing, it likely would have stayed until it succumbed.

The tree was more than strong enough to take the hits, having barely taken any damage. With its circumference easily being large enough for 7-8 grown men to stand holding hands around it, he saw no scenario where it would be falling over. So, to sum it all up... if he had been alone, he would have gotten solo experience and TP, and no one would have gotten seriously hurt, though the fight would have taken longer.

On top of that, Jake had an inherent unwillingness to ignore his own instincts and intuition. As most people would, he assumed. While he in his work-life before the system was very calculating, always taking an analytical and data-based approach, he also relied on his guts a lot. The same for tests in university. He trusted his intuition to an almost unhealthy degree.

When it came to archery, and pretty much everything else in life, he had come to prefer taking everything as it comes, trusting in his own judgment.

And he felt like his instincts and intuition had only gotten stronger after the system came. Even taking a more objective look at his performance in this tutorial so far, he had made little to no mistakes... if he was alone, that is.

He had made correct split-decision choices. With every arrow he shot, he never second-guessed if he should shoot or not. What if he had hesitated to climb the tree for even a second? He would likely have been squashed to mush in between a tree and a giant pig.

With how every beast they had encountered so far acted, the small boar was likely going to attack them as either way, making the fight with the big boar inevitable. The result of his actions may not have been optimal, but he still adamantly stood behind it. Killing the small boar had been the right decision, and his performance during the fight was as good as anyone could expect.

“I did what I deemed best, and I do stand behind the decision to kill the small boar. Even if it had been another human, trusting anyone, not from our team is a horrible idea. The tutorial actively encourages us to kill each other, don’t forget that,” he started, finding confidence he didn’t quite know he had.

“Jacob, this new reality of ours is one where magic exists. Joanna is hurt, but she isn't in danger. She lost a leg, but who is to say that cannot be healed? With her improved physique, she should be fine soon, and maybe we can even attempt to make a wooden leg or something for her. Or we can just have her guard our camp since she can cast magic. This isn't our old world anymore. People die. I would count us lucky to not have lost anyone yet. Seriously, look at the tutorial panel, everyone.”



The final part of his sentence, spoken loudly, addressed everyone. Jake himself also having opened his panel already:

[Tutorial Panel]

Duration: 63 days & 20:52:39

Total Survivors Remaining: 1112/1200

TP Collected: 319

Not even an hour had passed since the beginning, and yet nearly a hundred people had died. And Jake seriously doubted that beasts were the only culprits behind the many deaths.

The others were silent, unsure of what to say. It was no secret that Jake had been the main contributor of the group so far, performing the best in combat and scouting ahead for potential dangers. He even led them away once from an area where Jake felt like strong beasts were fighting each other.

Despite them having only been here for so little time, and only been in two fights, Jake had more than shown his proficiency. Even Jacob, the de-facto leader of their group, had to admit that Jake had been the one doing most of the heavy lifting so far.

“Jake... I just want you to remember that we are a team. Consult with us, tell us your thoughts before just jumping into motion. To not be making the decision for all of us...” Jacob sighed, not willing to dwell on the topic anymore. Being relieved seeing that Jake had no intent to either. “Let’s keep moving forward.”

The following half an hour was uneventful, Jake still walking at the front with Bertram just a bit behind him, and the rest of the group silently following his lead. Finally, as it was also starting to get slightly darker, Jake heard the subtle sound of running water off in the distance.

He once again thanked his improved senses and told the group what he heard. Everyone was relieved, and after only another five minutes, they made their way to the top of a hill and saw a small river running just downhill. It was minimal, barely a couple of meters wide, with depth only to one’s ankles, but a source of fresh water is a source of fresh water.

Quickly the group found a clearing just a bit downstream and all settled down on the grass. For the first time since the beginning of this tutorial, everyone finally relaxed - everyone resting except Jake, who was sitting with his quiver in hand.

Jake had conjured more arrows on the way but started getting a headache. A symptom of low mana, it seems, as his mana had dropped down to 11/120. Stamina was still looking fine at 116/140. The maximum had been increased by 10 due to the point in endurance given by the level-up in his class. Looking at his stats, he was once again reminded of his 4 unallocated free points.

The biggest challenge in the prior fight had been his ability to deal damage. Against small targets, his arrows dealt major damage, and he could aim for vital spots. Like the boar, large creatures were simply too big to get affected much by the small arrows.

There were weak spots, like when he hit the eye, but the other weak spots were normally protected. It took him his entire quiver of arrows to down one big piggie, and that was with help. But he wasn't sure if a couple of stats in strength or agility would in any way enable him to do any serious damage. There was simply too much fur, skin, flesh, and muscle to get through before he hit any organs.

Saving the points seemed like a waste too. After thinking a while, he decided to put 1 point in strength, 1 in agility, and 2 in perception, just following his class distribution. Looking at his stats, not much had changed, except the points from a single level-up and the free points.

Stats

Strength: 15

Agility: 16

Endurance: 14

Vitality: 13

Toughness: 11

Wisdom: 12

Intelligence: 12

Perception: 22

Willpower: 10

Free points: 0

Looking around, he was clearly not the only one consulting his menu screens. The chatter started shortly after; everyone just happy to finally have a modicum of safety. No one spoke to Jake, which was fine as he was happy just to listen in.

Everyone had gotten a single level in their race and class from the kill on the boar it seems, Bertram even gaining two in his class. He had already gotten one level in his class from the first fight with the badgers, but his contribution against the boar seemed to net him quite a lot.

After having relaxed for 20 minutes or so, the peace was broken by Jacob getting up, urging the group to not waste what daylight was left. Distributing tasks, they began gathering firewood, checking the perimeter, and getting materials to perhaps make some basic tools. Theodore had the idea of taking some of the vines lying around and perhaps making some makeshift rope. The vines were very thin, but rather strong, and could be weaved together.

Surveying the perimeter went to Jake, who ended up killing two more badgers who were lurking in the bushes just outside the clearing. They were only level two, giving no levels and only 4 TP. Having not enough mana to recharge all his arrows, Casper gave Jake some of his arrows to fill up his quiver. Afterward, he started spending his own mana to conjure more, effectively acting as a mobile arrow factory.

This also allowed him to ask Jake for tips related to archery and combat in general. While even Jake was surprised by his own level of competence in combat, he was more than confident and willing to give advice on how to handle a bow. He had tried to go pro when he was younger, though he didn't exactly go around bragging about it, mainly due to the fact that he had to give up that dream because of an injury. Leaving a bit of a mental scar.

He demonstrated proper forms, advised on aiming, proper motions when taking arrows from the quiver, nocking them properly, drawing the bow, and finally releasing the arrow, all in one fluid movement. Casper at his side, trying to follow along with the movements while throwing in a question here and there.

Around the two archers, everyone was busy trying to make at least a barebones functional camp, and Ahmed volunteered to try to skin and prepare the two badgers Jake had killed that skulked at the outskirts of the clearing. His goal was to make it possible to cook them.

Jake and Casper were left alone to their own antics, spending hours of training with their bows. As Jake thought back on all his knowledge of how to use a bow through teaching Casper, he was pleasantly surprised by the system suddenly giving him a notification.

**\*Skill Upgraded\*:** [Basic Archery (Inferior)] – An Archers best friend is the bow in his hand and the arrow in his foes heart. Unlocks basic proficiency with bows, crossbows, and adds a minuscule bonus to the effect of agility and strength when using a ranged weapon.

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[Advanced Archery (Common)] – An Archers best friend is the bow in his hand and the arrow in his foes heart. You have shown improved proficiency with a bow, making the weapon even more familiar to you. Adds a minor bonus to the effect of agility and strength when using a ranged weapon.

The stats' bonus effect went from minuscule to minor, though Jake still had no clue exactly how big the effect was. His bow did not really feel any more familiar than before, perhaps because he already felt very comfortable with it.

Casper, while not getting any skill upgrade, still showed quite an improvement in his abilities. While it was certainly getting darker, there was still quite a bit of sunlight left in the day, and the dinner preparations were far from ready.

Jake still had a few things he wanted to test. Looking at Casper while thinking of what to do, Jake got a brilliant idea.

## Chapter 7 - Training & Rest

"OW! For fuck's sake, that hurts!" Jake growled after being hit by yet another arrow.

"Jake, are you sure about this?" Casper asked, genuinely wondering if Jake was actually a masochist. He had been shooting padded arrows, with dulled arrowheads wrapped in cloth, at Jake for nearly three hours already. The cloth came from Jake's own jacket, which he had been wearing under his cloak this entire time.

"Yeah, just give me a second," Jake said, getting ready once again. He had wrapped the torn sleeve of his jacket around his eyes, acting as a blindfold.

"Are you really sure this is doing anything? Well, I guess it's good target practice for me, but..." Casper said, mumbling the last part. Jake's plan was rather straightforward. He would have Casper shoot arrows at him while blindfolded while trying to react to them without relying on sight.

While Jake certainly had reservations of his own plan's veracity, to begin with, he had made progress throughout their training session. In the beginning, he merely flinched milli-seconds before the arrows hit, while now he could react to at least try to attempt to evade the arrow before it hit him.

"Just keep the arrows coming, I can feel it!" Jake said, still hurting, though also very positive.

He had been wondering about his weird senses since coming to this tutorial. He somehow 'knew' the big boar was charging through the bushes before he saw or even heard the beast. Actually, to say he knew was a bit too strong of a word. He just had this vague feeling that a massive danger was coming.

In combat, he didn't really think much per-se but merely went with the flow. He was still in full control of his body, of course, but at times it felt like his brain couldn't keep up with his body. His instincts. He just did what felt most natural at the time. And the results spoke for themselves.

And that was how Jake got the idea for this kind of practice. He wanted to train his senses and allow him to understand exactly what was happening to him and why it felt like he had a new sixth sense. He had suspected it had something to do with being an archer or may be tied to the perception stat, but Casper didn't have the same experiences as him at all.

With the big boar he had felt that the boar was coming for him as he had just begun climbing the tree. His logical mind then took over, concluding it would hit the tree, allowing him to strengthen his grip and avoid falling.

At the beginning of their impromptu practice-session, Casper had merely thrown small sticks and cloth-wrapped stones at him. Jake felt nearly nothing before the things hit him. He could get a feeling that something was coming towards him, but not how fast or where it would hit. It also came way too late for him to react.

After quite a bit of frustration and thinking, he asked if Casper could throw a rock not wrapped in cloth. This time, he felt it quite vividly before it hit him, and even more so when it actually did hit. Got a nice blue mark from that one. A round of Casper apologizing profusely later, Jake had calmed him down and convinced him to switch to the cloth-wrapped arrows. They still hurt like hell, but at least they were not able to cause



any real damage. Well, he had lost a few health points, but it was barely noticeable, and they were regenerating quite quickly.

Throughout the session, Jake felt the improvement more and more, and he felt like he was just a little away from grasping unto something. He had a far more distinct feeling that something was about to hit him than when he started. Still not enough of a feeling to react adequately, though.

Back in the present, the next arrow came, and Jake once again felt that something was about to hit him, so he tried dodging it. He ended up still getting hit again and even ended up tripping while trying to dodge it. He got up again, not at all discouraged. He had felt it there. Not just the concept of danger approaching, he had even felt what it was that was about to strike him.

They kept up the practice a bit more, with Jake even managing to dodge an arrow or two here and there. Casper was finally beginning to believe in whatever Jake was doing, and even asking questions on how to do it. Jake tried to explain the feeling he got, but Jake sucked at it, putting the feeling into words, and to begin with, it was like trying to explain colors to a blind person.

Another hour went by before someone came over from the makeshift camp. Food had been prepared, and while neither Jake nor Casper were hungry, they knew the importance of sustenance. No one knew when they could get their next meal either.

The dinner that was about to be ready was the two badgers killed earlier. Grilled haphazardly over a small fire after being skinned and gutted. Bertram knew how to do that, surprisingly. They didn't have any spices or proper tools though, so quite frankly, it looked quite... simple.

Even the cook, Lina, had to admit that it did not exactly look appetizing in any way. Caroline was the one that came over to the two archers to get them to eat. Jake nearly felt like all the pain had been worth it when she sat down next to him while they ate in order to heal his wounds. The healing felt good like a cold stream was running through his veins, and he saw the blue marks slowly disappear over the next twenty minutes as he sat there, enjoying the sensation.

They chatted while Caroline mainly asked questions about why he had let Casper use him for target practice for the better part of four hours, and about other minor things, like how he was so good at using a bow and what-not.

Jake was happy to talk to her and explained his training with Casper and what he hoped to achieve by doing it. He also explained to her how he had practiced archery growing up and how he did it from time to time still, thus explaining his proficiency with a bow.

He even divulged how he sadly had to give up going pro due to an injury, much to Caroline's interest. She had always seen him as the silent nerdy type, and not at all sporty. This also made Jake realize how little he had interacted with her outside of work. The same went for everyone in their group, in fact.

He had never been the social type in any kind of setting, really. While he wasn't absolutely hopeless in social interactions, he did try to minimize them. Heck, he ended up doing archery, to begin with, because his dad insisted on him doing some kind of sport, so he picked one where he had no team or direct opponents to interact with. Archery was a sport he could enjoy in solitude, just him and his bow.

Him liking Jacob and Caroline was most likely because they were two of the only people outside of his family that he felt comfortable around. Because of his welcoming nature and open demeanor, Jacob allowed pretty much anyone to feel good about themselves. Caroline, on the other hand, he couldn't put his finger on why he liked her. He just did.

Ah, who was he kidding, he just found her physically attractive, and that's about it. He barely knew the gal before the system.

In university, he had purposefully worked on improving his social skills and actively aimed to take part in gatherings and such. While he never got completely comfortable doing it, it improved his self-confidence tremendously during those years. Getting a girlfriend and a few close friends did even more for that confidence to develop. All until it was brought down the day he walked in on his girlfriend and his supposed best friend. Apparently, it had been an open secret in their little group. Open to everyone but Jake.

All the work and development he had gone through was for naught and his self-confidence and self-worth in the gutter. His girlfriend claimed it was just 'having fun' and that it was nothing serious, while his so-called best friend seemed to think it was no big deal at all, and that he just had to 'stop being a pussy about it'. A sentiment apparently shared by everyone else in their little university group. Or maybe they just feared social ex-communication from the group if they spoke up.

This event led to Jake being back to his old introverted ways. He studied, did archery, played games, watched TV, and went to classes. A good day was one where he hadn't spoken a single word to anyone but his parents when they called, asking how he was doing.

It had improved after he graduated, having gotten a good job, and through that was forced to engage in the social system that is the workplace. Jacob was the one that had gotten him out of his shell initially and made him open up more to his colleagues. Enough to be on friendly terms with everyone, at least. Jacob seemed to always try to invite Jake to things explicitly. Thinking back, the reason why they were in this tutorial together was maybe even due to Jacob asking him to go to lunch together.

In a professional setting, he had no issue speaking or expressing himself normally now. The same reason why he had no problem arguing for his decision-making with Jacob

earlier and talking with Casper during their training. But what he was doing right now. Casually small talking with Caroline... it was more nerve-wracking than facing down the huge boar.

During the conversation, Dennis yelled out to them, clearly flustered.

“Caroline! Joanna woke up. Can you come to check on her?” All said while nervously shooting glances at Jake. Caroline did not hesitate and excused herself as she followed Dennis over to Joanna. Not that they were very far away, being less than five meters away from where they had been sitting and eating.

Jake could easily peek or listen in but decided against it. He wouldn't blame Joanna if she were angry at him. In her eyes, he was the indirect cause of her injury after all. However, he was a bit scared if she would put any of those thoughts into words or actions.

How would he react if she started yelling at him? Blaming him? Could he stand there and argue that he stood by his decision? Or would it get heated and turn into another huge argument? He was afraid to find out and fell back into his old habit of simply avoiding the potential confrontation.

So Jake instead chose to close his eyes, and once again focus on trying to understand and reexperience his weird new sixth-sense-like ability. As he closed himself off mentally, he lost track of time until he was awoken by Casper, who was about to poke him in the side.

Jake opened his eyes before the finger even touched him, much to Casper's surprise. Jake was about to ask what he wanted when he noticed Jacob having gotten up also. Clearly about to launch into another speech.

“Alright, everyone, we made it through our first day,” he said, as he gave a sad look Joanna’s way. “Casper already checked and confirmed that the beasts have at least some fear of fire; however, we are not sure if it is a sure thing. I think we should have someone be on watch while everyone sleeps. We should make a rotation.”

No one had any objections to the idea of having someone watch their back as they slept. It was agreed that two people would keep watch together, while the others slept. Making the rotation, they had an odd number of potential lookouts, Joanna being excluded from the rotation. Without much fuss, Jake volunteered to keep watch solo, once again not meeting any objections.

The first watch would be Lina and Dennis, and the second watch would go to Jake and the third Jacob and Caroline. Jake wasn't exactly overjoyed imagining Caroline and Jacob being alone together, sitting at a bonfire under the moonlight. Not that a murder-forest was particularly romantic.

As they finished cleaning up after dinner, nobody wasted any time getting some shut-eye. While the stamina of most of them was still more than half full, they were nevertheless exhausted. While Jake did not feel particularly tired, he knew it would be foolish not to take the opportunity to get some sleep in. It wasn't exactly comfortable, just lying on the grass—the coarse cloak offering little comfort.

Jake shut his eyes and fell asleep immediately. Quite a feat considering the circumstances. He had no idea exactly how long he had been sleeping, he imagined the three hours they had agreed on, but he woke up as he felt someone approach him. Opening his eyes, instantly alert, he heard the small yelp of Lina as she jumped back, frightened by Jake suddenly awaking as she was about to wake him.

“Holy shit, you scared me. Were you already awake?” Lina whispered as Jake got up and made sure he had both his bow, full quiver, and knife still on him.

“No, I just awoke. How long have I been sleeping? And did anything happen while I slept?” Jake asked, looking around. It was now deep in the night, though not as dark as he would have assumed. The moonlight did much to illuminate the surroundings, making it quite easy to see everything in the clearing. Or perhaps it was just his improved eyesight making everything appear brighter. He frankly had no way to know.

“We have been keeping watch for a bit over three hours. We used the tutorial countdown to keep track,” she said, “and nothing has happened, really. A couple of small animals and what looked like more of those badgers were on the outskirts of the clearing, but they didn’t even exit the bushes or get close to us. Scared of the fire, I think. That or my awesome magic!”

Jake chuckled at her attempt at a joke, mainly out of courtesy than it actually being funny. He could see how tense she was and knew she was just trying to lighten the mood. She smiled, and they went over to Dennis, who was more than happy to be relieved of his services.

The two promptly went over to the others to sleep, while wishing Jake a peaceful watch. Jake took a seat on the same log that Dennis had been sitting on as he looked into the dark forest. Let’s hope that the rest of the night will also be quiet.

## Chapter 8 - A Wonderful Night

The night was quiet, far quieter than one would expect from a forest filled with borderline mindless beasts who wanted nothing more than to munch on human flesh. There were no

roars, no howls of wolves or hoots of owls. No sounds at all, really, except the breeze rustling the trees and bushes, and the crackling of the bonfire.

The responsibility of the person on watch was quite simple. Keep an eye out for things trying to kill them, and keep the bonfire lit. Jake checked his stamina, seeing it up to 135/140. Nearly maxed out again by around three hours of sleep. It had only been at around half when he went to sleep, regenerating far faster than he had predicted.

The need for sleep being reduced with levels was certainly a possibility, or perhaps the introduction to the system had changed something fundamental that simply made sleep less important. For example, Jake was wondering what would happen if one just chugged down stamina potions whenever it got low if one could stay awake indefinitely.

Shaking his head, Jake got up and took a short walk around the camp, surveying the perimeter of the small clearing. In hindsight, the location of their camp was poorly chosen, to say the least. There were trees and dense bushes all around them, making easy hiding spots for any predators, and not a single direction offered any solid cover from potential assaults.

Jake considered if they should look for a cave or something like that in the morning. Then again, caves also had their drawbacks, as chances are there would only be one entrance... and he could just imagine a beast like the big boar charging through the narrow tunnels, trampling anything in its wake. Yeah, not a pretty picture.

Looking at the trees, it was perhaps possible to somehow make camp up in one of the larger ones? Though that would make having a fire impossible, and he was not completely confident in everybody's ability to climb said trees.

Thinking about how little activity there was in the forest at this time of night made Jake think that the system or whatever/whoever had designed this tutorial was not completely ruthless. The absence of nocturnal beasts made surviving quite a bit easier, giving them time to sleep and recuperate. Even animals like badgers, which were normally active at night, seemed to only hunt during the daytime.

Jake, however, still had to remain vigilant as he had no solid evidence that there were no beasts out there, still hunting. He could also not forget the other humans of the tutorial. He had seen them on the giant pillar at the start, spread out to all sides. Thinking back on it, they had only been to the left and right, and none in front or behind him. He also couldn't forget the giant wall off to the back of them.

The space between the pillars was measured in kilometers easily, so it was not surprising that they had not run into other survivors yet. It had only been half a day or so, and while they had been moving for a while, they had not gone far, perhaps only a few kilometers tops. The pace had been slow, and everyone tense and overly careful, even taking some detours to avoid potentially dangerous areas. The direction they had traveled was also directly away from the wall.

He didn't even know if the other participants in the tutorial all were actually human. He had seen silhouettes, indicating bipedal creatures, but he had no way to know if they just had roughly the same shape as humans, or if they were humans. And quite honestly, he was not sure if he preferred for them to be humans or for them to be aliens, as chances are, they would end up in conflict at some point.

As the minutes slowly ticked by, the monotony started getting to him. While sitting still and just keeping an eye out sounds easy, anyone who has worked any kind of night job knows exactly how boring it is. But sadly, reading a book or playing on his phone was not an option.



Dennis and Lina had likely kept themselves entertained by talking and keeping the other awake and aware. The boredom, mixed with the lack of even the slightest stimulations from the environment, led to Jake slowly becoming less and less vigilant.

However, he was promptly awoken from his stupor once more when he heard rustling from one of the bushes at the far end of the clearing, the furthest away from the bonfire. Jake fixated his eyes on it as the bush kept rustling. He did not feel any sense of danger from the bush as he focused on it, but his instinct nevertheless told him something was wrong. For him to be careful.

He took his bow and got up from the log, checking back on everyone still soundly asleep. Everyone had been dead tired yesterday, mainly due to the mental exhaustion of this whole ordeal, so he was not at all inclined to wake them up for a false alarm.

He walked towards the bush, as it still rustled slightly once every couple of seconds as he got closer. He scanned the bush, seeing nothing, but still hesitant to go right up to it. He started drawing his bow and aimed it at the bush, as he slowly walked closer, taking tiny steps, prepared for anything jumping out.

Without any warning, something came out of the bush, and he instantly shot his arrow, easily hitting it. At the same time, before he could even register what it was, a silhouette charged out from the bushes. He couldn't properly see what it was in the darkness, but the humanoid silhouette was clear. Further cemented as he saw the moonlight reflected off the blade of a sword.

Jake stumbled backward and called out to awake the others, but the sound had barely left his mouth when he haphazardly raised his bow to try and block the sword.

He managed to block it, but he was pushed backward, once more nearly falling to the ground, barely holding onto the bow with both of his hands. Finally, he got a proper look at the assailant and saw that it was a bearded man, who seemed to be in his thirties, wearing an outfit identical to the one worn by Jacob and Theodore. In other words, a medium warrior.

The warrior once more tried to swing his blade, but it had cut into the wood of Jake's bow and had gotten stuck, turning their fight into a stalemate. Jake trying to get his bow back and retreat, with the warrior trying to cut all the way through and into Jake's body. However, the stalemate was short-lived as another person rushed out of a nearby bush, wielding a huge two-handed axe.

Jake saw him, and it didn't take a genius to know the situation was bad. Real bad. The medium warrior was as strong, if not slightly stronger, than Jake, and he had already been forced into close combat, meaning he had no way to use his bow. The others back at the camp had awoken by now, but they were scrambling and confused, with not even one of them having a clue what was going on. Jake and his attackers were a good 25 meters from the bonfire, hidden in the darkness.

Jake was at a loss what to do as the axe wielding warrior got closer. He had no time to think, so instead of thinking... he just reacted. Less than a second before the axe smashed his head in, he let go of his bow just as the warrior tugged, making him fall backward from his own momentum. Jake took the opportunity to pull back as the axe smashed into the ground where he had just stood. The weapon now stuck in the ground, making the heavy warrior his next target.

Charging forward, he tried stabbing the heavy warrior with his knife but was blocked by his armored arm. Without any hesitation, Jake pulled an arrow from his quiver and making use of the arrow's length, managed to hit the axe wielder's eye with an overhead blow, just reaching across his guard. The arrow barely penetrated, but it was enough to buy him time.

Turning around, the medium warrior was once again upon him, but he managed to block the first strike with his knife. The warrior took a step back and swung his sword once more, but this time there was a slight red gleam around it, as it moved faster and was far stronger. Jakes's attempt to block it was met with severe pain in his wrist as the knife flew out of his hand.

At the very same time, he felt a distinct sense of danger from behind him. No... it was not the feeling of danger, but that of sure death. Time seemed to get slower, as Jakes's senses were stimulated like never before. He saw, no, felt the battlefield. The axe wielder had gotten up once more, bleeding from his eye, but had managed to pick up his axe ready to attack again.

The medium warrior was already upon him once more, raising his sword for another strike. Even more importantly, was that behind him... an arrow was flying for his head. For the first time ever, he completely embraced the feeling of these new, unfamiliar senses. But even more so than that, he completely and unquestionably followed exactly what his instinct told him to do. Something had been unlocked, and he more than willingly accepted it.

He swayed slightly to the side, raising his left hand behind his back as he caught the arrow. The same motion easily dodging the overhead blow from the medium warrior as he slammed the arrow into the man's hand, making him yell out in pain as he dropped the sword. The axe wielding warrior behind him once more tried to strike him, but he dodged the blow by ducking beneath it as if he had eyes behind his back. In the same motion, he caught the falling sword that the medium warrior had dropped earlier.

In a swift, fluid motion, he smashed the sword into the axe warriors' kneecap, making him buckle over as he screamed. Instead of trying to finish him off, Jake went for the medium warrior with the intent to finish off the now disarmed man. Jake ran towards him and cut him once across his arms as he raised them to try and block, with the second blow slicing his neck open, spraying blood all around him, also drenching Jake from head to toe.

Another arrow flew his way, but Jake merely swayed slightly, making it miss him, as he once more ran for the axe wielding heavy warrior who was trying to pick up his axe once more. Jake, however, did not give him time to do so, as he, in full sprint, kicked him in the head. Before the disorientated warrior could recollect himself, Jake lifted the sword and stabbed it downwards into the skull of the kneeling man. With his entire weight behind the blow, the sword still ended up only penetrating a few centimeters, but it was more than enough to pierce deep into the brain, killing him instantly.

However, the sword was stuck, making Jake take out two arrows from his quiver, wielding one in both hands as he dodged another arrow shot by the enemy archer. The attacking Archer was clearly flustered, and fear was evident in his eyes as the blood-covered Jake charged him. He had been hiding in some bushes off to the side but pinpointing him from the direction of where the arrow came from was simplicity itself.

The archer threw his bow to the ground, realizing that he had no time to fire another arrow, and drew his knife. An excellent choice as Jake had found his archery very lacking. Clearly a novice before the system, and he had a feeling the man wasn't that much better with a melee weapon either.

Jake smirked as he easily dodged the first swipe of the knife as he leaned in and stabbed an arrow into the archer's knife wielding arm. To the man's credit, he did not let go of his knife, but it helped him little as another arrow was stabbed into his stomach. Dropping his knife from the shock of that one.

He tried fighting back, but Jake easily took out another arrow from his quiver and smashed it into the archer's chest, followed by another, and then another. The poor man only able to flail his arms as he attempted in vain to ward them off.

Nine arrows later, and the man finally stopped struggling as his last breath left him, now with a total of 12 arrows sticking out of his corpse. Jake got up and looked towards the

sky, a small smile still on his lips. The sense of danger gone, his instinct to kill quiet. He had survived.

The others back in the camp were now more than awake and ran towards him; all of them clearly still flustered. The moment they saw the scene, they were instantly horrified by the sight. A man lying face down in a pool of blood, right beside another man still in a kneeling position, blood dripping from his eye with a sword sticking out of the top of his skull. The picture only made all the more horrifying by a smiling Jake, completely covered in blood, standing over another corpse with a dozen arrows sticking out of it.

## **“What... what happened? Chapter 9: Blood**

Jake felt good. Incredibly good, in fact. The sensations that come from facing down certain death and coming out on top was wonderful. He didn't notice the weird look Jacob was giving him as he just enjoyed how he felt. He didn't take notice that the other people in his group had made their way over either, though some of them quickly turned right back around when they saw the scene.

Among the new arrivals, Caroline looked at Jake with a mix of concern and fear.

“Are you hurt? There is so much blood...” she asked in a quiet voice. She felt slightly sick, looking at the frightening image of Jake standing beside a man full of arrows, the blood gleaming as it reflected the moonlight.

“I’m good. None of it is mine,” Jake answered casually with a light smile. He was hoping to finish up any potential conversations so he could move on to more important things. He had gotten several system notifications that he was more than eager to get to.

“Oh... okay,” she answered tentatively.

Caroline didn’t seem inclined to ask any more questions, while Jacob looked like he had something to say, but he chose not to. Jake gladly took the opportunity to extricate himself when no one else spoke up.

“I’m gonna go sit down and check my status messages. There are no more enemies as far as I can tell, so relax everyone,” Jake said, considering if he should tell them they could go back to sleep. He decided not to, as he had serious doubts anyone felt like sleeping right now. He sure as hell didn’t, his spirit way too high.

Jake walked to the bonfire that was still burning bright as ever, sat down on the same log he had used as a lookout earlier in the night, and finally opened his notifications window to a slew of messages.

***\*You have slain [Human (G) -lvl 3 / Warrior (Medium) - lvl 7] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 478 TP earned\****

***\*You have slain [Human (G) -lvl 2 / Warrior (Heavy) - lvl 5] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 340 TP earned\****

***\*You have slain [Human (G) -lvl 2 / Archer - lvl 4] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 294 TP earned\****

***\*'DING!' Class: [Archer] has reached level 4 - Stat points allocated, +1 free point\****

***\*'DING!' Race: [Human (G)] has reached level 2 - Stat points allocated, +1 free point\****

***\*'DING!' Class: [Archer] has reached level 5 - Stat points allocated, +1 free point\****

He had won, not because of his stats, but purely due to how he fought. They were amateurs, Jake even doubting they used all their skills during the fight. Besides the medium warrior using that glowing sword, he didn't notice anything else... then again, they were all low level, and it wasn't like skills actually had any real visual prompt from what he had seen so far. In fact, he should instead maybe be surprised that the guy had a skill to make his sword glow like that, to begin with.

Looking at his gains from the fight, the stats and levels were nice, but the real gains came in the next few notifications. Though they were a bit different from any earlier ones.

***\*Bloodline Detected\****

***Processing...***

...

***Bloodline analyzed.***

***\*Bloodline Awakened\*: [Bloodline of the Primal Hunter (Bloodline Ability - Unique)] – Dormant power lies in the very essence of your being. A unique, innate ability awakened in the bloodline of the newly initiated human, Jake Thayne. Enhances innate instincts. Enhances the ability to perceive your surroundings. Enhances perception of danger. +5% to perception.***

A new skill had been unlocked, or was it an ability? He was clueless as to what the whole bloodline business was about. His family background was nothing extraordinary, as average as one can be, and yet he apparently possessed an innate ability tied to it.

Not that he was going to complain just because he was a bit confused. The effects of the ability were, in Jake's honest opinion, awesome. It also explained why he had these weird senses that none of the others seemed to have. More amazing was that the description even included his name. That was kind of cool in its own right... right?

What he gathered from his own experiences, along with the description of the ability, was that it had four effects. The first one was the enhancement of instincts. Without a doubt, this was the explanation behind his performance in combat and the at times supernatural reaction time he possessed. His ability to react was way beyond what his stats should allow him, and the reason why he at times felt like his body couldn't keep up with what he wanted it to do.



The second part of the ability was the one to perceive his surroundings. The 360 degrees perception he had experienced during the fight made him act as if he had eyes in his back. He could not explain at all how it worked; he just 'knew' where everything was.

Even now, it was still active. He 'felt' the bonfire's flickering flames and every particle of smoke that entered the air. He 'knew' of the log beneath him, how it had a small part of it inside that was hollow, and every single blade of grass around it. His understanding improved whenever he focused on it, but it was passively making him aware of roughly everything around himself, especially any movements.

It was all vague, however, and the range seemed only to be a few meters. He could not sense the others, as they were still at the corpses 10 or so meters away. He estimated the range to be perhaps five or six meters. Too low for scouting, but invaluable in combat.

Third on the list was the perception of danger. That part was rather self-explanatory, honestly. It was the prickling sensation he felt whenever something dangerous was heading his way, the feeling in his gut that something dangerous was lurking ahead.

That part alone was great, but what made this part of the ability incredibly strong was the synergy with the two other effects. His perception of the area around him allowed him to perceive the nature of the danger, and his enhanced instincts allowed him to make a split-second reaction.

The fourth and final part was a 5% stat bonus to perception. While certainly valuable, he saw it as rather inconsequential compared to the other effects. He didn't doubt it would prove more beneficial as he got more stats, and the bonus started adding up, though.

The entire skill seemed far stronger than anything else. Archer's Eye was also a perception-based skill, but compared to his Bloodline of the Primal Hunter, it was borderline useless for anything other than scouting.

Even with the ability itself being so awesome, it didn't come alone, bringing even more benefits.

***\*Title Earned\*: [Bloodline Patriarch] – Unlock a unique bloodline ability. The power found in the origin of your Records are yours, and yours alone to wield and pass down throughout the multiverse. May your bloodline prevail. +15 Vitality, +10% to Vitality.***

This one was... massive. In a few different ways.

The description of the title was quite something in itself. Especially compared to his only other title, which was just a matter-of-fact statement that he was now part of the multiverse and new to it. This one instead talked about something called Records. Whatever the hell that was.

Even the name of the title felt quite a bit more impactful. Bloodline Patriarch. It was indicating that he was the forefather of the bloodline and that it was his alone. Did this mean that the rest of his family didn't possess it too? Was he just the first one to unlock it? The thought of his family was even still alive briefly entered his mind, but he suppressed the thought. Now wasn't the time to get sentimental.

The description and stats granted by the title indicated the system's desire for him to survive and thereby allow the bloodline to live on... and oh boy the stats. A massive +15 vitality instantly making it his highest stat, only made better by another +10% straight on top.

Looking at his stats, they had gone through quite a development from the level-ups, ability, and title.

### **Status**

Name: Jake Thayne

Race: [Human (G) – lvl 2]

Class: [Archer – lvl 5]

Profession: N/A

Health Points (HP): 302/310

Mana Points (MP): 123/130

Stamina: 144/170

## Stats

Strength: 18

Agility: 19

Endurance: 17

Vitality: 31

Toughness: 12

Wisdom: 13

Intelligence: 13

Perception: 28

Willpower: 11

Free points: 3

His stats had seen a massive growth, which made him smile widely. He did frown a bit, however, as he began to question his vitality being at 31. According to his quick math, he should have 29 vitality before the +10%, having been at 13 the last time he checked. After that, he had gotten +1 point from his race leveling up and +15 from the title. With +10%, he should be at 31.9... and yet it only showed 31 and not 32. Did it only show whole numbers rounded down?

Jake had 3 free points, so instead of thinking further on it, he simply allocated a single point and saw it instantly jump from 31 to 33. *So, only whole numbers rounded down. Got it*, he thought, nodding internally.

As for his last two points, he decided to do another experiment. His stamina was at 144/170, being higher than his maximum was when he woke up earlier in the night. What Jake wanted to know was how increasing the maximum of a resource affected the current amount available.

He allocated a free point to endurance, leaving him with one left for later. He saw his stamina jump to 154/180, adding a static 10 points to both maximum and current. *Does this mean you could potentially have infinite stamina with enough repeated level-ups?* Jake wondered though he did admit the scenario of that happening was quite far-fetched.

For the last free point, he was unsure how to distribute it, so he just let it be for now. The last subject on his lengthy list of system messages was the result of reaching level 5 in his Archer class:

***\*Archer class skill available\****

Jake mentally acknowledged that he wanted to browse class skills, and a big list appeared before him. To his surprise, a huge number of weapon skills showed up in front of him. ***[Basic Two-Handed Weapons (Inferior)]***, ***[Basic Shield Technique (Inferior)]***, ***[Basic Unarmed (Inferior)]***, ***[Basic Throwing Weapons (Inferior)]***, and so on and so forth.

The only ones he did not seem to have were the magic-related ones. Quite honestly, Jake was not interested in any of them whatsoever. He was more than happy with his already once-upgraded ***[Advanced Archery (Common)]***, and he still had the ***[Basic One-Handed Weapons (Inferior)]***, in case things got dicey and he was forced into melee as he had in the last fight. This left him with only three options available at the bottom.

***[Basic Trapping (Inferior)] – The Archer is not limited to direct combat but can also use his tactical prowess to emerge victorious. Unlocks proficiency using basic traps and knowledge of how to construct them. Adds a minuscule bonus to stat effects on traps based on the nature of said trap.***

***[Basic Stealth (Inferior)] – The deadliest predator is the one not seen coming. Unlocks basic proficiency in the arts of stealth, allowing you to remain undetected more easily and blend into the environment. Adds a minuscule bonus to the effect of agility and perception when successfully remaining undetected.***

***[Basic Tracking (Inferior)] – The first objective of any hunt is to find your prey. Unlocks basic proficiency in tracking entities you are familiar with. Must be identifiable tracks available. Adds a minuscule bonus to the effect of perception when tracking.***

All of them were just more basic proficiency skills. Thinking back to the two melee ambushers earlier, both were over level 5 in their classes. He would not at all be surprised if they both had the basic stealth skill, considering how close he got to them, while they managed to remain hidden. Though the first warrior had a glowing weapon, so he must have gotten a skill to do that. Yeah, that made Jake a bit jealous. Good riddance, that lucky guy was dead.

He saw value in all of them, but he did not see himself setting up a large number of traps, especially not with his bloodline ability. He very much wanted the tracking skill, and he did consider taking it to track down where the three attackers came from.

But ultimately, he decided on **[Basic Stealth (Inferior)]**. He could imagine the synergy with his bloodline ability, allowing him to attack his foes before they would ever get a chance to strike back. The fact that it also scaled with both agility and perception only made it all the better.

The fight had made him realize how little he had accomplished since he got into the tutorial. They were all higher level than him, with the medium warrior being level 7 in his class, more than twice what he had been. He had already decided that he would need to go hunting.

He picked the skill and felt the same feeling as when he got his class the first time. This time far weaker, though. It gave him something he wasn't quite sure if he could call 'knowledge', but he still instinctively understood it. Maybe it was due to his bloodline ability, but he doubted it. Either way, he now knew how to sneak a bit better than before. It was small, subtle things, and far from a complete guide on becoming a master thief.

Closing all the menus, he felt very satisfied with himself. Perhaps a bit sad that getting a new skill was so anti-climactic. No ability to shoot laser beams or to shoot down the eight suns with eight arrows was gained.

Jake finally got up from the log and stretched his back. The smell of iron instantly reminding him that he was still covered in blood. Or more accurately, his cloak and face were covered. He took off his cloak, seeing that his shirt and pants underneath were spared from the torrent of blood. Quickly he sprinted down to the small river nearby, cleansed his face, and sprinted back up to the camp once more, the entire trip taking less than a minute.

As he felt refreshed, he also began to feel oddly naked. He immediately realized that he had no weapons on him whatsoever. His knife had been disarmed, and his bow had been hacked into. He saw that the others were still over at the corpses, and Jake started walking over. He first got to the dead archer and picked up the bow he had dropped, seeing it identical to his old one. The only difference being that this one was undamaged.

While picking up the bow, he couldn't help looking at the dead archer, arrows still sticking out of him, though the blood had long stopped seeping out. The man's eyes were still wide open, showing visible horror. Jake looked at him as he stopped. He looked over at the other corpses, the man with a sword still stuck in his skull, and the other lying in a pool of his own blood.

At the same time, he saw the looks everyone gave him. It wasn't the same look of the blame for causing Joanna's injuries like before. It was one of fear. That is when it struck him, far later than it should have.

The attackers were humans. He had just murdered three human beings.



” Jacob stammered, clearly disturbed by the carnage. His mind in turmoil as he looked at Jake in horror.

A smiling Jake turned to him, still savoring the euphoric feeling he was currently experiencing, his smile growing even larger as he answered.

“I won.”

## Chapter 10: Reflection & frustration

Murder. Killing. Homicide.

The act of taking another human's life has many names in society. No matter the name assigned, it is a crime. It is immoral. And even if morals were completely ignored, the act of removing another member from society is, in most cases, a detriment to said society. The act of ending another life is innately abhorrent to humans, and even if the act was one hundred percent justified, it will often leave the killer traumatized by the experience.

In many comics, whenever a hero kills a villain is the moment he becomes a villain himself. It is seen as a turning point for the character - his or her fall to the dark side.

These were just some of the thoughts bouncing around in Jake's head as he was sitting on the grass, staring down at the ground, reflecting on his feelings of what had transpired that night.

He had killed not just one, but three people. Logically, he knew that it was self-defense. They had tried to kill him, so he killed them instead. It was justified, and in many countries, could even be considered legal. Heck, it could even be argued that he was in a situation comparable to a war zone, making the laws of war apply, in which case he had simply killed enemy combatants.

Even if he got over the fact that he had killed them, the way he had done so couldn't be ignored, though. He did not think of the ferocity of his actions

during the fight, but as he saw the corpses, it couldn't be clearer how brutal he had been. Especially with the archer... he had pinned him down and simply kept stabbing him over and over with arrows until he finally stopped moving. It was a textbook example of excessive force.

The acts of brutality could perhaps be explained by Jake's inexperience in combat, the adrenaline pumping through him as he fought, and his enhanced instincts taking charge, but what he could not explain away was how he felt while doing it... and after. He felt nothing when he killed them. It was like he was just checking off three items on a list as he ended their lives one by one.

After the fighting, the only thing he felt was euphoric. He had never felt better. More alive. The relief, feeling of superiority, and overpowering sensation of 'winning' was just too intense, too addicting. If the feeling was due to his enhanced instincts as he suspected... that meant his base instinct, him at the very core of his being, enjoyed killing.

*No, that's wrong*, he corrected himself. He had not felt any pleasure from killing the badgers, and he did not feel any particularly strong emotions after the big boar either. He only felt contentment after that. He did not enjoy the simple act of killing... he enjoyed the hunt. The challenge of the kill. He enjoyed the feeling of winning over his foe.

Jake had never been the confrontational or aggressive type; in fact, he strived to avoid conflict whenever possible. But he enjoyed a challenge. He enjoyed pushing himself to his limits and try to improve. To throw his entire being into something and strive for the top. It was why he had managed to get so good at archery. It was how he had managed to graduate as one of the best in his class. Not because he was particularly smart, he just liked to see the number on his test score go up, so he slaved away to make it happen.

He remembered one of his professors describing him as 'driven' and 'ambitious'. Jake wasn't sure if he agreed on either of those, but he did enjoy picking hard fights and coming out on top. What people misunderstood, though, was that it wasn't because of the reward from the challenge. He did it for the challenge itself. The outcome wasn't necessarily relevant.

That is how he felt about the fight that had ultimately resulted in the death of three human beings too. He felt like the outcome, their deaths, was ultimately irrelevant. It was the process of the fight that was his goal and not the death of the three of them. It was just the unavoidable result of a life and death battle.

Which was the core root of his problem. After reflecting on his emotions and boiling everything down, he came to the realization that he just didn't care much. Be they human or beast; in the end, they were just challenges to overcome. The only feeling of remorse or regret he ever felt so far in this tutorial was when Joanna got hurt.

Even then, Jake knew that he thought it was her own fault more so than his. A part of him hated feeling that, but when he thought the scenario over, he just couldn't find anyone else to blame but her.

She could not have tripped, to begin with. As a caster, she could have at least tried to use the Mana Barrier that they already established all casters had. Freezing up right after tripping sure hadn't helped her chances, either. If she hadn't, rolling out of the way of the charge would have been more than possible.

If all those failed, she could at least have managed to avoid getting a limb trampled off so they could fix it up with a potion like the other leg. In other words, if it had been him in her position during the fight, he wouldn't have ended up losing a leg.

But it happened, and she was now just a burden. He and everyone else in the group were aware of it, but no one truly wanted to voice it out. Leaving her behind was no different than leaving her to die. None of them wanted that on their conscience, and no one wanted to leave a colleague and a friend behind. Not even Jake, despite his annoyance at her, but at the same time, he couldn't stay like this forever.

He finally realized he did not fit in with the group, likely a bit late in retrospect. They were corporate workers, civilians in every sense of the word. The only fighting any of them had ever participated in was sports like boxing. He doubted any one of their entire group had ever even been in a bar-fight or something similar except for one person.

Bertram did stand out. He was decisive and strong even before the tutorial. He handled his shield and sword well, and he didn't hesitate when attacking. The man had the eyes and demeanor of a fighter and was, without a doubt, the strongest person in the group except for Jake, but he was tethered to Jacob. Comparing their ragtag group of office workers to the ones he had killed was night and day.

While still amateurs with their weapons, the ambushers that attacked him were far from new to fighting. They had a plan of attack, a damn good one in his opinion, and they had the guts to fight. They had the courage to take on the lookout of a group of 10 with only three people. Their hope had likely been to kill him quickly before he even had time to wake up the others. Then proceed to wipe out their entire camp before they could muster a counterattack.

Their levels also spoke to their proficiency. They had either dared to hunt down beasts or other humans to get their level, meaning they had fought most of the time since entering the tutorial. They were just unlucky to encounter Jake as the lookout. If it had been anyone else, the chances are that the majority of their group would be dead now.

Comparing those three to his own party just felt sad. They would likely have lost several people, if not been wiped out completely, facing that big boar if Jake had not been there. Maybe they would even have suffered injuries from the first group of badgers. They were weak, not just in fighting strength but also resolve.

He realized that this line of thought was a spiraling black hole of negativity, but he had to acknowledge it. If his instinct, his natural disposition, was to enjoy hunting and overcoming challenges, then he could only see himself driven completely mad by suppressing those desires.

He finally looked up from the grass, having found a semblance of resolve. He would hunt, and he would grow stronger.

The others were still talking over at the two warriors' corpses, and Jake could hear their discussions, which seemed to mainly revolve around who the attackers were, where they came from, and if there were more of them. Jake

looked at them. They were his friends, his colleagues, and looking at Caroline, his crush. He wanted them to live, from the bottom of his heart.

In order to make that happen, he needed power. He had won today, but would he win tomorrow? What if there had been more attackers? What if they had been higher level, or he had made a mistake? His bloodline ability was far from flawless. It did not grant him omniscience, but merely faster and more appropriate reactions during combat.

Take the medium warriors attack where his blade was coated in the red gleam. His instinct had no warning of it, and he ended up disarmed and nearly dead. The strike hadn't been a danger to him directly as it hadn't aimed at his body, only his knife. It was an attack to disarm him, and his natural instincts couldn't recognize a complex attack like that. He also needed to think more while fighting and merge instinct and logic.

With his resolve steeled, he walked over to the rest of the group, save for Lina, who was still beside Joanna.

"Jake... can you tell us what happened?" Jacob asked as he saw him walking over. Everyone seemed to avoid looking at the corpses, which was perfectly understandable. It was equally understandable that they avoided looking at the killer too.



“Yeah... I was keeping watch when I heard-”

He explained exactly what had happened, and he saw the concern on Jacob’s face as he described the ambush. The concern only seemed to grow into confusion as he described how he had turned the situation around.

“But... why would they attack us without reason?” Caroline asked.

“Experience, equipment, and tutorial points,” Jake answered promptly. He then went on to explain the points he had gotten along with the levels. He purposefully left out the whole bloodline thing, though. The fact that one of the assailants had been level 7 came as a big shock to them, as the strongest of them, Bertram, was still only level 2 in his class after the boar kill.

“But to just murder someone...” Caroline mumbled as she instantly gave Jake a mixed look.

"It was self-defense Caroline, he... we have no choice but to defend ourselves," Jacob said, coming to Jake's defense. "He may have saved us all. Please don't blame him for that. We may need to reconsider our strategy for-"

As the others kept talking, mainly filled with concern for the future, Jake went over and picked up the knife he had dropped when the medium warrior attacked him with glowy-weapon skill. As he picked it up, he also finally solved the mystery of what had been thrown at him when they first jumped him.

He saw a dead badger, with the arrow he had shot stuck in it. It was dead before he even hit it, with what looked like a long sword-cut across its stomach, something he presumed was the cause of its death, to begin with. He doubted he would get tricked like that again with his new Sphere of Perception, which is the name he settled on for his new spherical vision.

Tuning back into the ongoing conversation of his colleagues, he wasn't exactly pleased. The group discussion seemed to steer towards finding a safe place to hide and wait the tutorial out, only fighting when absolutely necessary or to get food. As Jake listened, he started getting more and more pissed off. Was he really the only one who had any grasp of the situation they were in? He finally snapped as he started speaking in a voice far louder than any one of them was used to. Using enough curse words that HR would need to be called.

“Wake the fuck up people! This entire fucking tutorial is focused on killing, oh, and it is called a bloody TUTORIAL! As in TRAINING! What do you people think it’s a tutorial for? A nice corporate office job? Or, I don’t know, maybe somewhere even more fucked up than this place? What do you guys think is more probable? The world has changed, and you all need to get your asses moving and adapt if you want to survive.”

Jake got winded towards the end, everyone just staring at him with wide eyes. He was perfectly aware that the outburst was entirely out of character. He just had enough. He had resolved himself that he wanted them to live, that he wanted them to make it through this tutorial in one piece, and they wanted to hide in a hole in the ground for over two months?

A single person who had fought just a little during the tutorial would be able to wipe them out easily in just a few days if they didn’t gain any strength. A random beast could come upon them and kill them too. Jake did not like to have the thought, but he was confident that the current him could take down all of them single-handedly in an ambush, just picking them off one by one with arrows from a distance.

“What do you suggest we do?” Bertram stepped up and asked. Bertram had been the bravest and most competent by far in the group, not including Jake.

He had walked in front, and he had even selected a class during the introduction that allowed him to defend others. The tone in his voice was not one of anger or confrontation but genuine.

“I suggest you do whatever you need to level up and survive this shit. Even if you don’t want to fight other people, you at least need the strength to defend yourself when they wanna fight you. In other words, hunt beasts. Get experience, get power, do what the system wants you to,” Jake finished.

“I agree with Jake,” Casper said as he also joined the conversation. “We need to learn how to fend for ourselves. What if Jake had not been on watch, but someone else? What if they had come a couple of hours earlier? Would you be confident in fighting three people at once who were all above you in level, Dennis?”

Dennis shook his head, clear that he would likely be a corpse on the ground right now had the watch plan been different.

Jake hoped that his outburst could be a wake-up call for all of them. He didn’t want to just leave them and go be on his own. He was afraid of the consequences of that. They couldn’t survive on their own as they were now.

He gave them space to think it over as he excused himself from the group and went to check the corpses, starting with the two dead warriors. He knelt on the ground and started rummaging through their satchels. If he and his colleagues had gotten six potions at the tutorial's start, so had these people. He quickly took the satchels off the corpses and looked inside. Both had quite the number of potions in them, a mix of stamina, health, and mana.

Seeing mana potions, it confirmed that these three had either been a part of a team with casters or healers who died, or they had killed casters or priests. He personally leaned towards the latter. There was a total of fourteen health, eight stamina, and five mana potions, also counting the contents of the dead archer's satchel.

He turned to the group once more, who had simply stared at him as he looted. It was still dark, but the fire from make-shift torches they had brought over made the scene well-lit. The problem was that the forest was still too dark to leave. They would have to wait for morning before they could do anything.

"For now, try and get some more rest. It is still my turn to sit lookout, so I will. Get some energy. Tomorrow we hunt," Jake said, sitting down on his log once more. Doubting any of them would get even a wink of sleep.