

## Hunter 81

### Chapter 81: The Great White Stag

The arrow met the doe's turning forehead, as it didn't stop in the least upon encountering the hard skull but cut through like it was made of butter. It went through the brain and, because of the upwards angle it was shot from, into the beast's neck. There, it went through its throat and out beneath its right hind leg. However, what came out at the end was not an arrow but merely a few remnants of energy.

In its wake, it left everything destroyed. The entire head blew up, and the internal organs were shredded into a paste. No amount of healing could save the doe. It was dead before any of its companions could even react.

Even if they had tried to react, they now had their own issues to deal with. Another, albeit far weaker Infused Powershot, pierced through the air right towards the Great White Stag. It managed to block it with a barrier, but the arrow still shattered it and managed to penetrate a few inches into the stag's side.

Less than a second later, a third shot arrived aimed at one of the two remaining does. Even with its reduced power, it was not to be trifled with as it hit the beast in its left front leg. The arrow pierced right through, resulting in the doe stumbling to the side.

However, the fourth arrow found no purchase as the last White Doe dodged the blow with elegance.

Jake's initial assault had held nothing back. With no regard to his stamina and mana consumption, he had managed to kill one and injure two. Despite the two damaged ones only being minor, it was enough to deliver the arrowheads' liquid death. As he observed, he could already see the necrosis setting in at a visible rate.

Not that he was about to let up just yet. The arrows continued raining down, this time with Splitting Arrows. His aim was on the already injured doe, hoping to capitalize further on its limited mobility. He delayed the splitting of the arrow as long as possible to increase accuracy, forcing it to only clone itself when it got closer - another perk of his increased ability to control energy. Finally, when it was only 30 meters from the doe, it split as Jake could no longer hold back the split's activation. But he had achieved his goal.

The first barrage managed to hit with five of the nine arrows from the split. The Great White Stag had managed to help its companion in the last moment but only blocked one of the arrows that would have hit. Sadly, the one stopped arrow was the poisoned one - a deliberate move by the stag, no doubt.

With the initial element of surprise over, the beasts started to organize themselves. The wound on the stag was already gone, its hide back to pristine condition once more. The wounded doe was also healing fast as light descended upon it, but it was not in fighting condition yet. The last White Doe had already begun its charge towards Jake.

Something that proved to be a mistake. With the distance between them and the stag still busily focused on healing, the doe was isolated with no support.

Individually the does had never been a big issue; They only got annoying to deal with with a healer behind them. Jake felt no pressure from a single isolated beast.

He kept bombarding it with arrows while it ran towards him. Every shot was a Splitting Arrow and coupled with its momentum, it was unable to avoid all of them. It did, annoyingly so, avoid every single poisoned one.

It only suffered minor injuries here and there before it was only a few dozen meters away. Jake believed he still had time to fire a few more arrows but was interrupted as the doe subverted his expectations.

In a flash of light, the doe did what Jake could only describe as teleportation. Like a beam of light, it appeared right before him - but what surprised him even more was its method of attack.

A bright blade of light was now protruding from its forehead, not an antler-shaped one, but an edge of pure energy. Its head was pointed downwards as the blade was clearly aimed towards his midsection, and with a swipe of its head, it attempted to cleave him in half.

But Jake was fast enough to react in time. He awkwardly jumped backward, resulting in the blade still cutting into his chest with its very tip. Instead of soft skin, it instead encountered dark green scales. The edge was stuck dead in its tracks, its swiping motion interrupted.

The tip of the blade chipped as the blow did nothing, clearly leaving the White Doe distraught. Capitalizing on the momentary display of weakness, his bow disappeared, and a weapon appeared in each of his hands. A sword and a fang-shaped dagger approached the beast from both sides as it still had its head lowered at an awkward angle.

In a moment of panic, the beast hesitated, which allowed him to land a solid blow. His Venomfang penetrated its neck, while his sword went for its head. It never arrived, however, as the doe was awoken from the dagger.

With a loud bellow, its entire body exploded in a flash of light. Jake felt a searing sensation on his whole body, but the blow was more physical than energy. Like a bubble expanding around the beast, he was pushed back slightly.

The flash had blinded his eyes, but he ignored it as he relied on his Sphere anyway. At first, he had believed that it had tried to blow itself up, but it seemed only to try and create some distance. The blade of light reformed as it attempted to ram him, clearly trying to take advantage of his temporary blindness.

An incorrect assumption he gladly took advantage of. Acting as if blind, Jake let it nearly hit him before he moved slightly to the side, simultaneously summoning another set of scales to protect his flank. The blade scraped under his raised right arm as its head followed suit.

He quickly brought down his arm as he put the beast in a chokehold. A Touch of Malefic Viper quickly invaded the beast's body, making it bellow once more, this time in pain.

It exploded once more in the same bubble of light, but his hold was too strong. He kept channeling the Touch as the health of the doe slowly drained.

With his other hand, he started stabbing the beast in its abdomen with his Venomfang, doing even more damage.

The doe struggled for only a few seconds, releasing light constantly as it seared Jake's unscaled skin. However, in the end, it succumbed to the constant influx of poison, wrecking it from within.

He let the beast go as it dropped lifelessly to the ground.

Not even ten seconds had passed from the moment the beast teleported before him till it died, not even allowing any of the other beasts to engage him. It had been an uneven fight from the beginning.

His eyes were still scorched, and his sphere didn't detect any enemies within it. He refocused his vital energy, healing one of his eyes as fast as he could. Opening it, everything was blurry, but it was enough to land his Mark. He landed it on the doe, which was fine as that was his next target anyway.

Summoning his bow once more, he resumed his attack. Without his eyesight, one would imagine that his accuracy would suffer immensely, but it didn't matter with his tactic. He could feel where his enemy was, and that was enough for now.

Pulling an arrow out of his quiver, he nocked it and starting shooting once more. He could feel the beast's reaction instantly, meaning their attention had undoubtedly been on him. But from how slowly the doe avoided the blow, it had to still be wounded. Jake was a bit surprised the Great White Stag hadn't managed to heal it but didn't have time to question it.

Pressing his advantage, he continued firing. His ammunition was limited, but he had to make do. Rushing into melee was an option, but he preferred to buy time for now while hopefully still doing some damage. He could already feel his eyes healing.

As he fired, he focused on the movements of the doe. Jake, as an archer in the secular world before the integration, had concentrated on shooting stationary targets. He had improved immensely in technique over the last month or so in the tutorial and learned to hit moving targets far better.

Now, without his eyesight, he was forced to push this notion to the extreme. With 150 meters between himself and his target, he was sure to miss if he simply shot directly for his foe. Splitting Arrow helped, but it didn't make his aim foolproof.

Focusing on the doe's movements, he released an arrow aimed slightly to the right of the beast, followed swiftly by an extremely fast Infused Powershot to the left of it. His hope was to feint it into dodging the first arrow - a feint that worked.

As it moved slightly away from the first arrow, the second far faster Infused Powershot hit it straight in its chest, penetrating all the way through and out the other side. Far less damaging than his initial Infused Powershot, but the damage was done.

With it lethally damaged, the next two arrows quickly finished it off. Jake, of course, couldn't directly see his Infused Powershot hitting, but the beast's reaction to the shot was enough for him. The notification of the kill two arrows later sealed the deal.

Now all that remained was the Great White Stag. It hadn't moved at all for quite a while, and he was slightly confused at its actions.

It hadn't put up a single shield to protect the White Doe he just took down. From how fast other stags healed, it should have had ample time to heal it too. But it had only done some quick healing. His vision still blurry; he barely managed to see it and land his Mark. The system without a doubt helping him.

He fired an arrow at the stag but got no feedback from the shot. If he had to guess, the stag must have blocked it.

Jake pushed his vital energy to heal his eyes faster as the seconds ticked by. The stag did nothing, and he felt that shooting any arrows towards it would be a waste of time.

With him actively focusing on healing his eyes, it only took ten or so seconds for him. Opening his eyes once more, the first thing that struck him was how dark it was.

The sun was gone, and the sky was filled with stars. The stars and a single moon was floating far above. Jake's eyes widened as he quickly looked around. Seven pillars of light sprung up from around the dungeon, all shooting towards the moon above. Looking at them, he could almost feel the immense mana within.

Each source of light originated from one of the pools around the dungeon. But that wasn't all of it.

The paths between the pools also started to give off a faint glow. Like a spark had been ignited, a pattern of light was drawn on the plains. Each pond connected, each path a line upon a more extraordinary work of art.

And in the middle of it all was the middle pond.

The stag stood inside it, the water nearly reaching its belly. Its entire body gave off an ethereal glow as it seemed to be the one directing it all.

Whatever the hell was happening, Jake seriously doubted it was anything good for him. He would have to stop it, one way or another.

His first attempt was to take down the stag. He charged his Infused Powershot, imitating the first one he had shot. It was his full power, as it carried everything he had.

He released the arrow as it fired towards the stag. But the second it reached the edge of the pond, it encountered an impassible barrier of light. The barrier shimmered as it was revealed to be a near-transparent pillar of light descending from the moon.

Around the pillar appeared more than a hundred ghostly apparitions of does and stags. All were running in concert as they defended The Great Stag, powered the shield that protected the middle pond. He even saw three particularly powerful figures, identical to the three White Does.

The Great White Stag didn't even seem to register his attack. In fact, it seemed only to continue shining brighter and brighter. He could clearly feel the amount of mana condensing, meaning the stag only got more and more powerful the longer it stood there.

With his most potent attack utterly ineffective, he quickly tried to find a new plan. Would the barrier block him if he approached it in melee? Could he break it with a continued assault? Should he just let it run its course?

All the ghostly beasts protected the central area... and Jake quite honestly didn't feel like approaching would be wise.

As he considered his options, his eyes darted around until it landed on one of the closest ponds. An idea sprung to mind. He would have to somehow stop the transfer of power from the ponds.

Rushing down from his vantage point, he ran at full speed towards the pond. Should he maybe collect all the water? Or could he somehow drain it all off somewhere, or perhaps somehow cover the hole?



All of his solutions seemed either stupid, ineffective, or extremely slow to pull off. He would have to do something sooner rather than later.

He made it to the pond only a few seconds later. It was indeed the ponds giving off light towards the moon. The water was glowing with power, the mana intense.

Jake understood. The dungeon was a giant formation. A pattern, a circle of magic, or whatever term one wished to use. It was the reason why the deer ran between the ponds. They created the lines between the focal points - the ponds.

And now that formation was active. Active, and from the looks of it, empowering the lord of the dungeon, the Great White Stag. Perhaps the deaths of all other living beings in the dungeon had all been a part of this grand ritual. A grand scheme he had walked headfirst into.

Now he understood why he never felt any particular fear from facing the stag in open combat. Because it never planned on fighting him openly, to begin with.

The mana in the air was almost visible by now as Jake was forced to make a decision. The exit of the dungeon was long gone, meaning the fight was unavoidable. Not that he would have ever run.

As he looked at the small pond before him and the massive amount of mana within, he couldn't help but think of alchemy for some reason. His concoctions and how much the pond reminded him of a mixing bowl.

That stray thought led to an idea. Why couldn't he make it into a concoction?

The idea was insane, but Jake didn't need to create anything worthwhile. He just needed to fuck up the mix.

He needed to make the most unstable shitshow of a concoction he could manage.

And feed that clusterfuck of toxins straight into that damn moon.