

Hunter 66

Chapter 66: The Notorious B.I.G Badger

Jake focused on the threads of mana as he supplied mana through every one of them. One of them reached towards his battered cloak, which had been nearly completely destroyed, again, after the latest fight where he finally took down the last of the badger groups, leaving only the Alpha left.

The self-repair enchant on the cloak would repair it entirely over time, but if one were injecting mana, it would significantly speed up the process.

The second string went to his bracers that had taken quite the beating too. He had used them to block quite liberally, making them well and truly scratched up. One of them even had several bite holes in them from the two times he had been bitten.

The third string went to the empty quiver as he supplied mana to conjure more arrows. Yet another two were currently picking up a blue mushroom each as they slowly put it into the mixing bowl he was holding with his two hands.

If he was doing relatively easy concoctions or brews, he could do it with only one hand on the bowl, but it was more comfortable with two hands if he needed a bit finer control. And as he was currently making more Necrotic Poison, he needed both hands.

Of course, he made it a bit harder for himself by deploying mana strings and charging up or repairing his stuff.

But in the end, it turned out successful as he was met by the beautiful message confirming his successful concoction and finally getting that level-up.

'DING!' Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 47 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 43 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

Along with that level, he had already gotten quite the gains from the dungeon. Jake had been there for 10 hours by now, as he had to take a break before fighting the second to last and final group of badgers.

He quickly burned through all 60 arrows in every one of those fights, as the damn things were relatively resilient and good at avoiding fatal injuries.

As it took a bit of time to reconjure the arrows, he also spent the time concocting a bit. He had decided to go all out against the Alpha Badger and use some of his limited supply of Necrotic Poison.

He was starting to run a bit low on blue mushrooms by now. He cursed himself for casually eating them out of habit in the period after leaving the challenge dungeon, but not as much as he cursed himself for not clearing out the long tunnel filled with them after exiting the challenge dungeon.

It was unlikely that he would return for them as... well... he kind of didn't know the way back. He was a hunter, sure, but that didn't mean that his sense of direction was that powerful. Besides, the damn forest in the outer zone looked the same all over, with nearly no discernable landmarks. At least the inner area had huge mountains of different heights to orientate oneself quickly.

At least the dungeon was straight-forward. Quite literally, as there was only an opening at each end of the cave.

After he finished most of his preparations, he meditated for a few hours to fully restore himself. Only a single enemy remained in front of him, and from the feeling it gave off, the thing was stronger than anything he had ever faced before.

Exiting meditation, he took out the newly concocted bottle of Necrotic Poison, as he started dipping his arrows in it one by one. Leaving nothing up to chance, he dipped all sixty of them, making sure that he could give the beast a sufficient dosage of death.

After he was done, he put on the now fully repaired cloak and bracers. It was a bit weird how he retained the stats from the bracers even after removing them. Though his connection to them slowly worsened when he didn't have them on, so he assumed that if he took them off for too long, the stats would disappear.

Shifting his focus back on the huge Alpha Venomfang Badger, he noted that he still couldn't see its level even after his level-ups.

The Alpha was no longer sleeping but sitting on the ground, almost as if it was waiting for him. The moment he defeated the group with six badgers in it, the beast had woken up and moved to the position it was currently in. Likely by design, Jake noted.

Still too damn videogame-like, he sighed. It was kind of eerie how the beast could be only a hundred meters away from him on flat ground, and while he could clearly see it from here, it somehow didn't react to his presence at all.

The same was true for all the badgers. Jake could attack one group without any of the others bothering. They should clearly be able to both hear and see, and yet... nothing.

Outside it was a bit different, with the beasts roaming more, and while their range of perception was limited, the mere fact that they moved around made it more likely for someone to get into a fight accidentally.

His unintended engagement of the small dinos during his fight with the buffalo was a great example. He had kited it around as he usually did and accidentally moved too close to a bunch of the small buggers. The fact that their range of engagement was more extensive than his sphere of perception hadn't helped either.

But these badgers... he could easily encompass them with his sphere and still not pull them. It had to be noted that his sphere currently had a range of a bit over 20 meters. Heck, the fact that he could sit here in the dungeon and concoct poisons while they were only tens of meters away was just weird.

It worked to his advantage, though, so he wasn't going to complain that much.

As he stared down the giant badger in the distance, he took out an arrow from his quiver, nocked it, and took aim at the beast. It still didn't react as he started charging Powershot. He couldn't overdo it, as he doubted the creature would die in a single blow, and having a numb or even damaged arm wouldn't be advisable.

At the same time, it couldn't be too weak either. After 8 or so seconds, as Jake started to feel the soreness set in, he released the arrow to the usual explosion of energy.

He had aimed at the head of the beast, hoping for an easy one-shot. A hope that was quickly snuffed out as the beast reacted the moment he released the arrow. The otherwise dull eyes turned sharp, and the beast sprung into motion as it dodged to the side far faster than any other opponent Jake had faced before. It still managed to get scratched, but it was a surface-wound at best.

Despite it dodging his initial blow, Jake didn't get disappointed but instead felt excitement. This one was a worthy opponent. A good hunt. A challenge he would gladly face.

Taking out another arrow, he fired a Splitting Arrow that surprised the beast charging towards him.

Three of the five arrows hit as it dodged. But notably, it clearly purposefully avoided the original poisoned arrow.

Narrowing his eyes, Jake knew this beast, despite its prior demeanor, had sharp instincts.

He only had time to get off one more Splitting Arrows before the beast made it to him. It passed the 100-meter gap in only three or so seconds, putting most sportscars to shame with its monstrous acceleration. And this was even with the beast finding time to dodge the arrows on the way.

Jake Shadow Vaulted backward but didn't have time to fire another arrow before the beast was upon him once more. His tactic of briefly confusing his enemy by vaulting clearly not working on this one.

He still hadn't managed to properly land any poisoned arrows on the beast, as he was forced to block a swipe of its claws. Its strength outclassed Jake by far, and right before it hit him, he leaped backward, borrowing the momentum of its blow to create some distance.

However, the claw still tore into his bracers and arms, but besides that, he handled the blow relatively well. He felt his bones creak a bit, and it did send reverberations up his arms, but his body could take it.

Having gotten some distance, Jake finally managed to land an arrow on the beast, though not hitting any critical areas, but it was enough to deliver the toxic payload.

The arrow pierced its entire arrowhead into the hide of the beast, notably less than with the normal Venomfang badgers, where they either went straight through or only stopped when hitting bone or dense muscles.

But it was fine. As long as the arrow could penetrate the tough hide of the beast, he could kill it.

The beast itself also seemed to notice the poison's effects as it screeched in anger, far louder than even the Molerat Screechers had. His ears were ringing, and he felt his vision go black for a second. However, his danger sense still warned him of the maw of the beast descending upon him, allowing him to Shadow Vault to the side and avoid the danger.

He had no intention of letting the beast sink its fangs into him. He couldn't nullify the effect of the venom of the smaller ones, so he saw no chance with the Alpha. No reason to turn this into a battle of attrition.

Shadow Vaulting once more right after the first allowed him to get a bit more distance, as he noticed the beast behind him scratching at the wound he had inflicted. To his horror, he saw it rip out the piece of flesh where he had hit, along with the arrow itself.

Shit, Jake thought. The necrotic poison didn't really spread that well though blood... it broke down the flesh and spread through that. With the beast having ripped out the infected meat, it eliminated the majority of the infection.

Gotta switch it up, he decided as he pulled out a poison he had barely used. The very first type of poison he had ever made.

[Weak Hemotoxic Poison (Inferior)] – Increases bleeding on infected entities and makes any injuries harder to heal. The poison must be introduced directly into the bloodstream to have any effect.

It was of a lower rarity and effect... but it would likely do well against this type of foe. It already had several bleeding wounds, including the one it had just given itself.

He could see the flesh writhing as it visibly started healing, so he had no time to hesitate.

Using the time he had been given by the beast ripping out the infected flesh, he took out an arrow and swiftly cleaned as much of the necrotic poison off it as he could with his cloak. Mixing poisons never ended well and would often make the effects worse.

With no time to carefully dip the arrow in the poison, he just poured it out over the arrow swiftly as he briefly made eye-contact with the beast out of the corner of his eyes. It was coming.

Forced to retreat once more, he chuckled the bottle towards the beast. Luckily the creature decided that the empty bottle was a major threat as it jumped to the side to avoid it, buying Jake even more time.

He only had one arrow prepared with the poison, and he didn't know if he would get time to make another. He had no confidence in facing the beast in a melee brawl. Not yet, at least. If he could weaken it significantly first, perhaps he would be able to.

But he needed to land this shot. Splitting Arrow had proved not to work, and a regular shot had a big chance of being dodged... he needed to get a short-channeled Powershot somehow off.

His experimentation with speeding up the channeling speed had been gradual. He could slightly do it now... but he didn't exactly have a tremendous rate of success. Either it was negligible, or it just made the skill fail as all the stored inner energy dispersed into nothingness.

Tough times call for tough decisions, he thought as he took the gamble. What better time to try something new and risky than in a battle of life and death?

Having decided on a plan, he decided to take advantage of the beast's fear of bottles. He had thousands of empty bottles for poison and potions still in his storage and was more than willing to toss a few at the thing.

Taking out a handful of bottles, he threw it at the once again charging Alpha Badger as it predictably dodged to the side.

Jake didn't even take time to see if the feint worked as he raised his bow with the hemotoxic arrow nocked.

Focusing all his perception inwards, he started the skill and tried to hasten the flow of stamina. He felt it speed up significantly as he willed it to, and he felt the energy enter his arms at a rate like never before - a rate that was far too unstable.

All the energy built up disappeared even faster than it had gathered, making Jake curse inwardly. The first part had been fine... but he couldn't finish it. It was too unstable. Too rushed, with the energy not being guided properly.

He didn't have time to try again, as the beast also switched up its tactic.

The needle-like hair on its back suddenly stood up straight as he screeched towards him once more, giving him the same nauseous feeling. And just like before, his danger sense warned him right after, while his Sphere of Perception made him aware of the nature of the threat.

Hundreds of small, thin, needle-sharp hairs were heading towards him at breakneck speed.

Having no other choice, he charged towards the needles, as he used his Shadow Vault to phase through them. In a less than positive turn of events, he found that the needles had quite a lot of energy infused in every one of them, making Jake lose more than a thousand mana as well as more health than he would have liked.

However, he didn't regret his choice as his hearing returned after the screech, and he heard the sizzling sound the needles made as they were embedded in the ground.

Venomfang, my ass, should be called Venomhair, he cursed jokingly in his mind as now found himself closer to the beast than he would like. Despite the danger, he had to admit that he was very much enjoying himself.

With only five or so meters between them, the beast took its chance to snap at him, making Jake sidestep the blow, as he swiftly pulled out his sword and stabbed it into the side of the beast's head, penetrating the chin.

It reacted quickly as he was swiftly knocked back by the beast swinging its head. To make matters worse, the Alpha had managed to scratch his chest with one of its fangs during the motion.

He instantly felt the pain spread throughout his chest as the venom started taking hold. He subconsciously mobilized his vital energy to better fight it off as he looked in the direction of the beast trying to get the sword out of its chin. He had bought some time.

He had dropped his bow but had made sure to keep hold of the arrow. He still had his old bow from before he got the one upgraded to common-rarity. It was weaker, but if he infused mana into it, he should be able to make it hold together long enough to...

Something clicked in his mind at that moment. His control of inner energy was weak... but his mana control was far better, practiced through his alchemy, and helped along by his talent in it. If he could use mana to support the process... he could do it.

Mana couldn't be directly injected into the body in its pure form, but it could be manifested in the air and injected into non-living physical things, such as his bow.

Raising his old bow, he nocked the arrow in an almost trance-like state as the beast still thrashed around, trying to get the sword out of its chin. The Invading Chill was slowly seeping into it, annoying it more than doing any actual damage.

He began using Powershot as the process started as usual. However, this time, he tried speeding up the channel as he also injected mana into the bow simultaneously. The bow and his muscles were overwhelmed with energy in moments, but this time the inner energy didn't disperse.

The mana in and surrounding the bow held it in place as it reached equilibrium. The energy began building up like never before till it reached the crescendo. Having no time to waste, Jake released the string, as both the mana and inner energy flooded outwards, creating an explosion, unlike any Powershot he had ever done before.

The bow exploded into splinters when he released the string, unable to sustain its form after the mana had ravaged it from within.

He saw the notification pop up in front of him the second the arrow was released as it flew towards the beast that didn't even have time to react.

Skill Upgraded:[Powershot (Uncommon)] -->[Infused Powershot (Rare)]