

Hunter 207

Chapter 207: Enhanced Splitting Arrow

The three remaining monkeys looked as their comrade was blasted away in shock, but it only made them more aggressive than before.

With one down, he turned his attention to the Crusher. It came at him with tails swinging and arms flailing, now even more berserk than before. It was pretty strong but not very fast, and Jake easily evaded its simple movements as he took out his melee weapons.

In a fluid motion, he ran his palms over both, drawing blood and coating them in Blood of the Malefic Viper. Venomfang felt oddly frail in his hand as he held it, and he knew the weapon would soon be unable to keep up with his progress... and if he was honest, he had a feeling it would soon break anyway, him growing stronger or not. The weapon had been through a lot, and he would prefer for it not to break entirely.

But for this hunt you'll be just fine, old buddy.

He blocked the clawed hand of the Crusher as he felt the weight on the blade. To Jake, it felt like the beast before him weighed tons, yet when it jumped on the trees or swung from a branch, the wood didn't even budge, showing there indeed was some magic going on there.

Being this close, he also noticed what appeared to be a passive aura of sorts around the monkey, weighing him down even further. Even the regular D-ranks in the background had this aura active.

Angling himself a bit, Jake made sure to do so the monkey releasing blasts couldn't get a good shot as he landed small cuts on the body of the Crusher. Slowly the scimitar began glowing red, and Jake felt the curse within spin to life as he felt its hunger permeate his body – and luckily for it, today it would be sated.

With every landed cut, a small stream of red energy entered the blade and Jake himself, restoring a few health points to him while draining it from the Crusher. Simultaneously, the poison quickly accumulated in its system, and the monkey soon noticed that something was very wrong.

It didn't know it yet, but it was practically already dead. The two other D-grade monkeys in the background tried to help as they also entered melee and began swinging their tails and hands. One of them even tried to grab and hold him down while increasing its own weight, but Jake was faster than all of them. While the Crusher had more pure strength than him, he had more than the regular ones.

All the E-grades attempted to throw more of their damn feces here and there, but it was difficult for them with Jake surrounded by the three D-grades.

Jake had to admit that the pressure building up from the three weight-increasing auras was beginning to get cumbersome as he moved to finish one of the beasts off. He laid eyes on all three of them and used Gaze of the Apex Hunter, making all of them freeze up as his scimitar was coated in a mix of arcane mana and the energy of the curse.

The blade extended as he swept it horizontally through the neck of the closest monkey, sending its head flying into the air.

You have slain [Tri-Lighttail Monkey – lvl 103] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

A moment after the head left its neck, the two surviving monkeys became able to move again, and their fury had spiked even more than before.

But it was all for naught. The Crusher was already sluggish from all the poison, and the other regular one wasn't doing that much better itself, having taken a few solid stabs from Venomfang already.

Perhaps realizing they were both screwed, they held nothing back. It was as if the air shimmered, and Jake felt like he had just been thrown deep underwater as he felt the pressure mount on him, and he was forced down to the ground with the two monkeys in tow. Their two auras overlapped as they tried to crush him, and Jake even became unable to avoid the attacks of the shit-slingers.

Without hesitation, he erected a barrier of mana around himself – courtesy of many hours of practice with Hawkie – and had all the feces land on that. He felt every impact drain some mana, and he even felt that the shit could corrode the mana even faster, but if there was one thing Jake didn't lack currently, it was mana.

Also... while he couldn't exactly jump around, he could still move a bit.

He took out his bow and, with great willpower, stood up straight as he began channeling. He felt like his bones creaked a bit doing so, but his body was durable enough to easily handle it.

The purple-pink mana swirled around him as the energy began building up. Both D-grade monkeys noticed this, and the Crusher moved in to attack, moving incredibly slow as it was also clearly affected by its own aura.

Jake smirked a bit as he lifted his foot and took a step forward, and by using his sphere used it to travel nearly 100 meters backward as the ground where he had just stood exploded as the massive tail of the Crusher tried to do exactly what the creature was named for doing.

A small crater was formed as the soil was kicked up, the Crusher confused by its blow missing the human that shouldn't be able to move.

Its surprise only doubled when an arcane arrow parted the cloud of dust and blew its head off.

You have slain [Tri-Lighttail Monkey Crusher – lvl 112] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

Jake instantly felt the pressure on him almost disappear, and he turned his gaze to the last D-grade that was just standing there, looking like it was about to shit itself. Before it got the chance to throw that hypothetical shit, Jake put it down with another Arcane Powershot, freezing the monkey as it attempted to flee.

He barely had time to spot the very last D-grade monkey peek out from behind a tree before it quickly bolted away, rushing further into the forest. It was the one he had sent flying earlier, and it had only barely managed to get its bearing to come back in time and see its comrades slaughtered.

With those gone... let's figure out why Splitting Arrow isn't working, Jake thought, moving on to more exciting things. The D-grades were honestly too weak for him... he reckoned those four together only managed to reach the level of a single Thunder Roc, even with their levels.

This wasn't surprising as often solitary creatures were more powerful individually. They had more skills to square up their own shortcomings and just more stats overall. This didn't mean that beasts or monsters in groups were weaker, though. Often they had powerful leaders, even for their level, such as... well, pretty much all the dungeon bosses from the Tutorial were examples of this.

On top of that, these leaders often had skills that allowed their subjects to level and grow faster. Jake didn't doubt that these monkeys had some strong leaders hidden away in the core of their territory, and he was very much looking forward to paying them a visit.

It would only be polite so teach them some basic courtesy, wouldn't it? Such as not allowing shit-throwing.

But before that... he had a skill to upgrade and more than a hundred E-grade monkeys still hiding in the trees all around him, thinking he couldn't see them. Joke's on them because Jake had more perception than could ever be reasonable for a level 101 human.

He turned to the side with his bow in hand and fired towards a tree nearby, trying to use Splitting Arrow, using the stable version of his arcane arrows, as he noticed before, they would persist for a bit longer. Yet again, the arrow appeared to split for a second, but just as the outline appeared, they dispersed.

Jake had only consumed a bit of stamina from the shot... and he instantly found the issue.

Arcane arrows use mana, you dummy.

The three fundamental energies for humans: vital energy – also called health points, mana, and stamina were able to act like one another, but this required a bit of finesse on the user's part. That is how he could make his mana act like vital energy and create health potions after all.

However, the transformation of energy was a time-consuming process, making it not at all viable in combat unless used with some specific technique. Self-healing spells, as an example, were often just a skill transforming a portion of mana or stamina into health points.

Jake had considered at one point if this was exploitable... you know, have a skill that effectively turns 500 mana into 1000 health, and then a skill that turns 500 health into 1000 mana. Couldn't you go infinite with that? Sadly the Viper shot that down quickly. He learned that you didn't truly transform the energy; you just allowed it to act as another kind of energy for a bit. You had to use it, or it would just disperse, like if Jake consumed a mana potion while full.

Going back to Splitting Arrow, that skill was entirely a "physical" skill. It consumed stamina to use, even if the stamina acted a lot like mana normally would as it duplicated the arrows. One could say the quiver was the same, too, as it summoned physical arrows. At least they were viewed as physical entities by the system. Jake's arcane arrows, on the other hand, were considered entirely magical. Honestly... the easiest way to spot the difference was just what stats the skills benefitted from. If it benefitted from physical stats, it was a stamina-move; if it benefitted from mental stats, it was a mana move, and if it used stats from both camps, it had mixed cost - his own Arcane Powershot an example of this.

The arcane arrows only benefitted from wisdom and intelligence for the exploding ones and wisdom and perception for the stable arrows. Perception was a stat that didn't really fit into either camp as a physical or mental stat, but was a bit of both. That is because, objectively speaking – according to Jake – perception was the best stat.

In summary, Jake needed to change the Splitting Arrow skill to work with his mana rather than his stamina.

However, this was easier said than done. Summoning an arcane arrow was naturally easy for Jake, considering that was what the Arcane Hunter's Arrows was all about... no, the issue was to do it while in flight and at the same time allow them to retain their innate power and momentum.

Any attack used had inherent power in it, and not just in the form of physical momentum or force. Especially Jake's attacks were different. All his arrows dealt damage based on distance and perception because of his Archery of Vast Horizons, so he had to make sure the arrows were still considered archery – no matter how weird that sounds.

With all that in mind, Jake went to work.

He kept trying to use the skill as he made small changes here and there. Dozens of Lighttail Monkeys fell during his experimentation, but even more of them were just perplexed at how bad the accuracy of their attacker was. A few of the shots were made with the intent of the arrow splitting, after all.

After half an hour, another small group of D-grades showed up. Two Crushers in this one, both around the level of the one he killed earlier, as well as four of the more regular D-grade Tri-Lighttail Monkeys. One of them being the one who ran off earlier.

Another five minutes after that, there were two dead Crushers and 4 dead regular D-grade monkeys. Jake didn't let any of them run off for reinforcements this time as he wanted to spend some time figuring out the whole Splitting Arrow thing and doing that while having two buffed-up hulking monkeys try and smash him was a bit distracting. He would come to them in due time.

The next few hours were spent with Jake trying different things. Around two hours in, he had partial success as he managed to split the arrow while in mid-air, but the new arrow just fell harmlessly to the ground instantly, having lost all momentum.

He needed the “physical” aspects of the skill to work, too, so he began experimenting with a mix of stamina and mana.

The hardest part of it all was to have it all work with the Splitting Arrow skill. He had an innate connection to any attack he used, and to activate his intent for the arrow to split using the Splitting Arrow skill took quite a bit of practice. If he tried to do it without using the skill as an anchor, he had no confidence at all in getting it to work. It was a good example of why skills were still valuable... they did stuff that was honestly far too complicated than Jake could do on his own, and it wasn't even like Splitting Arrow was the most complex.

During his progress, only a single more D-grade showed up after that large group, and that one was swiftly put down. No levels yet, but he hadn't really expected any either.

Five hours into his practice, most of his time was spent considering how to improve things while looking for more prey. He felt absolutely no regret from slaughtering a few hundred monkeys, and even if he questioned himself if committing monkey genocide was acceptable, then a single shit-flinging bastard was enough to deter that sentiment.

It was on the sixth hour that he met his first partial success as an arrow was summoned and lasted for a few seconds before flickering out, and it even managed to strike a tree before doing so, penetrating into the bark deeply.

Fifteen minutes later, his improved version of Splitting Arrow passed the threshold of improvement set by the system, and a notification appeared.

[Splitting Arrow (Uncommon)] – One arrow becomes many; one fallen prey becomes a field of death. Fire an arrow that splits into several copies while in flight. Each arrow strikes with the power of the original. Adds a small bonus to the effect of Agility and Strength when using Splitting Arrow.

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[Enhanced Splitting Arrow (Rare)] – A skill most often used by archers, now usurped and reformed by the Avaricious Arcane Hunter. Allows you to clone your arrows while in flight, allowing them to retain innate magical properties. Each arrow strikes with the power of the original. Adds a small bonus to the effect of Agility and Wisdom when using Enhanced Splitting Arrow.

With the upgrade, the system assistance was entirely in place as he fired his Enhanced Splitting Arrow. It consumed both mana and stamina as he did so - quite a bit more mana than stamina.

It only split into three arrows – far fewer than before – but each struck with impressive power.

Three giant explosions sounded out as the forest shook, and monkey parts were sent flying everywhere.

Jake nodded in satisfaction as he dismissed his bow and began traveling further into the domain of the Lighttail Monkeys.

Leaving only more dead monkeys in his wake. One could even say that the monkey-tribe was having quite the shitty day.