

Hunter 103

Chapter 103: Pigs for slaughter

Jake had long gotten used to not really having to eat or drink anything. Whatever he chugged down here and there appeared to be enough to keep him going. He could barely remember the feeling of hunger or thirst anymore.

However, what he had kept doing was breathing. It just felt far too natural to do. All living beings he had seen did it. Yet, he had now been submerged underwater for nearly an entire day, and he hadn't even thought about having to breathe before mere moments ago.

Breathing still had to have some kind of benefit. Why else would anyone and everything do it? He doubted all the beasts had the same lingering instinct as he and other humans from before the system did.

Well... not having to breathe is nice, I guess, he thought as he decided to pop his head up above the surface of the lake.

As his head got above the water, he saw the sunlight hit the shimmering water of the lake, as he peeked towards the shores. He saw nothing.

It appeared the boars weren't having a drinking-session right now. Jake had kind of hoped for them to be there as the poison made its way to the upper echelons of the lake to observe its effect. He would have to wait a bit for that, though.

Jake decided to spend the time productively as he kept an eye on the entrance to the gorge. He had gotten many still lingering inspirations concerning the use of mana, and he decided to test out a bit of it now.

Earth mana had a weirdly solid feel to it, and it had inspired him to try if he could use it to enhance his own use of mana.

His first test was to place both his palms on the water's surface as he began channeling mana to them and tried to push them downwards. He felt himself getting lifted a little as his hands sunk into the water.

Despite the failure, he was elated as his theory had been proven immediately right. Placing his palms on the water once more, he continued as he tried lifting himself out of the water once more, using the water as support.

With zeal, he continued his practice for half an hour until he finally managed to stretch out his arms, lifting his entire upper body out of the water, with the only support being his hands on the water.

The next step was to extend the same concept to other parts of his body. It took him only another hour or so until he stood triumphant on top of the water. Finally, he had realized a long-held dream since childhood. Following in the footsteps of a certain orange-dressed ninja, he could now channel his energy to stand on water.

He tried taking a few steps back and forth and found great success. Even going into a light jog, he managed to keep himself from falling through. His next test was to take out his bow as he tried firing an arrow - great success once more as he pulled back the string.

Next, he tried the ultimate test. Taking an arrow this time, he began channeling Infused Powershot, and... he plopped straight down into the lake. He would have to work a bit more on that one.

An opportunity he didn't get quite yet as he heard the sound of trotters hitting the ground in the distance.

Stopping his antics, he pulled up his hood and activated the camouflage feature. He kept himself submerged with only the top of his head sticking out.

He had already established that the eyesight of the boars sucked. By blending in with the colors of the lake, he had a feeling that he could remain undetected, especially with the mana-rich water around him shrouding him further.

Being down in the water once more, he could also vividly feel the poison all around him. The entire lake had been well and truly contaminated as all the toxins had had time to rise to the surface. Now, for the most crucial part. Would the big piggies notice?

Watching them get closer, he remained unmoving as he crossed his fingers. Like the last time he saw them, they all spread out in a huge semi-circle as they surrounded the lake - something they had clearly done many times before.

Jake saw the first boar approach the water, the big boss Horde Leader. His heart pumped with a mix of anxiety and anticipation as he saw it lower its snout. It briefly froze before it began drinking, the snout moving up and down as it sniffed the water.

Don't you fucking dare... he thought as the damn thing hesitated. However, its neighbor boar didn't have the same caution as it just slumped its head into the water and began drinking.

The big boss looked over at its comrade and seemed to do what Jake interpreted as a shrug as it too began drinking.

None of the others hesitated either as they all began draining the lake. Jake reveled as he started feeling the poison enter them through his Sense of the Malefic Viper.

The beasts hadn't shown the slightest ability to sense mana so far, besides from earth mana. And even then, he wasn't sure if they could really 'feel' it or how exactly they manipulated it. All he knew was that the poison was currently entering their bodies, and they all seemed none the wiser.

Minutes passed as they all kept gulping down the Contaminated Soilwater. The Horde Leader appeared to be the sharpest of the bunch, but even it hadn't noticed anything yet, perhaps because it would take quite a bit more poison to affect it compared to the others.

Each of the boars had to have consumed tens if not hundreds of liters. It was honestly amazing how the lake didn't appear to shrink at all. Jake hadn't seen any signs of new water, so he wrote it off as dungeon-fuckery.

His stray thought was interrupted by one of the boars that had now stopped drinking. It backed away from the pool and... stumbled over and bumped into the boar beside it.

The one that got knocked only swayed a little, but it did raise its head and made an angry squeal at its companion. It, however, seemed to notice something was off as it had now stopped drinking too. It shook its head and took a few steps forward, falling into the lake.

This entire interaction caught the attention of all the other beasts, as they all abruptly stopped drinking. They all raised their heads and simultaneously noticed something was off.

They started all stumbling about as if drunk, hitting each other, with some of them falling into the lake.

Jake was a bit dumbfounded as he observed all this. The effects of the poison hadn't been what he expected... he had hoped for it to deal significant damage, maybe even slowly kill them. From what he could feel, they didn't appear to take any noticeable damage, however.

Instead, they were... blind?

A function of dark mana was to limit perception, and now it appeared these boars were infected by just that. Their already absolutely terrible perception hampered even more, directly to the point of absolute blindness.

Jake began swimming to the shore on the opposite side of where the boars had entered. There was a bit of an area now clear of beasts, one he quickly reached as he climbed up on shore. He did so carefully, as he kept watch of the pigs to see if they noticed him - something they clearly didn't.

Looking around, he saw the chaos he had caused. Several pigs were squealing and splashing around in the water, the others running around hitting each other in confusion, with the Horde Leader being unmoving, eyes closed.

He took out his bow and his quiver. He mentally smacked himself for not applying poison to his arrows, but then again, it would likely have been washed off down in the water.

Instead, he put a bit of his poisoned blood into the bottom of the quiver, making do with what he had and what he could apply most quickly. As he did so, he used Mark of the Ambitious Hunter on his first target.

Nocking the first arrow, he aimed at one of the boars smack in the middle of the mayhem. He channeled his Infused Powershot as he waited till he had a clear line of sight.

He released the arrow to the usual explosion of might. It didn't even take the arrow a few milliseconds to reach its target more than 150 meters away, easily breaking the sound barrier. Not that the expected sonic boom was heard. Another part of physics that was likely altered or broken by the system.

When the arrow met its target, it did exactly as Jake expected. It blew a substantial barrel-sized hole in the side of the boar, blasting it away. It smashed into several others, mainly on account of the different pieces of the beast flying all over the place.

Jake was prepared to dive into the lake after his shot, but the boars' response was... more chaos. Not a single one of them seemed to notice him at all but instead started panicking in a far more frenzied manner.

He could vaguely feel the amount of poison within each beast reducing by the second from where he stood. The problem for the creatures was that they had consumed too damn much of the water. Even if their body slowly cleansed it, Jake reckoned he would have hours before they were all back to normal.

All except for one boar that was currently curing itself far faster than the others. The Horde Leader. But even so, while it healed itself faster, it had also chucked down way more than any of the others. He had time.

Another arrow nocked, another Infused Powershot channeled, resulted in another dead boar. This repeated four more times before the boars finally seemed to catch on. Even with their reduced senses, the smell of blood had begun entering their snouts, making it clear that things were off.

Not that it helped them. In fact, it helped Jake more.

The earth rumbled as shards of stone began flying all around. Spikes of earth shot up, one of them even hitting the side of the Horde Leader, bringing it out of its state of concentration. It appeared to think it was under attack as it erected a dome of stone around it.

None of the other boars were smart enough to do that, though. They just attacked everything around them. And the only thing around them was their own allies.

Jake, at the same time, continued shooting. He had to make use of the time as efficiently as he could. Most boars died in a single shot through the heart or head, but some he had to shoot a few more times.

While the boars were durable, they were all currently in a weakened state. Their vital energies were entangled in a struggle against the poison in their bodies, weakening them all significantly. An unexpected blow from Jake's most powerful Infused Powershot proved fatal for them in that state.

The only boars he didn't bother with yet were the ones that had fallen into the lake. He counted fourteen in there right now, all struggling to get their bearings, some even being submerged. It didn't look like they knew how to swim very well. Jake was pretty sure normal non-earth bending boars knew how to swim.

If they had their bearings, they could likely just manipulate the earth to get them out. But delirious as they were, they could only act like a bunch of normal, non-swimmer boars tossed in a lake.

His quiver wasn't decreasing either despite the many arrows fired. He had long learned to conjure arrows while shooting through a small tether of mana attached to said quiver. It did drain mana, but his current limiter in combat endurance was, well... endurance, aka his stamina.

Luckily for him, his resources were pretty much topped off when he engaged in the fight. To be safe, he did consume a stamina potion the moment his stamina dipped a bit.

After firing his hundredth arrow, he had already killed more than 50 boars. He had felt the warm glow of levels more than a few times already. He didn't have time to distract himself, though, as he kept up his constant assault.

His arms and entire upper body were aching from the constant Infused Powershots, but at least his Windsoar Bow had yet to show any indications of being overloaded. If he had used his old bow, it would very likely already be broken by now due to the massive amounts of mana injected into it.

Soldiering through the pain, he managed to keep killing even if his speed dropped.

As he lifted his bow to fire the 205th Infused Powershot, his entire upper-arm started shaking as the skill fizzled out. His entire arm was in the state of both being numb and hurting at the same time. He tried to lift it, but while the mind was willing, the body found itself unable.

Looking out on the field, he saw only nine boars continuing to run around. Even now, they kept hitting the corpses of their fallen comrades and had all entered their enraged state. Something that actually appeared to help dispel the poison faster.

The dome hiding the Horde Leader still stood firm, and Jake could feel only remnants of the poison left in the big boss.

Any thoughts of somehow continuing his assault were stopped as he saw the dome begin cracking. Without hesitation, he jumped back into the churning lake.

The pigs that had fallen in earlier were still splashing about, though most of them had made it back to shore once more. Jake did all he could to avoid them as he dove downwards, using only his feet to propel himself as his arms rested.

He had glanced at his arm before he dove into the lake, and it didn't look good. It was covered in blood and was a mix of blue and red. To call what he had done overexertion would be the understatement of the century.

He had overexerted it and then kept going for another hundred shots. Even if only the first few were full-power shots, he had still used Infused Powershot after all.

Reaching the bottom of the lake once more, he made his way all the way over to the Crystalized Essence as it was found at the deepest point. The mana density around it was the strongest, making it the ideal place to recover.

He was betting on the Horde Leader not deciding to dive into the lake to investigate. More hoping, actually. If it did come, he was in for a tough and likely very awkward fight - a hunter with only his left hand versus a huge boar that couldn't swim.

Luckily it didn't come to that. Jake's Mark made him aware that the boar above he had placed it on had stopped moving. He felt movements in the water above, his intuition telling him that the boars were getting out of the water. Likely with the help of the Horde Leader.

Finally, he felt it leave and go into the gorge once more.

With a sigh of relief, Jake closed his eyes as he entered meditation. With the fighting done, he could finally take a look at the many notifications he had received due to the absolute slaughter that had happened above.