

## Hunter 65

### Chapter 65: Chilling with badgers

Jake could feel that both his mana and stamina were reasonable despite the many Shadow Vaults. His quiver was also more than half-full making it unnecessary to reconjure more quite yet.

After he had poisoned a few more arrows, he set his sights on the next pack - four badgers, levels similar to the one he had just taken out.

With a Powershot, he once more took out the group's strongest, as he retreated to where he had fought the first group to not attract more beasts. He had to be a bit cautious for the last group and kite them in a circle, while he now had more space to use.

Minutes later, the beasts met their end, as Jake once more got a level. Quite honestly, this was too easy. His arrows were getting low, though, so he had to conjure some more. His stamina also began getting low, so he decided to take a quick break to stock up on arrows while restoring some stamina.

Said restoration happened through the consumption of a stamina potion, as he took a quick peek in his spatial storage and saw that his stock was getting low.

His consumption of stamina potions was quite insane. He used his skills liberally, making him consume a lot of stamina. That, coupled with him still not being all that practiced making the potions, made him have to drink one nearly every hour when it was off cooldown.

Deciding to extend his break a little, he retreated to the tunnel in which he had entered and sat down on the ground as he summoned his mixing bowl.

Following that, he took out some purified water and put it in the bowl, along with the Green Lavender and Evergreen Grass, as he prepared himself to make the stamina potions.

Placing his palm under it, he activated Alchemist's Flame, making the transparent flame spring forth. The water slowly heated up, as he used his other hand and small strings of mana to pick up the other ingredients as he started his brewing.

He always found alchemy relaxing. Even during the challenge dungeon where his life was on the line, he still enjoyed it. It was challenging and complex, yet immensely satisfying to create something. Jake had never really had any hobbies that led to any actual products, being far too into archery or games.

His job was the same, with most of his creations simply being documents and figures on a computer. He didn't count putting together a PowerPoint with a bunch of graphs and forecasts to be considered a worthwhile or satisfying creation.

But seeing herbs and water slowly turn into the desired color, and hearing the following message of his success was oh so satisfying, especially after struggling for a long time to make it correctly. He seriously doubted he would ever forget the first time he made a common-rarity Necrotic Poison.

Smiling to himself, he jumped into the work.

The hours passed by in the blink of an eye, as Jake sat there absorbed in his alchemy.

The dungeon around him was silent, the badgers simply milling about, sniffing the ground and sometimes bumping into each other. The Alpha was just sleeping, as it seemed to be waiting for a challenger to appear before it.

Only four groups of badgers remained. One of them had four members like those he had already taken down, while two of the others had five, and the last one six. By how they were placed, it seemed apparent that you should fight them in order of least to most, ending up against the Alpha at the end.

Just like a goddamn game, Jake sighed as he started packing up the unused materials and threw the stamina potions he had made into his spatial storage, but not before taking one and chugging it down. Interestingly enough, newly created potions tasted exactly the same as older ones, making Jake briefly wonder if potions had expiration dates.

He didn't get a level despite hours passing, but he hadn't expected to either. While his leveling speed was likely monstrous compared to many others with their professions, it was a slow and arduous process compared to leveling his class.

A single fight lasting only minutes could earn him a level in his class, while he could easily do alchemy for an entire day without seeing a level-up, especially not when he was trying out new recipes.

Of course, professions were way safer to level. Jake was in no danger while doing alchemy, and that was even with Jake's profession being one with relatively high levels of risk due to the focus on using potent toxins. But compared to fighting beasts, the danger was negligible.

It had to be noted though that Jake was in relatively little danger during his fights, in large part due to his profession providing him a very high amount of vitality and toughness, making him far more durable than any agility-based class should ever be at his level. Coupled with the many race levels, it wasn't that surprising that he could easily face beasts many levels above his own.

Having finished cleaning everything up, he dismissed all distracting thoughts as he locked onto the next group of badgers. Four of them once again.

The battle went as one would expect, with Jake easily managing to kite them back and kill them one by one. He was exceptionally well-matched against them, making it an easy undertaking.

Three groups were now dead, with not a single one of them even touching the edges of his cloak.

He didn't get a level from the last group, but luckily there were many enemies left.

The next group with five badgers proved to be a bit more annoying than the others. The extra beast allowed them to slowly gain ground on him until he was forced to meet the final one in melee. He ended up getting a nasty bite on his arm when he was forced to block its attacks.

His attacker, however, didn't fare much better as Jake used an arrow to stab the beast repeatedly while holding it down, with it becoming a battle of attrition. Perhaps the badger had hoped that the potent venom within its teeth would take out Jake before it succumbed to his attacks. A hope that swiftly died as Jake got the notification of the kill.

To his surprise, though, he hadn't been able to neutralize the venom entirely through his Palate of the Malefic Viper. He felt a slight burning sensation in his arm as the poison struggled to travel through his veins. His health was also dropping little by little as his vital energy slowly fought off said venom.

The skill clearly increased his resistance still, as he could feel the venom's toxic potency through his Sense of the Malefic Viper. In terms of pure toxicity, it was on par with his infused blood.

He was a bit lucky though that the beasts didn't have any resistance to poison themselves. Nothing of note, at least. Which wasn't that surprising as many animals usually didn't even have resistance to their own toxins.

For example, a snake would be poisoned if bitten by another venomous snake of the same species, or even if it bit itself. Their venom was protein-based, which meant that while they could easily eat prey they had killed with their poison, the same venom would still be deadly if injected into themselves.

It being protein-based means that the stomach could break it down and absorb it, making drinking snake venom not actually dangerous under most circumstances. If you didn't have any open wounds in your mouth, throat, or stomach, that is. However, it is still not recommended to drink venom under any circumstances.

And based on the venom these badgers possessed, it seemed to be of the same kind as snake venom. Of course, one had to factor in the system and possible magic elements involved. Jake could feel traces of inner energy within the toxin, making it not purely a physical substance.

The same was true for all of Jake's own poisons. His blood and concocted poisons both. His blood being mana-based was quite self-evident, considering it was quite literally mana-injected blood. The ingredients used in poison concoction were also all filled with mana, making the poisons made from them also inherently filled with mana.

Jake wondered how a poison from before the system would fare against his current body. He remembered certain animals being absolutely ridiculously poisonous, being able to kill giant animals with even a drop of their venom or poison.

Perhaps the toxin would be far less effective due to all the magical mumbo-jumbo going on. Taking the venom currently being eradicated in Jake's arm into consideration, he could only imagine how easily non-magical venom would succumb.

Not that there was any way to know in the end. The system was here, and it was likely going to stay.

After less than a minute, he had finally removed the final trace of venom in his arm, as he noticed that it had managed to take less than 1/20 of his total health.

Looking at his notifications quickly, he saw that he had gained another level in his class.

\*'DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 36 - Stat points allocated, +4 free points\*

\*'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 41 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points\*

Honestly, this speed was ridiculous. But then again, he was a level 35 hunter killing beasts around level 60. Additionally, he had the Big Game Hunter skill, which helped him close the stat-gap by quite a lot. Noticing his class also reaching level 36, he slapped himself on his forehead as he admonished himself.

Why the hell had he used an arrow to stab the badger? He could finally use his new sword!

Taking it out, he instantly injected mana and felt that unlike the rare Greatsword of Nature, this one didn't reject him at all but smoothly absorbed his mana. He immediately felt the faint connection and became aware of how exactly its Invading Chill ability worked.

[Shortsword of Icy Winds (Uncommon)] – A Sword made out of Froststeel and amplified with Ice-affinity mana over a long time. Due to the material used, the blade afflicts anyone hit with the elemental energy of frost. Enchantments: Invading Chill.

Requirements: Lvl 35+ in any class.

It wasn't that unlike a poison, but if compared to toxins that had some physical parts to them, this affliction was entirely magical.

As the blade was now bound to him, the enchantments and power within also activated as its edge chilled - a frosty layer covered the metal as it started giving off traces of vapor.

He had tried to use the sword before he reached level 35 and found that he couldn't inject his mana into it at all. As for wielding it without binding it to himself, that too was impossible as the blade just wouldn't sit right in his hand. It was a weird feeling, but it felt like if he tried to attack anything with it, it wouldn't be as sharp as it should either.

He had forgotten actually to test if the theory was correct, but perhaps that was another experiment for another time.

What was important right now was that he finally had a proper melee weapon once more. He had found a common-rarity dagger in the valley before, meaning he could now duel-wield it together with the shortsword.

Taking out the dagger, which he had bound to himself when he found it, he started swinging them around to test how it felt.

To his satisfaction, he felt that Twin Fang Style indeed did work with the shortsword, making him not lose out on the stat effectiveness bonuses from the skill. He naturally still didn't get the "weapon of bone" bonus, but hey, what can you do?

He decided to put the two weapons back in his storage as he quite frankly didn't have confidence in beating those badgers purely using melee. One of the reasons he could handle them so easily was that he always killed one before the fight even began and then took them out.

However, being surrounded by five, all scratching and biting at him... yeah, he wasn't going to do that. The damn things were also too damn big, reaching up to his chest. If they stood on their hind legs, they would be more than three meters tall, being by far the largest badgers he had encountered so far.

Of course, the Alpha was even more prominent - the size of a large horse, with far more bulk and presence due to its spiky hide. He couldn't help but get a bit excited at the prospect of fighting it... but first, he had to get rid of the last three groups.

Checking his stuff, he was a bit low on arrows... but he didn't feel like reconjuring more yet, so he decided to make it an excellent excuse also to do a bit of melee combat when he ran out.



The first Badger went down with the customary Powershot, with the next two dying to the kiting and Splitting Arrow combo. The last two had only taken minor injuries when they finally managed to pin him down.

With a bit of excitement, Jake took out his dagger and shortsword, as he used the sword to block the claw of the first badger. He felt himself getting pushed back, having a disadvantage in strength.

He barely had time to jump back as the other tried to bite him in the neck. He struggled to get a good foothold as the first one charged again, but this time Jake put the beast between himself and the neck-biting one, making it unable to jump him immediately.

Taking the opportunity, he blocked the claw with the dagger once more, as he stabbed the beast in its front, penetrating quite deeply until a bone stopped the blade.

The badger screeched as it seemed to go berserk, clawing and biting recklessly. An action that, sadly for the beast, only made the fight easier for Jake. The creature was stronger and slightly faster than himself, but also utterly predictable.

He landed a few more cuts on the beast while he dodged the other one, that was still desperately trying to bite him to pieces. The badger got slower and slower with every cut from the sword, the Invading Cold from the sword seeping into its muscles and making them stiffen. Finally, he got in close and landed a Touch of the Malefic Viper as he put his palm on the side of the beast's contorted face.

It's screeching only got louder as the poison slowly started rotting its face, as Jake Shadow Vaulted backward, no longer bothering with the thing. It was already dead. A prediction that proved right in only a few seconds as the poison spread to the brain.

The remaining badger didn't seem even the tiniest bit disturbed about the horrific death of its former comrade as it continued the frenzied assault.

A few minutes later, it met the same fate as Jake stabbed the sword into its heart after its movements also started getting stiff and sloppy.

Jake hadn't come out of the fight unscathed as his cloak was well and genuinely tattered, and he had several claw-marks all over his arms and chest. He had even been bitten once more, and on the same damn arm even. But the thrill of the fight made the pain irrelevant. The sword was sharp, and the icy affliction had done great work. It even made him think of perhaps concocting a nerve toxin to double up on the paralyzing effect.

However, the most important thing, for now, was yet another level.

\*'DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 37 - Stat points allocated, +4 free points\*

Two more groups and one big-ass badger left.