

Hunter 88

Chapter 88: Many Rats! Handle it!

The clattering got louder as Jake felt tensions rise. He summoned his bow and nocked an arrow, prepared for whatever may appear. He could hear the sound coming from the far end of the basin below. Whatever it was, it was coming from there.

The barrier of mana felt completely impassable when he touched it, and it had also cut off his strings of mana. With even those strings cut off, he seriously doubted he had any way of getting through it even with Shadow Vault, which meant he was stuck with whatever was coming towards him.

As the sound echoed, he saw the first sign of movement in his sphere. Dozens of small rats entered his sphere at once, heading towards the stairs leading up to him.

Jake didn't even hesitate as he released a Splitting Arrow. He multitasked and identified one as he nocked another arrow.

[Molerat Swarmer – lvl 46]

His first arrow gave him several kills, but it barely made a difference. Hundreds of the things inhabited the basin below and were all now swarming towards him.

Jake managed to shoot four more Splitting Arrows, killing more than twenty rats before the first one reached him. He cursed his injured shoulder that had slowed down his speed as he summoned his sword and dagger.

The first rat was cut cleanly in two as it jumped towards him, with the second one suffering a similar fate. They were all the size of common housecats, which made them huge for rats but relatively small compared to anything else he had encountered so far.

Five more rats died before one managed to slip through and tried to bite him on the leg. Its teeth didn't sink into flesh as expected but were stopped by the fur pants he wore. It still did some damage, but it failed to draw blood.

This made Jake jump back from the pain as he attempted to keep the beasts at bay. Individually they didn't pose a threat; heck, a dozen didn't even matter to him.

The issue was that he wasn't dealing with just a few dozen rats. In his sphere, he only saw more and more rats entering. It was as if an endless wave of rodents had been unleashed upon him, and if he didn't do anything, he would soon drown in it.

The only thing giving him any respite currently was the limited space on the stairs leading up to him. But even that advantage was slowly being removed as the endless stream of rats started piling up below as they all tried to climb towards him.

Rats also began ascending the walls of the basin below, slowly closing in on from his flanks. He was well and truly surrounded. The only place with no attackers was behind him, where the barrier blocked him off.

He cut them down one after another until he could no longer keep them all at bay.

A rat slipped through and was about to land a bite on his stomach when a set of black scales appeared and blocked it. Instead, its teeth chipped as if it had tried to bite steel.

Jake no longer held anything back as he covered his upper body in scales. His pants and boots protected his legs and feet, but his exposed upper body needed protection badly.

His blade and dagger danced through the air in a reckless assault to anything around him. He no longer focused on defense but only on killing anything in his vicinity.

He instantly started to feel the mana drain. While the rats couldn't bite through his scales, they still wore them down and forced him to spend mana repairing and maintaining them. It was unsustainable in the long run, but for now, it was still manageable.

Minutes passed, but it felt like hours to Jake as he was in a constant state of focus. His instincts and sphere worked in tandem as he fought less like a human and more like an efficient, almost bestial killing machine.

It quickly became clear to him, however, that this wasn't going to end well. Despite the hundreds of dead enemies, he didn't feel like he had even put a dent in their numbers.

He had reached level 60 already, but he didn't have the option to choose a skill despite that. The system wouldn't allow him to do so while still fighting, closing off the possibility of getting a skill to get him out of the situation.

No, he had to try something else. Instead of staying where he was, he charged forward, slicing and dicing anything in front of him as he advanced. He had to find the source of the rats.

Fighting through the basin was slow and tiring. Jake's progress was impeded by waves of rats trying to climb over each other to bite him. He stepped on several, nearly falling, and was repeatedly forced to expend more and more mana to maintain Scales of the Malefic Viper.

He had somehow managed to carve a path through the beasts for over 60 meters when his sphere finally picked up something - a figure unlike the army of rats attacking him.

A tall figure stood at the opposite end of the basin in front of yet another dark barrier blocking off what he assumed to be the path forward.

At first, he believed it to be a human, but soon it became clear it was barely humanoid. It stood on two legs but had a chubby body covered in fur and a staff in one of its claws. Claws that even had an extra growth resembling a thumb.

Its face looked a lot like an average rat, but it wore a ragged robe covering its fur. He focused on it through his sphere while he fought and managed to identify it.

[Ratman Swarm Controller – lvl 81]

Its level was far higher than any of the rats, and the name made its role pretty damn obvious.

With a target in sight, he continued with renewed vigor. The problem of the constant swarm of rats didn't diminish in the least, however, as they kept coming.

There was a finite amount, but their total number was in the thousands. They were spread throughout the basin initially, and many were still just gathering, likely at the controller's behest.

Jake had to finish it off and finish it fast. Taking a risk, he started building up mana within himself as he continued getting closer to the controller step by step. After a few seconds, he felt that he had built up sufficient energy as he released it.

An explosion of pure mana appeared around him, briefly pushing back everything. The rats, air, even the dark mana was pushed back. It hadn't done any real damage to the rats, but it had created the opening he needed.

With a Badger's Jump, he shot up to the ceiling, nearly smashing into it. At the same time, threads of dark mana shot out of him as they attached themselves to the stones above.

Instead of falling back down, he hung by thin threads of dark mana. It wouldn't last for long, but all he needed was a single shot. Taking out his bow, he began channeling an Infused Powershot. His stance was shoddy, and it wouldn't be the best he could fire... but it would have to make do.

The rats didn't idle as they still tried reaching for him. They climbed on the walls and even managed to dig their claws into the ceiling as they tried crawling towards him. At the same time, the rats around the Controller started building a barrier with their own bodies.

The controller was just barely inside his sphere, and even without it, he had used Mark of the Ambitious Hunter on it before he jumped. His energy continued building up in his arms and bow as the rats got closer and closer.

Right before the rats reached him and his threads broke, he released the stored energy as the arrow flew forth. The explosion of mana broke his mana strings and sent him falling towards the ground, as he kept his focus on the controller.

It summoned a wall of dark mana in front of it in a last-ditch effort, but to no avail. The arrow shot right through the wall of rats and pierced the dark mana like it hadn't even been there. It continued right into the controller's chest, blowing a hole the size of a fist through the ratman.

The moment the arrow hit, all the rats seemed to freeze up briefly. Those on the ceiling and walls lost grip as they fell down, and the rats fell over each other in their moment of confusion.

Jake didn't receive a notification meaning the Controller still lived, but he had a golden opportunity. While falling, he quickly soaked his dagger and sword in Blood of the Malefic Viper, ready to continue his assault.

He sprung forth upon hitting the ground and used Shadow Vault in one fluid motion as he launched towards the still reeling ratman.

It held one claw to its chest and raised its staff with its other, smashing it into the ground. When it hit, it echoed throughout the basin, and all the rats around Jake started moving to attack him once more. But it was already too late.

Jake reached the Controller and tried to stab it. The ratman managed to block with its staff at the very last moment, but it failed to stop the follow-up kick to its gaping wound, making it tumble backward. It didn't manage to collect itself before a blade swept in from the side, decapitating it.

With the Controller dead, the rats around him once more lost their cohesion. Jake reached out and grabbed the staff dropped by the ratman, and quickly checked the description.

[Swarm Control Rod (Unique)] – A rod used to control the Molerat Swarmers. Lost upon exiting the Forgotten Sewers. It can only be used with compatible skills. Upon the destruction of the staff, kill any bound by it.

That description said all he needed to know as Jake tried smashing the staff into the ground as hard as he could. Sadly, all it did was hurt his already aching arm as he didn't even scratch it. Even his Venomfang didn't do anything.

The rats were still confused, but soon they started collecting themselves a bit. They were no longer acting with cohesion, but instead individually. And individually, they still wanted to take a bite out of the tasty human in the basin.

Jake desperately tried breaking the staff to no avail as the rats closed in on him once more. He tried injecting mana into it, using Touch of the Malefic Viper, and even putting it into his spatial storage. Nothing worked, and he couldn't put it in his storage at all.

As he was about to just throw it aside and try and fight the damn things, he thought of his Alchemical Flame. The flames were the hallmark of many alchemists, allowing one to break down materials and ingredients while also acting as a heat source.

He summoned the flame around the staff, and momentarily thought it another failure until a small crack appeared on the staff's body. Pushing even more mana into the skill, the flames erupted in power as the staff slowly started getting broken down.

As it did so, he swung the burning staff at nearby rats to keep them at bay until finally, it broke in two mid-swing. The rat he had tried to hit dropped lifelessly to the floor along with all the others. Instantly the basin went from a flurry of activity to complete stillness.

Jake got flooded with many notifications for the kills but only got a single level despite the thousands of rats that just died.

'DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 62 - Stat points allocated, +4 free points

During the course of the battle, he had earned 3 levels in total, counting the final one. It was pretty apparent that he got less experience from them due to how he killed thousands of rats by breaking the staff. If he didn't, he would have likely gained three or maybe even four levels just from smashing a rod.

And speaking of the staff, he noticed ashes left behind by burning it. The wood had a strange purple color, almost as if it was ground up crystals. Using Identify confirmed it wasn't anything ordinary.

[Lesser Ethwood Ashes (Uncommon)] – The ashes left behind by burnt Lesser Ethwood. Used in a myriad of recipes related to the soul and mind. Has no effect upon direct consumption.

Using his necklace, he didn't have to scoop up the ashes as he simply deposited it directly into the spatial storage. There wasn't that much left after burning the staff, and he had no idea what to use it for, but with so much space left remaining in his storage, he saw no reason not to hoard.

Jake sat down on the floor amidst the corpses of rats as he breathed heavily. He was pretty damn drained of both stamina and mana as he had freely been using skills during the entire fight, not holding anything back.

His pants had small holes in places, but by supplying mana, the self-repair enchant got to work as they started mending. The fight had gone as well as one could expect, though. He must have multiplied his total kill count by many times during this one dungeon dive. One point that especially experienced a lot of growth was his tutorial points.

He had earned full points from all the rats he had killed. Even those that died after smashing the staff, making his total amount multiply instantly. He still had no use for the points currently, and his current guess was that they only show their worth after completing the tutorial, which meant that they were of no importance or consequence for now. If he failed to defeat the King of the Forest, it wouldn't matter anyway.

Jake couldn't help but find it kind of funny, though, that the shitty sewer dungeon had gone from being the least effective source of experience and tutorial points to the most rewarding in such a short period. Then again, it came with associated risks.

Without his scales, he would have been eaten up whole, and without his bloodline allowing him to be aware of his surroundings, he would have likely died before even reaching here. He could only imagine how horrible the dungeon would be for a regular party entering. Though, of course, they would have their own methods to survive and progress.

After examining his body and waiting a bit to be entirely sure no more enemies came, he entered meditation. Finally, he had the time and opportunity to pick a new class skill.