

Hunter 43

Chapter 43: Big Pig II: Steeltusk Edition

Jake sauntered before the mighty beast. It easily towered over him, reaching the size of a small van. It hadn't grown massively compared to its prior evolution, but Jake could feel the power hidden within its porky body. The boar was built like a tank, with a hide perhaps comparable to one.

As he got closer, the beast seemed to wake from its stupor as it turned towards him, glaring. Perhaps the system was doing its magic since it was night, but it didn't immediately attack. It just stared at him. He instinctively felt that if he moved just a couple of steps closer, the beast would charge with abandon.

The logical move would be to take out his bow use Powershot with the maximum charge to do massive damage or even kill it with a single attack, but where was the fun in that? Where was the challenge? He didn't even use any poison either.

Instead, he took a step forward and entered its range, and as predicted, the beast squealed as it made its way towards him. A charge he gladly met with his own. A bit stupid in retrospect, but he trusted in his powerful body.

The result was as he expected as the beast rammed into him, making him fly backward, but not before landing a good stab with the bone dagger on the snout of the big pig. This did little more than anger it further as it tried trampling him along with everything else in the surroundings.

This time he decided to dodge as he rolled to the side and started moving around the pig as if dancing. If he had learned one thing, it was that these things had horrible mobility. However, this was highly made up for by the hide on its side being near-impenetrable to regular attacks.

All of this was true, for the Irontusk boar. But the evolved Steeltusk one had more tricks up its sleeve. As Jake moved to the side, the ground beneath him suddenly shifted, nearly making him lose his balance. Simultaneously, the earth itself seemed to help rotate the mighty boar, making it turn far faster than Jake had first calculated.

Forced to move back due to the unforeseen circumstances, Jake was not distraught but happy. The stronger the beast, the more interesting the fight. He could kill the creature far faster and easier if he used poisons, giving him a reliable backup if his pure melee approach failed.

But he would be damned if he didn't even try. Training dual-wielding yourself is all well and good, but it was nothing compared to the experience one would get in live combat.

Which was the ultimate reason why he had chosen to engage in this dance of death. Totally nothing to do with having a bit of fun with the first beast above level 25.

The moving ground made his dance difficult, his steps sometimes not finding the expected foothold, but he nevertheless managed to avoid the tusks time after time. He knew that even with his durable body, it would hurt like hell to get impaled.

An issue that quickly materialized was the weakness of the starting knife he used. Against the formidable defenses of the boar, it couldn't even leave a mark with his slashes. Only when he stabbed did he manage to barely leave a mark. Even the bone dagger only managed to make light cuts. The enchantment was doing work, though, making each of those small cuts bleed far more and for longer than usual.

Minutes passed as Jake dodged and weaved, stabbed, and cut, while the beast furiously tried to pin him down and skewer him. As the damage to the creature increased, so did its fury and bloodlust. With little

warning, the beast's eyes suddenly started to emit a red glow, as the entire boar started to give off a similar red aura.

Jake felt his danger sense flare up as he raised his arms to block, and with a squeal of fury, the boar turned its head and hit him with one of its tusks, sending him airborne for a few moments. However, the boar was far from done as the very earth seemed to reach up and grab hold of him as the beast began a full-power charge straight at him.

With no way to move, he tossed his two daggers into the air and prepared to meet the beast. Its size was both a strength and a weakness, as Jake managed to slide between the two tusks aiming at him and instead have the snout of the beast crash into him.

He felt all air leave his lungs as he managed to grab hold of the boar, avoiding to get trampled beneath it. The beast with berserk-movements tried to shake him off, but Jake kept hold as he managed to somehow get up on the back of the creature.

Through his sphere, he managed to locate the bone dagger and, with an unprecedented level of skill, weaved a string of mana that nudged the blade to fall towards his hand. He felt like a warrior from a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away as he caught the dagger and shanked it down into the back of the beast.

The beast's response was to throw itself to the side, attempting to squash him beneath it. Jake pulled himself up by the hide of the massive creature and avoided finding himself between the ground and a van-sized pig.

He kept delivering stab after stab until finally he was forced to let go and jump off, as the beast started rolling around while at the same time manipulating the earth itself to try and get him off. The beast's berserk state was still active, making it promptly stop rolling around and continue its reckless assault.

Jake could, however, feel that the beast had started getting slower. Blood was everywhere by now, on the creature, the ground, and even himself. Dozens of bloody holes covered its hide, still oozing out blood.

With the beast's speed reduced, and Jake having adapted to the shifting ground, the fight had gotten significantly more straightforward. He dodged and jumped around the beast, landing cut after cut, as it increasingly grew desperate in its attempts to lock him down.

After several minutes, the beast had only managed to inflict a couple of minor injuries on Jake, the worst one being a long gash on one of his shoulders. Jake called it a minor injury, though, before the system it would without a doubt have required a trip to the emergency room. But his high vitality kept him in top shape, and he felt that his health was still in good condition.

A few minutes later, the beast finally collapsed from its wounds, no longer able to muster any strength to fight back. The ground manipulation kept going even after the creature couldn't move as it continued to hit Jake with pitifully weak attacks.

Jake was starting to feel bad for it, and finally pulled out his bow and fired a Powershot into the head of the unmoving beast, ending its life instantly.

You have slain [Steeltusk Boar – lvl 28] – Experienced earned. 16000 TP earned

'DING!' Class: [Archer] has reached level 20 - Stat points allocated, +1 free point

'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 32 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

Despite the less than satisfying ending, Jake had still very much enjoyed the fight. There was just something about fighting a powerful enemy.

Looking at his health points, he found them only having been reduced by a sixth. Far less than he had lost during the short exchange with the metal manipulating caster, which showed that other humans indeed were the real danger of his tutorial.

Despite him barely losing any health, his cloak didn't avoid suffering catastrophic damage once again. Luckily the self-repair enchant remained active even after being utterly ruined by William's final attack, but now it was once more tattered.

He had also discovered that if he injected mana into the cloak, the repair function would speed up significantly. It still took its time, though. Speaking of injecting mana into items, that was another important thing he had considerably explored over the last few days.

Most materials could be made stronger by injecting mana into it. The primary reason why the trees were so strong was their ability to absorb the ambient mana. The same was true for nearly anything, even anything completely non-living. Stones, metals, even the properties of the air itself changed and got amplified by mana.

Without injecting mana into his bow, for example, it would without a doubt break when using Powershot. He was still in the early stages of practice, but he believed that it should be possible to also improve already enchanted items somehow. Currently, he couldn't inject any mana into his bone dagger. Despite not being enchanted, the normal archer dagger also rejected most of the mana he tried injecting.

Of all his items, only the ones with self-repair and his bow accepted mana injection. He could use mana with his other things, like his spatial necklace, but that was not really injection per se. Mana injection is more like how one would directly shoot electricity into a bar of metal to heat it up and eventually make it melt if too much was injected.

However, for his necklace, it was like you injected that mana into a transformer, which then correctly applied the mana to fulfill the desired function. Such as taking an item in or out of storage. As to how this metaphorical transformer worked... that was way above Jake's paygrade.

He was learning a lot about mana these days, but he was also very actively studying it. Before he met with the Malefic Viper, he had taken a lot of its properties for granted. He had seen it as just the system doing its thing and saw no further reason to question it. And even if he did question how things worked, he couldn't do anything with the mana then.

But now he actively questioned everything he could. He experimented happily with mana manipulation at all times, and his control had vastly improved without a doubt. His little trick of pulling the bone dagger to himself during the fight was more than proof of that. Also, it felt really awesome to do. Could he just have deposited it in his necklace and not throw it into the air? Sure, he could, but the other way was way cooler.

The fact that no skill had appeared or been made available regarding mana manipulation was a bit weird to him, though. He could clearly levitate objects and do things akin to telekinesis, and yet no skills had come.

Then again, he didn't have a skill related to manipulating stamina or health points either. He had tried controlling those two sources of energy and found it way harder. He could kind of control his vital energy to focus on specific areas as he had done during the final part of the challenge dungeon, but Jake couldn't shape it as he could with mana.

Stamina, on the other hand, was a dead-end so far. He had theorized that he should be able to use it to enhance his own body somehow, as it was known as the inner energy. The fact that nearly all physical skills used stamina to function proved that stamina could significantly affect the body.

Of course, it could just be the system doing system things. One energy could exhibit the properties of another, after all. In the end, Stamina, Health, and Mana were all just different forms of energy. Not to say that one could necessarily combine all three to make something more powerful. In before that's how you make divine energy or something like that, he joked to himself.

Exiting his thoughts, he entered the system menus.

Archer class skills available

Checking the list, he found the usual suspects he had been offered at level 10. While some of them still appealed to him, especially the Active Camouflage skill, he chose to ignore them all for now. He had been offered two new skills of interest, though - both of them falling into the evasion type. The first skill of which was a bit weird.

[Disengaging Shot (Common)] – An arrow may not only be shot to wound or kill but also as a tool of escape. Allows the archer to shoot an arrow that directs and amplifies all kinetic energy into a backward force. Must have a suitable weapon to use. Adds a minor bonus to the effect of agility when dodging using Disengaging Shot.

Talking immediate drawbacks was the fact that it required a bow and arrow. This, of course, limited the ability quite a lot. He couldn't use it in melee with his daggers, and he couldn't use it in split-second emergency situations as he would have to actually shoot an arrow to activate it.

On the positive side, though, it would be godly when kiting. Depending on the stamina requirements, Jake would be able to use it continuously to quite literally blow himself around the battlefield. He couldn't help but imagine himself trying to fly through the air by repeatably shooting arrows towards the ground. That would sure as hell be cool... though likely very stupid-looking if even feasible.

Moving on to the second skill, the first thing that struck him was the name.

[Basic Shadow Vault of Umbra (Uncommon)] – The power of shadows is an often used tool for anyone looking to escape. Tapping into the Records of Umbra, embrace the shadows for a brief moment, becoming ethereal. Allows the archer to momentarily become one with the shadows. Can only be used in straight lines. Adds a small bonus to the effect of agility and wisdom when using Basic Shadow Vault of Umbra.

The skill was somehow related to something or someone called Umbra. Thinking about it, he checked out his bracers.

[Leather Bracers of the Novice Rogue (Uncommon)] – A pair of leather bracers made of fine leather, originally designed for new initiates in the Order of Umbra. Enchantments: Self-Repair. +5 agility, +3 strength. Increases the effectiveness of all stealth skills, further amplified while remaining hidden in the shadows.

Requirements: Lvl 5+ in any class or humanoid race. Stealth-based skill.

Had he somehow managed to acquire Records related to some entity named Umbra solely through using bracers holding the name?

He understood why he got skills related to the Malefic Viper as the profession was quite literally named after him. Could the mere act of having those bracers somehow influence him that much that it would open up entirely new skill options to him? He was honestly a bit taken aback at the prospect. He kind of assumed that Umbra was a god... would it then be considered blasphemy to take the skill when he already had the Malefic Viper ones?

Well... at least the Malefic Viper didn't seem like the sort of person to care much about that, and the skill was looking very juicy. The fact that it made use of his high wisdom was also a huge bonus. He also assumed the skill made use of both mana and stamina... but he couldn't know before taking it.

As a basic skill, it was also very appetizing. Basic implied plenty of room for improvement, aka skill upgrades. Jake had improved his archery skill through being good at archery, so would he be able to improve that skill too by being good at... Shadow Vaulting?

The description of the effects of the Shadow Vault was also quite honestly very awesome-sounding. To become one with shadows and dodging around sounded very fantasy-like, but more importantly than that, it sounded pretty damn handy.

Ultimately the choice of skill was a no-brainer. One required a bow and was kind of gimmicky, and the other one literally allowed him to dodge like a shadow without any immediate drawbacks. With that in mind, he picked it.

***Gained Skill*:** [Basic Shadow Vault of Umbra (Uncommon)] – The power of shadows is an often used tool for anyone looking to escape. Tapping into the Records of Umbra, embrace the shadows for a brief

moment, becoming ethereal. Allows the archer to momentarily become one with the shadows. Can only be used in straight lines. Adds a small bonus to the effect of agility and wisdom when using Basic Shadow Vault of Umbra.

Jake instantly felt the knowledge stream into his mind. Vaguely he also felt like the dark night became several shades darker as he felt the information being implanted.

A few seconds passed, and everything returned to normal as Jake now had a vague idea of how the skill worked and how to activate it, but far from enough. Needless to say, it was testing time!