

Hunter 67

Chapter 67: Infused Powershot

The newly gained Infused Powershot shot the arrow at an unprecedented speed as it hit the Alpha Venomfang Badger right in its midsection. The powerful attack tore straight through the beast's body as it exited out the other way, piercing any vital organ in the way.

Jake was overjoyed at his method working and wanted to read through the notification with the upgraded skill, but was quickly brought back to reality by the Alpha's mad roar, as it charged towards him with reckless abandon.

He quickly realized the gravity of the situation as he was forced to jump to the side to avoid its mad charge.

His bow had broken upon releasing the arrow, his sword was still hanging from the beast's chin, as it seemed to have gotten stuck on something, and his other bow had been thrown who-knows-where after the mad rampage of the creature.

But he did have one big thing going for him in the big hole torn straight through the creature, coupled with the wounds left behind by a few arrows and the piece of flesh it had torn off itself. Instead of the bleeding stopping from these wounds, it had now started again, the hemotoxin doing its work.

The beast was also no longer as bright as before. The Infused Powershot seemed to have thoroughly enraged it, making it thrash around uncontrollably. However, the large movements only served to worsen its wounds.

A problem for Jake, though, was his inability to capitalize on the situation further. He didn't have a bow nor a sword, and trying to stab it with arrows or his dagger in melee didn't seem like a good idea either. So, he went with perhaps the most boring approach and kited it around, letting blood-loss do the job for him.

After running around for a few minutes, he finally found his bow as it appeared in his sphere. With it in hand, he could continue to land potshots on the beast whenever an opportunity presented itself. These arrows were the ones soaked with Necrotic Poison, making them all the more deadly.

In an attempt to take less damage, the beast ended up taking more as it ripped out all the poisoned arrows shortly after they hit it. Huge chunks of flesh were torn out, but the Alpha could not regenerate as every last shred of vitality was spent trying not to succumb to blood loss.

The badger started getting slower as pools of blood soaked into the already moist soil. Its screeches got less intense as it got weaker and weaker.

This naturally only made it easier for Jake to do more and more damage to the beast, making the conclusion of their fight inevitable.

Finally, the beast fell on the ground after Jake landed an arrow on one of its legs. It still tried to crawl forward, but with it barely moving, he safely finished it off by finally landing an arrow in its eyes, penetrating into the skull.

With a breath of relief, he looked at the dead beast. It had been the strongest enemy he had ever faced by far. The fight had given him a feeling he had missed for a long time. Everything had been too easy after he exited the challenge dungeon.

He didn't count the ambush by Richard as that wasn't a fight but a one-sided attack. A battle he didn't even want to have, based on false pretenses. That time had only been about escaping... he hadn't been in the right headspace, but if it ever happened again... no, he would never allow himself to be so stupid as to land in such a situation a second time. And if he was, he wanted just to be strong enough to dominate the opposition.

To do that, Jake needed to challenge himself and improve, but every other fight had just been too simple. Jake had barely taken damage in most of them, and both his stamina and mana rarely took a hit.

A few good fights had been here and there, but nothing to really stroke his desire for a real challenge. But now, he had finally gotten one. It was a satisfying feeling, to be sure.

Looking at his notifications, he got a level, but what he instead focused on was his surprise at the badger level.

You have slain [Alpha Venomfang Badger – lvl 71] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 102000 TP earned

' DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 40 - Stat points allocated, +4 free points

Only 71, he thought, as he double-checked. That seemed way too low. Several badgers had been in their 60's and were so much weaker. He trusted the instincts that told him the beast hadn't evolved to D-grade but was still E-grade like him.

Then again... it did kind of make sense. The race of the beast was different. A variant, like how he could have gotten a worse class or profession, so could one perhaps get worse races. Or maybe only beasts could, as Jake was unsure if humans could somehow evolve into something... not human.

He couldn't help but remember the Malefic Viper. He had once been a snake, a beast of some sort. But he had transformed to become a dragon, and even now, he had the form of a scaled, very human-looking man. Several considerable changes to his race appeared through that line of evolution, though always keeping the reptilian theme. For him to have had several variant races throughout that journey could only be expected.

Perhaps these badgers were the same. Variants appeared among them, providing better stats and skills. It would certainly explain why a level-gap of only a ten or so between badgers could mean so much.

An explanation he was sure to get in the future. For now, however, he had plenty of things to do.

The first thing he did was to retrieve his sword from the mouth of the beast. It took quite a bit of work to get it free, as it had been stuck between two teeth, and the creature had only made it worse as it tried to get it out, pressing it down into the flesh. Painful, to say the least.

Luckily the blade itself was fine. Jake had feared that it would be damaged, and as it didn't possess the repair enchantment, he would have no way of fixing it.

Next, he looked back at the notifications list and saw the new and improved Infused Powershot.

[Infused Powershot (Rare)] – Stamina as fuel - mana as a guide. Unlike a normal Powershot, the Infused Powershot does not require a long charging time but can be charged in a brief moment. The higher the magnitude of the charge, the greater the stamina and mana expenditure. Charging Infused Powershot may empower the skill further. Adds a small bonus to the effect of agility, strength, and intelligence when using Infused Powershot.

He was thrilled that the system had recognized his attempt and given him a new skill. He could feel the system helping him there towards the end, though it was only slightly. Honestly, he did most of it on a whim, somehow applying techniques he mainly used when doing alchemy.

As for the new skill, it was quite an improvement. It had been improved from Uncommon to Rare-rarity, and the charging time had been nearly removed. The scaling of the skill also now included intelligence, making Jake happy to finally use the stat. Well, he did have Touch of the Malefic Viper, but that skill required him to touch his opponent, making it quite hard to use against opponents like the Alpha that could rip him apart in melee.

His Alchemist of the Malefic Viper provided him 2 intelligence per level, while he also got 2 for every race level-up, giving him a total of 150 intelligence currently. It was his lowest stat by quite a bit, but he was happy that it finally had some use, at least.

Though he had to admit that the stat likely brought benefits he was unaware of. It was one of the big three mental stats, the others being wisdom and willpower, so it had to do something. Willpower, as an example, increased his mana regeneration, while his wisdom, of course, increased his maximum mana. If he had to guess, then intelligence maybe had something to do with the potency of mana?

Nevertheless, it felt good to finally have the stat mentioned as providing bonuses to a skill.

Infused Powershot was also far more powerful than the old Powershot. Or, the potential for it to be powerful was higher. Powershot relied solely on his stamina along with his physical body's ability to withstand the pent-up energy until he released it all in an explosion of might.

This new version used both mana and stamina. Now, the weapon was covered alongside Jake's body, making that also matter far more. The limiter on the amount of charged mana was the weapon used and Jake's ability to control the mana and stamina's equilibrium.

As an equilibrium was required, his limit of charged-up stamina was actually the same, as he had to use a corresponding amount of mana as stamina. The damage inflicted by overcharging the skill was also unchanged, though now it also risked breaking the weapon.

The skill's power was determined by the amount of mana and stamina combined, naturally making the skill far stronger. Though it wasn't a simple addition, making the power double. A fast shot without any charging time wasn't close to as strong as Jake's fully-charged Powershot before.

He could also feel that it wasn't like he couldn't do a Powershot like before, relying purely on stamina. He couldn't imagine many scenarios where he would do that, but he could. As for the final part of the skill...

This was where the system took entirely over and helped him. The release of the skill was entirely the system's doing, while Jake had only willed the way it was supposed to happen. How it managed to release the energy into the attack so perfectly was way, way above his pay-grade.

If it works, it works, I guess, Jake thought as he shrugged mentally. The system was a bit weird in many areas. Skills could clearly be unlocked or upgraded according to the user's actions, but he had yet to see any new skills being gained straight out. The option would just appear the next time you acquired the opportunity to unlock another skill.

Which, coincidentally, was very relevant currently as he had just hit level 40.

Ambitious Hunter class skills available

With no reason to delay, he accepted the prompt to unlock a new skill, as the long list of selections appeared before him.

The usual suspects were still there, with all the weapon skills still clogging up the beginning, followed by all the skills he had passed over while still a regular archer.

At 30, he had considered Hunter's Tracking and Hunter's Trapping Expertise quite a bit but had ultimately passed them in favor of Splitting Arrow. A decision he didn't regret.

He could see many situations where they would be useful, but he just didn't really feel like they appealed to him yet. Perhaps next time, he told himself, knowing full well that another, more attractive option would likely also present itself next time.

The exciting part of the skills was always the newcomers, after all. Of which there were a few - the first one not really that exciting, though.

[Infused Strike (Common)] – Sometimes, there is strength in simplicity. Charge a melee weapon with mana, striking for additional damage. Adds a minor bonus to the effect of intelligence and strength when using Infused Strike.

This skill was just... yeah. Perhaps it could be useful, but Jake doubted it would be anywhere close as useful as many of his other options.

Besides, melee wasn't his first choice, to begin with. While he saw himself as somewhat competent at it, the goal was ultimately just to find an opportunity to create some distance and return to using his bow.

The creation of the additional skill option also helped confirm the precedent that he would more or less directly create these new options. He was pretty damn sure that Infused Strike came as a result of Infused Powershot.

Of course, he was sure there were more complicated reasons behind the system's way of unlocking skills.

He naturally wasn't going to with Infused Strike. The next skill option also made it a lot easier to rule it out.

[Determination of the Ambitious Hunter (Rare)] – The Ambitious Hunter is not one to back down even in front of the most frightening foe. The mind a fortress, the hunter determined. Increases resistance to all mental and illusion based attacks. Increases resistance to suppressive effects. Adds a small bonus to the effect of Determination of the Ambitious Hunter based on willpower.

A passive defensive skill. A rare one at that. The effects seemed okay, though not necessarily that useful for Jake's current situation.

He hadn't met much in the vein of mind manipulation yet. But the thought of it scared him to death. The mind was a complicated thing, and Jake didn't like the idea of it being manipulated the slightest.

Imagining someone controlling you without you, yourself, even being aware of it was just downright chilling. To be a willing puppet just because of some fucked-up skill. Most mental magic was not like that, though, he hoped.

Thinking back, perhaps the Molerat Screechers and even the Alpha had used some sort of mental attack with their screeches. The attacks were not merely physical but had energy mixed in, momentarily jolting his mind, throwing his senses for a loop.

Of course, he had been fine due to his bloodline abilities making him not rely on his usual senses. But it had still been a harrowing experience and the feeling of vertigo far from pleasant.

The skill also provided resistance against illusions and suppressing effects. Both also things Jake hadn't really encountered as far as he knew.

Quite honestly, he wasn't much into the skill. While he believed it would be instrumental during certain situations, for now, he needed something to make him stronger immediately. The reason for that being quite simple... the dungeon wasn't done yet.

He still had the objective of defeating the Den Mother. While he had slain an Alpha, the beast hadn't been the big baddie. The Den Mother was likely a beast even stronger than the Alpha, so he needed something to help him in the fight against it. Something the final skill without a doubt would.

[Mark of the Ambitious Hunter (Rare)] – The prey is chosen, the hunt begins. Covertly mark a target, making you aware of their position at all times until the mark expires or is dispelled. All damage done to the marked target is increased. Additional bonus experience earned for slaying a marked target above your level. Adds a small bonus to the damage inflicted, the mark's duration, and the mark's subtlety based on perception.

The first part of the skill that allowed him to know his prey's position was kind of irrelevant to him currently. He had yet to meet a beast that would run away or abandon a fight, forcing him to hunt after it. However, he could see it being useful if he ever did clash with an enemy who made a retreat, such as if he had been able to mark William back then.

No, the reason why he wanted this skill was due to the damage increasing effect. This was also his first time seeing a skill that said it straight-up increased damage done. It was always an "increase effect of stat" or something like that.

The skill scratched both his itches: Firstly, to earn more power and secondly to explore the system's intricacies.

It even had that final bonus experience earned for killing foes above his level to top it off. Such a bonus already existed for everyone based on the kill notifications, but he assumed this one would only increase that bonus. This effect likely came from the "ambitious" part of the skill name, as it seemed pretty in line with his class's theme. Of course, this effect was also a first to see on a skill.

He didn't have much to think about as he accepted the skill and felt the information flood his brain. After a few moments, he knew exactly how to use the skill, just like the others.

Turning towards the cavern's exit, he walked past the Alpha as he gave it one last nod of approval, as a bit of excitement started building in his chest. The fight with the Den Mother was sure to be even more exhilarating.