

Hunter 109

Chapter 109: Eclipse

Yeah... this could go better, Jake thought, as he barely managed to roll out of the way as a giant tree-spear was shot towards him.

He managed to dodge it with Shadow Vault, but more were coming. And not just trees. Several large boulders were also thrown after him, along with pretty much anything within hundreds of meters of the King.

Dodging and weaving in between the attacks, he managed not to get hit by a single one. A slight positive, but ultimately, he was only buying time - time that wasn't to his advantage.

The King of the Forest was clearly multitasking as he worked on clearing away the curse from the Nest Watcher and the energy from the Horde Leader as he attacked. Jake, on the other hand, was slowly running out of his resources. He had gotten back quite a bit of health from the potion, but both his stamina and mana were draining.

Limit Break had been active at 20% from the very first Infused Powershot. In reality, it had only been minutes, but he was already starting to feel it taking its toll. Deactivating the boost wasn't an option as he would enter a state of weakness - a shortcut to a quick death for sure.

His remaining tools were limited. He only had two weapons left - an old common-rarity bow and his Venomfang dagger. The bow could handle at most one Infused Powershot before breaking, with the blade obviously his most reliable weapon.

His last tool was the Corrupted Mooncore Shard. A plan for that was beginning to form in his mind as he observed the floating King.

Despite everything looking so bleak, Jake wasn't distraught in the least. He was shaking, not with fear, but excitement. At any moment, with the slightest mistake, he could die. Yet, he didn't feel it was impossible. He felt like it was a long shot. A very long shot, one he would gladly take.

He was quite confident in his aim, after all. This was what he lived and would gladly die for. Not that he planned on seeing his path end quite yet.

Jake knew he couldn't give the King too much time to heal the wounds caused by the Tusk and marble. He was currently circling as he dodged, slowly getting closer to the King floating above the crater he had created earlier.

He did also notice one other thing. The aim of the King was outright terrible. The only reason why he had to focus so much on dodging was the type of projectile used. The huge trees and boulders were just that: huge.

If it had been smaller spears and not freaking trees, he wouldn't even have to dodge. The aim of the King was obviously compromised from the curse that inflicted him. This was likely also the reason why he didn't shoot those ridiculously overpowered blasts of force.

Jake made use of that by running in more unpredictable patterns. Huge clouds of dust were kicked up with every attack, and Jake was more than happy to hide within them and use them as cover as he got closer.

At the same time, he took one of the arrows out of his quiver and held it in his hand. As he was avoiding being squashed, he began channeling dark mana into it.

By the time he was halfway there, the King was out of things to throw at him. So he began throwing words instead.

“What do you hope to accomplish? Do you believe you can win? Truly just an unwise beast.”

Jake ignored it as he snickered. Keep talking, you childish arrogant fuck.

The King didn't do anything as Jake got closer, allowing the hunter to get out his one remaining bow as he nocked the arrow infused with dark mana. With a rapidly charged Infused Powershot, he fired it upwards at the floating creature. The bow breaking and turning into splinters in the process.

The King of the Forest managed to raise his hand and block the arrow with his ivory claws. The arrow harmlessly hit his body but then exploded in a cloud of dark mana. Dark mana that didn't hurt the King at all. What it did do was to obscure his already severely weakened senses.

The moment the arrow exploded, Jake jumped upwards using Badger Jump. However, he wasn't done yet, as he also used Shadow Vault to get even higher.

He put both hands behind him from up there as he released two blasts of mana from his gloves, propelling him downwards once more, sending him descending down towards the King.

Simultaneously, the King flew upwards to escape the cloud of dark mana that Jake had made. Still unaware, he flew straight up into the rapidly descending Jake, who had already taken out his Venomfang.

With both hands on the handle, he smashed the knife down. Descending Dark Fang with its full power on display.

He failed to penetrate the King's hard skull, the crown of thorns blocking some of the blow, but he did succeed in bringing the creature down with him. Like two meteors, they smashed into the crater below, creating two smaller holes within.

Jake quickly got up once more, his scales absorbing much of the damage from the accelerated fall. Flipping his dagger to a backhanded grip, he charged the King and swung for the side of the creature's head.

The King had been brought down by the blast but hadn't fallen. The pressure from the impact had, however, forced him down on one knee. The illustrious King of the Forest made to kneel before a human far weaker than himself.

Still shaken, the King didn't react as a dagger smashed into his face. It hit the mask and didn't even leave a mark, making Jake swiftly switch target. Next, the King felt a stab his chest, and then a second and a third – directly into the wound left by the Tusk earlier.

None of them managed to do much, but they did worsen the wound. Besides, all Jake needed was to inflict his poison. At the same time, he was holding a small fingernail-sized object in his other hand - Touch of the Malefic Viper infusing it with toxic energy.

The King finally managed to get his bearings. And he was furious. His entire body started burning with intense energy. His hand shot up, far faster than Jake could in any way react to, the ivory claw glowing with golden light. The claws aimed directly at the hunter right in front of him.

Jake saw the blurred movement as his sense of danger exploded. He barely managed to register the claw flying towards his chest, as if it aimed to rip his body into several pieces. Just as it was about to touch his chest, it slowed down. Everything slowed down.

Moment of the Primal Hunter

The hunter quickly ducked under the hand that was suspended in the air as it slowly moved upwards, the golden light it gave off amplified by the slowdown. Even more ridiculous was that the claw was still visibly moving, albeit very slowly.

Jake barely registered this as he made his move. He opened his hand as he pushed forth the small shard in his hand, the one he had been infusing - The Corrupted Mooncore Shard.

[Corrupted Mooncore Shard (Epic)] – The shard of a Mooncore, corrupted by an immense amount of toxicity. It is unstable by nature and will not last more than a few months in its current state. Contains highly concentrated volatile energy as the energies clash within. The mana of the moon and the foreign mana in a constant cycle of mutual destruction.

The description he remembered from before had led him to this gamble. Within it, the energies were in equilibrium. But no more. Touch of the Malefic Viper had broken the balance, and now it was but a ticking time bomb.

As he pushed it towards the King, he gave it a final injection with Touch of the Malefic Viper on full display. He felt it crack as it lost contact with the hand pushing it forward. Making its way into the hole left by the Tusk of the Horde Leader.

Many more small cracks slowly spread across the shard as it very slowly floated forward.

At the same time, Jake summoned the Bulwark of the Horde Leader and began channeling mana into it. Something he barely managed as time resumed.

An explosion sounded out, but not from the shard. A golden cone-shaped blast was released from the claw as five deep scars were cut across the tutorial's entire inner zone, leveling the mountain where Lucenti Plains had once been as well as everything in the way.

From the Kings perspective, all he saw was his golden claw about to reap of the life of the human in front of him, as suddenly the figure disappeared. A movement faster than the King could ever imagine the weak human being capable of, his position had suddenly shifted to standing slightly to the right of the claw, now holding a shield in front of him.

The King of the Forest was about to attack again as he felt it. A familiar kind of mana that he hoped to never encounter again. A weird sort of mystical light element that the hateful Great White Stag had used.

As a D-rank entity, he had cared little for the Beast Lords. They were all weak and beneath him - all except for the stag. It was the kind of being that dealt in the realm of mysticism - in types of magic far more complicated than any the King ever dabbled in himself.

Able to perform feats far above his own. Able to use the power of concepts he couldn't comprehend. Of all the Beast Lords, the Great White Stag was the only one he had ever felt a tinge of fear towards. And now he felt that mana again. But it was different. Corrupted.

These were the only thoughts he had time to make before a second explosion sounded out before the first even had time to stop echoing out. Yet it wasn't a big bang or a great fireball. It was... subtle.

For but a moment, light died. The world turned monochrome, and the artificial sun above was covered by a fractured moon, as the sky darkened. Like night had descended, the eclipsed sun was utterly suppressed.

Countless stars all floated around the black rotting moon. A moon that was shattered and broken leaking out copious amounts of dark green energy. It had lost all its splendor and now carried only the feeling of corruption and decay – an omen of death incarnate.

And then the explosion came. A storm of light and darkness consuming each other as well as the world around it. Like the moon itself had exploded on the ground, a spherical explosion was released. The sphere expanded tens of meters each second and grew in concert with the massive shockwave it released.

The two living beings in the midst of it all, taking the brunt of it.

The first, a hunter, was pushed back by a wave of force produced. Covered behind a shield of rock, every single part of his body coated in dark green scales. He flew back nearly a kilometer until he found himself embedded in a wall for the umpteenth time that day. More bones were broken than not, more organs ruptured than whole.

The second, a creature crowned King of the Forest. A being caught in the epicenter, as the source of the explosion originated from the hole within his very own body.

Like a chemical reaction, the fallout from the two energies mixing was more than just the sum of their parts. It was the meeting of two opposing concepts, two fundamental laws of the universe seeking to destroy one another. And the moment that cycle of destruction broke down, and all that energy was what hit the King of the Forest.

Jake was observing it all as the energy didn't subside for several seconds, even after he was knocked away. His entire body was broken and bloody, and he could only see the happenings with his one remaining eye. The other one had been scorched out of his skull from the explosion as a wayward ray of light hit him.

The shield he had used to protect himself was utterly broken and had already crumbled to dust after being infected with the chaotic mana. A rare shield from the final dungeon boss, broken. Without it, Jake didn't doubt for a moment that he would be dead. Despite his dissatisfaction with getting it... it had saved his life.

He also knew that the Scales of the Malefic Viper appeared to be the bane of both types of energy released. The dark toxic mana was fundamentally aligned to himself as he was its source, while the light mana was particularly weak against his scales. It had allowed him to survive, even if the explosion itself had left him utterly broken.

Looking inward, he could feel his bones being cracked. Yet he still stood as he didn't dare to deactivate his Limit Break quite yet. His stamina was at a healthier level than he actually anticipated, and he soon found the source. The very environment he now found himself in nurtured him through Palate of the Malefic Viper. The explosion had left something akin to radioactive fallout.

On the other hand, both his mana and health were critically low, though mana was regenerating fast. He had poured all his mana into the shard and then the shield. He had been trying to both do as much damage as possible and then survive it afterward. His health was low due to him, of course, taking a lot of damage.

As Jake got done checking his own condition, the darkness dispersed as the artificial sun's light was allowed to shine down once more. Albeit far more muted than before.

The valley that had already turned into a crater was now even worse off. Long marks of the golden claw were still visible, though vastly overshadowed by the massive hole left by the Mooncore Shard.

Everything was colored in dark green veins that appeared to pulse with toxic energy. It wasn't only in the valley; this could be seen everywhere. Even the mountains off in the distance were now even more broken and covered in dark energy.

Jake, with unsteady steps, walked towards the epicenter of the explosion. He couldn't relax yet. Despite the huge explosion with the King of the Forest in the center, he had yet to receive any notifications. But he refused to believe that the creature had come out of it unscathed.

Getting closer, he finally saw the King. Lying face-up on the black ground. Unmoving. The bark covering his body was as black and rotten as the ground around him, with blood leaking through the cracked natural armor. The left arm was nowhere to be found, only a stump at the shoulder.

The dark mana from the curse, now mixed with the toxic dark mana of the Mooncore, still lingered on the body. Dark smoke came out of every crack in the armor along with the blood - the golden veins left by the power from the Tusk now pulsed with dark green energy.

Jake was amazed the body was even that whole. An explosion he had only been hit by slightly had quite literally exploded within the body of the one lying in front of him - the blast from the Mooncore more potent than anything he could have ever imagined.

Taking out his dagger, he kept walking towards the fallen King, his body slowly being nurtured by the contaminated environment around him. The mask-like face of the King was now the only thing completely undamaged by the explosion. The two holes that marked the eyes empty. Jake didn't hesitate as he brought down the dagger towards the heart of the creature.

Just as the dagger was about to hit, a faint light flickered forth in the holes of the mask, and an ivory claw, now covered in dark veins, flew up and blocked. His danger sense warned him as he endured a blast of force, sending Jake flying back.

Landing on his feet, Jake slid back a bit and tried to stabilize himself as he looked at the now rising figure that was the King of the Forest. Black smoke emanating from the broken body.

The fight wasn't over yet.