

Hunter 99

Chapter 99: Going with the flow

Jake tended to be rather good at predicting what the response to his attacks would be. He had expected the closest boars to rush towards their now dead comrade, or perhaps to all start searching frantically for the killer.

It turns out that this time Jake had predicted a bit wrong. Just a tiny bit. While the big piggies didn't react much to him channeling mana, they apparently really didn't like it when someone made the ground explode and killed one of their pals.

In fact, they liked it so little they all appeared to have gone berserk. More than 10 Steeltusk Boars were currently rushing red-eyed towards the pillar Jake was hiding on, the ground shaking beneath their every step. It wasn't just their footfalls causing the shaking either. Mana swirled in the air as rocks of all sizes rose around them.

The enraged beasts, however, had one major issue. They had nothing to attack. They reached the corpse of their comrade, full of fire and fury, with no outlet in sight.

Jake had smartly focused every fiber of his being on standing absolutely still while covered by his camouflage cloak, channeling everything he had into utilizing Advanced Stealth.

Without any immediate target, the boars did as any reasonably enraged beast would do. They began destroying everything around where their comrade died - including the pillar he was hiding on.

Huge boulders started flying about, and the pillar itself began being ripped apart. One of the beasts even rammed the thing, causing it to shake.

Jake, getting the hint, jumped off the pillar, hoping to land behind the boars surrounding it. He fell through the air, boars still in his sphere as he observed them. He watched them all through his fall, and not a single one of them noticed him.

That is until his feet hit the ground. As if he had set off an alarm, all of the beasts turned towards him in an instant, eyes red, gleaming with a thirst for revenge.

Well, fuck, Jake thought as he legged it.

He sprinted straight back towards the gorge, the enraged beasts following him with more vigor than ever before. Scratch that, it wasn't just vigor. They were actually significantly faster than they had been before, catching up to him at a pace far faster than he found comfortable.

Forced to use Shadow Vault more than three times in less than ten seconds, he knew the situation wasn't sustainable. He did manage to reach the gorge once more, but all that did was to make his path of retreat more linear.

The gorge was the only place he could flee to, though. The rest of the valley was full of more boars and, of course, the Horde Leader itself. Running through that would only serve to increase the number of crazed beasts chasing him.

So, Jake ran through the gorge, the stampede close behind him. They didn't even bother flinging spells at him, but the shaking caused by their running did slow him down slightly. He had to Shadow Vault

repeatedly to get just a small semblance of distance, but in mere seconds they would catch up once more.

Jake's mind worked at high speed, trying to find a solution. Stop and fight? No way he could kill them all; he counted 14 of the damn things, all around or above level 80. It wouldn't be impossible to win, but he would likely have to use his Moment of the Primal Hunter as well as everything else he got. The end result would still be him out of commission for quite a while. Fighting was swiftly designated to last resort.

Keep fleeing? He could lose focus for a mere moment and get impaled or run out of stamina far faster than them. They didn't appear to slow down either. Based on what he knew about the boars, endurance wasn't an area they lacked in.

Potshots were also out of the question. No way he could manage to shoot a single arrow as things were. Even if he did manage to shoot an arrow, the damage it would do would be negligible.

As his head churned for ideas, he also observed the boars close enough to be within his sphere. He noticed that the air around them seemed to give off a faint sheen. It reminded him a lot of the Blade of Nature guy he had fought so long ago.

Were the pigs doing something similar? They were clearly boosted by something. Jake kept observing them as he dodged, and he felt the energy slowly seeping out. It wasn't mana; no, it was stamina. Somehow the beasts were burning through stamina to strengthen themselves.

Jake had tried something like that a fair bit of time ago. It had ended in exploding limbs as he went too far with the energy. But while he overloaded it, he did feel the increase in power. It was to a crazy level, but it also came with crazy drawbacks.

What the boars did appeared to be similar in nature. Back then, Jake's problem had been the lack of an outlet for the energy, making it repeatably build up in his arms in a constant cycle. His final act of desperation had been to release all the energy at once, hence the exploding arms.

Their outlet wasn't exploding their limbs, no, it was their entire bodies. As the energy was burned through, they released it through their pores. A concept Jake had theorized long ago but hadn't dared to try.

Now, however, the circumstances pushed him to it. He decided to try something he had feared to try before. His control of energy had only increased since then, and he thoroughly believed that if these damn pigs could do it, so could he. Skill or not be damned.

As he ran, he began to look inwards. He felt the inner energy that flowed through his body - stamina. It was in a constant cycle as it circulated through the metaphysical veins he had come to call meridians. He could feel the energy moving faster now that he was running than it usually did while idle.

Stamina, as he had already explored, was like the fuel of the body. It constantly circulated to keep him moving and fighting. A more powerful body naturally required more fuel, explaining why stamina expenditure increased with his physical stats.

When he had been level 1, a measly 80 stamina could keep him up and awake for an entire day. Now he would be lucky if it could keep him fighting for half an hour, even without using skills.

As his power increased, so did the power of the stamina flowing through his system. As he expended more stamina and performed more requiring tasks, the speed of the flow increased. If that was true... perhaps the opposite was too. If he increased the speed and/or power of the flow, his own power and ability to do more difficult tasks increased.

And now... he would finally put it to the test.

He focused on the flow within. He felt the energy in every crevice of his body, the constant idyllic flow. And then he pushed it. He pushed the flow ever so slightly to move faster. For the cycle to rotate more quickly. And the energy listened.

The cycle's speed increased only a little while Jake focused every bit of willpower he had to control it. At the same time, he felt the changes outside his physical body.

His running speed increased. Every footfall was faster than the one before. The boars that were only a few meters from him, now being slowly left behind.

Jake felt the power in his body swell. He felt stronger and faster than before. It felt like when he had gotten one of the titles that increased his stats by a percentage. But this wasn't something as fantastic as that. Certainly not as sustainable.

The quiet river that was his meridians was now amidst a brewing storm. The wind pushed the energy to flow faster and faster, while Jake focused all of his willpower to stem the tide. It was challenging to do while at the same time running and not falling over from the shaking ground. His instincts, once again coming to the rescue.

With his body being on autopilot running, his foci could be entirely on his internal struggle. The experiment had worked. The flow of the stamina had increased, and so had his power. Now the issue was to let the rampant energy not rampage through and blow up his entire body in a - what albeit would be - glorious shower of blood.

He began to control the energy more, willing it to slow down as much as he could. But he knew he needed an outlet. But with the external pressures on his body, it was hard.

Soon his eyes picked up a glimmer of hope. He had managed to make it all the way to the entrance of the dungeon once more. More importantly, was the fact that the barrier that was blocking it was gone.

Without hesitation, he leaped up to the small cave, the boars hot on his tail. They couldn't fit in the cave from what he had seen, but it wasn't a bet he was willing to take. He placed his hand on the portal-door and instantly was transported outside.

The second he was out, he sat himself down in meditation. The slight slip of focus from exiting the dungeon had thrown the energy ravaging his meridians into disarray. With renewed will and his undivided attention, he grabbed hold of the energy to control it.

With every ounce of will, he managed to control the flow somewhat. But he still needed to find an outlet for the energy. It was still ever so slowly building up, and even if he felt himself get stronger by the moment, he also felt himself get more unstable.

His body began to make small jerks here and there - a twitching muscle or a tapping finger outside of his control. Like mini seizures, symptoms increased in frequency as he felt out the energy flow, looking for any way to let it out.

He was sitting still, but his body desired to move; it demanded to move. But he knew indulging it would only worsen his condition. He needed it to calm down and not stress it further.

Seconds that felt like hours ticked by as he sat there, twitching uncontrollably outwardly while being full of serenity inwardly.

Until finally... he found something. As if a small valve opened, energy started slowly fizzling out of his nose and mouth. Soon it also came out of his ears and even from his eyes.

More and more outlets appeared now on his skin. From his arms, chest, legs, every single pore on his body began letting out the pent up energy.

He kept a steeled resolve and control as he meticulously let out the energy a little at a time not to injure himself more than necessary. However, he felt immense fatigue overtake his body as more and more energy was let out.

Not that his mind experienced that at all. It made sure that the flow of energy slowly decreased as the excess energy left his body.

It took nearly an hour before the stamina stopped leaving his body and his internal flow returned to its normal idle state. The balance was restored, and his body finally felt at ease as the twitching and spasms stopped.

His entire body was covered in sweat. The stamina was intangible, so it just passed straight through his clothes, but that didn't mean the physical stress didn't still exhaust him.

With his mind, he summoned a barrel of water from his spatial storage and climbed into it. Or he tried to climb into it but was unable to even lift his own body weight.

Giving up, he just lay back on the hard ground. His entire body was aching. It felt like he had just done the most insane exercise imaginable, and everything hurt. Looking at his stamina, he also saw that it was down to only a bit over 300, which is to say less than 10%.

In a bit over an hour, he had expended around 3000 stamina just from speeding up the circulation. He could use more if he kept using his skills in quick succession, but the drainage was still intense, to say the least. Heck, he was even meditating during it all, making the actual amount consumed even more than 3000.

All of that even ignoring the fact that his health had also dropped to less than half. The internal damage and overexertion had resulted in him repeatably pulling his muscles and overloading his organs, forcing his body to keep healing itself.

Weakness was something Jake hadn't experienced in a long time. It wasn't as if he was utterly helpless, though.

Strings of mana were extended from all over his skin, pushing the ground beneath him and lifting him up. Without moving a single muscle, he managed to get his body into the barrel purely with mana usage.

Feeling the cool water washing over him was relaxing, and he felt his tense muscles relax a bit more. It did little to alleviate his actual exhaustion, but it helped treat the symptoms. It also helped wash off all the sweat and dirt.

He was still fully clothed but frankly didn't care much. The only thing he had thrown off was the cloak as he soaked in the barrel for a while. As he sat there, he felt the mental exhaustion also strike. He was tired, and he needed a rest. Meditation wouldn't help against that; he needed to sleep.

Thinking back, the last time he truly slept was just before fighting the Den Mother. The constant fighting, meditation, and levels had somehow managed to keep him going, but it could only do so much. He was getting closer to not needing sleep at all, but not quite there yet.

What he also hadn't forgotten was the nightmare that followed his last sleep. Without a doubt, something that had helped him to avoid the desire to sleep, both consciously and unconsciously. He remembered the influence of a 'fake Andy' that tried to push him to do things he didn't want to.

Lifting himself out of the makeshift bath, he didn't even bother to summon the bed as he lay there on the ground. His clothes would have to make do as bedding. He dreaded what images his mind would conjure up upon sleeping, but he couldn't delay it any longer.

His only hope was that his body would be back to normal by the time he awoke and that he wouldn't sleep for too long.

Closing his eyes and relaxing his body, he fell asleep instantly.