

## The Primal 10

### 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.