

Hunter 39

Chapter 39: Powershot

Jake cursed under his breath as he walked through the narrow cave. He had totally forgotten the shitty location of the challenge dungeon. At least he could walk out a lot faster than he had gotten in.

He was also happy to finally get his weapons back. He had missed his bow. It would have been a great stress-reliever in the dungeon to do some target practice. The quiver had naturally also come back with the bow.

One of the two daggers he had were now redundant after having gotten the Dagger of Bloodletting. It was common-rarity, and despite being made of bone, it was far sharper and far more durable than his steel knives. And that was ignoring the enchant to make things bleed more.

Another absolute positive was how damn comfortable his new boots were. It was utterly illogical how some old worn leather boots could feel like walking on clouds while simultaneously getting your feet massaged. He feared that he would never be able to go back to regular footwear.

The winding tunnel took him only half an hour to go through this time, though he purposefully ignored all the blue mushrooms in his path. He had had enough of those, for now, and with his bow in hand, he felt himself become slightly restless. He hadn't fought anything for thirty days after just getting a taste of it.

He had briefly considered seeking out his colleagues. But he was afraid that he was not powerful enough. He had minimal information and had no idea what kind of growth all the other survivors had gone through.

Professions are inherently not combat-focused, while classes are. Jake's class only at level 9 meant that he had fewer combat skills. His strength, agility, and endurance were his three lowest stats by quite a bit too. The stats that also happened to be the most important, along with perception, for archers.

Reaching the end of the cavern, he once more found himself at the foot of the hill. He couldn't help but take a deep breath as he looked around and took in everything within his Sphere of Perception. He had been confined for a month, either in small halls or the cave and garden. While the garden was spacious, it was nothing compared to the vast forest.

His sphere instantly picked something up that put a smile on his face. A small group of deer was on the hill above him. They were a bit larger than he remembered but based on the one evolved stag among them, it seemed like the same group he had chosen to avoid before entering the dungeon. Must be fate, he joked to himself.

There were five of them: one stag and four deer.

Making his way up the hill, he could only describe his feelings as childish anticipation. He had grown stronger in so many ways, his stats increasing manifold, and yet he had no outlet in the dungeon. He had nothing to test himself against.

He was more powerful than he had ever been now, and he had far more methods than ever before. At the top of the hill, he finally saw the beasts. The stag's antlers were glowing a faint white light, while both the deer and stag had rune-like motifs covering their hides. They weren't even trying to hide that the beasts were magical in some way or another.

Using Identify on the stag, he was happy that the now upgraded skill showed the beast's name and level.

[Lucenti Stag – lvl 24]

Identifying the other ones, he found them all in the low 20's, the weakest only 19.

[Lucenti Deer – lvl 19]

Despite their levels being literally twice that of his class, he felt not a shred of threat from them. This meant that he, with no hesitation, took out his bow while at the same time taking out a hemotoxin of inferior quality that he had stored in the necklace.

He dipped five arrows in the concoction, one for each beast. He had absolute confidence in winning, but not in killing them quickly without the use of poison. He still remembered his quite horrible damage output before he entered, and even with the overall stat growth, it likely still sucked.

But a poison would make up for that. The hemotoxin would increase the bleeding from any wounds Jake made and, of course, deal damage in general. Toxins were most commonly cured by merely having your vital energy overpower and wash it out.

This naturally consumed health points. Some intelligent beings would simply allow a poison like a hemotoxin to remain in their system until it naturally dissipated as its effect was relatively harmless as long as you didn't take any hits.

The beasts, however, had proved themselves to be anything but intelligent. They seemed to function off pure aggression and instinct. And trying to get rid of the poison in your system seemed like a somewhat

instinctual thing to Jake. He would know; his instincts were quite something if his bloodline ability was to be believed.

The only slight annoyance with using poisons was the fact that the poison had to stay in its bottle or it would lose its potency fast. Unlike normal pre-system poisons, the mana within concocted poisons would become ineffective within ten minutes or so of leaving the bottle. His Malefic Viper's Poison did extend that duration, allowing it to stay toxic for up to half an hour, so that did help quite a lot.

He also couldn't just soak an arrow in poison and then put it in his storage. As the arrows were conjured, they couldn't be stored, or they would just turn to mana whenever he tried. Not that it would have helped anyway, as the 'duration' of the poison still decreased despite the temporal suspension in the necklace. He tried it with a dagger by coating it in poison, but when he took it out an hour later, all the potency in the poison was gone.

Having his arrows prepared, he nocked the first poisoned one and aimed at the stag. The arrow was loosed with great speed and power as it flew true and hit the stag in the neck, only penetrating with the arrowhead - more than enough to deliver the poison, though.

Momentarily stumbling, the stag, and the rest of its group, for that matter, were obviously taken by surprise. None of the deer had any chance to react before another arrow hit one of them, followed by another and then another.

Jake shot faster and more accurately than ever before, as he hit the last deer just as they had located him and started charging. Deep trails of blood were left after every beast, and Jake was happy to continue peppering them in wounds as they approached.

Only three beasts managed to reach him as Jake had successfully hit the stag in one of its legs, nearly severing it. A second deer was stuck in the eye and was now lying and spasming on the ground, likely

only waiting to bleed out. Which left Jake with only three beasts to deal with in melee as the stag very probably wasn't getting back up.

The other three beasts finally made it into melee range, all dropping buckets of blood from their wounds. Jake took out two daggers, one of bone and one of steel. Just as they got close, they all exploded with light, burning Jake's skin and blinding him. Not that it mattered much, as he didn't really need his eyesight that much.

Dodging the initial charge, he swiped the bloodletting dagger across one of the deer, leaving a long gash that spilled blood like a waterfall. The second deer was not much luckier as it was granted several stabs with his other dagger. The third one, he simply allowed to ram into him, as he wrestled it to the ground.

His danger perception had barely reacted, making him willingly take the risk of fighting it in close combat. With the four others down for the count, he didn't see much threat from a logical standpoint. Something that was a mistake, as he failed to dodge a beam fired as a last-ditch effort by the stag in its dying moments.

The beam left a nasty burn-wound, almost like a high-powered laser. Yet despite Jake assessing the wound as 'nasty', it didn't affect much and already started healing itself mere moments after it got inflicted.

As for the beast pinning him down, he raised his hand and placed it on the neck of the creature, digging his fingers into its hide, as he used Touch of the Malefic Viper on full power, throwing away all subtlety the skill allowed. Instantly the effects were made clear. The flesh his hand touched started rotting, showing clear signs of necrosis, as the deer let out a whimper before it collapsed.

Jake got back up and noticed the rest of the beasts either dead or in their final moments. Taking the dagger, he made a quick round and finished the rest of them off.

He had felt the levels more than once throughout the battle and knew it had been a fruitful hunt. Quite honestly, him being level 9 at the beginning was just sad in a way. His stats were clearly not that of a level 9 archer at all.

Opening his status window, he saw the kill notifications for the first time in a month. It felt incredibly satisfying. One could argue it was a bit sad that the first living things he met he had killed. Discounting the Malefic Viper himself, of course. Snake-gods didn't count.

You have slain [Lucenti Stag – lvl 24] – Experience earned. 4000 TP earned

You have slain [Lucenti Deer – lvl 20] – Experience earned. 3000 TP earned

You have slain [Lucenti Deer – lvl 19] – Experience earned. 2750 TP earned

You have slain [Lucenti Deer – lvl 21] – Experience earned. 3250 TP earned

You have slain [Lucenti Deer – lvl 22] – Experience earned. 3500 TP earned

And as for levels, he had gotten quite a bit in that department too.

'DING!' Class: [Archer] has reached level 10 - Stat points allocated, +1 free point

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'DING!' Class: [Archer] has reached level 13 - Stat points allocated, +1 free point

'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 27 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 28 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

Four levels from a single fight lasting only a few minutes. The bonus experience from killing higher-leveled enemies sure did its work. While the kill notifications didn't explicitly state that he got any bonus experience, he clearly did. If he had to guess, then classes and professions had separate experience-meters?

The race levels were, however, where the real value lay. Whenever Jake got a level in his class, he got a measly 5 stats and 1 free point. On the other hand, his race levels gave 2 in all stats, or 18 in total, and 5 free points. So, a total difference of 6 and 23 stats per level. Nearly four times.

Of course, his profession was also quite ridiculous, with it providing 15 stats, 5 free points, aka 20 in total. But one had to remember that was evolved and a variant. Plus, it took two levels in either profession or class to get a single race level. It had at least been consistently that way so far.

Passing level 10 in his class naturally also meant something else.

Archer class skills available

Jake knew he had to mentally prepare himself after getting skills from his profession. He couldn't expect a random rare or even epic skill from a basic starting class after all. So, with little expectations, he went through the list, the first one being about as basic as he expected.

[Twin Arrow (Common)] – The Archer's arrows are never-ending; a single arrow becomes two. Allows the Archer to shoot an arrow that splits into two during its flight. Adds a minor bonus to the effect of agility and strength when using Twin Arrow.

This one was very fantasy-esque. It had several useful applications; the sneak attack component alone would be great. Oh, you think one arrow is heading your way? Sorry, it was two. But the thing he was most concerned about was how exactly a splitting arrow would work with his poisons. Would both have it? None of them have it? Or only the 'original' one. Or did the skill just conjure new arrows entirely? He just felt there were so many unknowns. If it didn't work with his poisons, he didn't care.

If it merely divided the poison between the two split arrows, it would be worse than not splitting at all. It is far better to deliver one strong dose to one area than two weaker doses in two regions. The former was far harder to heal and get rid of.

With him having more concerns than excitement for the skill, he moved on.

[Bow Bash (Common)] – Who says the bow can only be used at range? Allows the Archer to bash with his bow, knocking back the target. Increases the bow's durability and gives a minor bonus to the effect of strength when using Bow Bash.

This skill was way more straightforward. Just a skill that allowed him to hit people with his bow better. The purpose of the skill seemed to be keeping his enemies at a distance. The skill would indeed be useful, but Jake wasn't exactly getting excited over reading it. Moving on, he hoped for something better.

[Bouncing Arrow (Common)] – The Archer has many tricks hidden in their quiver. Allows the Archer to shoot an arrow that bounces off the first object it hits. Adds a minor bonus to the effect of agility and strength when using Bouncing Arrow.

This one was just gimmicky as hell. It seemed fun and interesting, but he had some serious questions as to the usefulness. He reckoned it was the kind of trick that would work once against an enemy and then be utterly ineffective from that point onwards. And if one had already seen the trick before, you wouldn't be tricked by it as easily the next time. Again, another disappointing skill in his honest opinion.

[Active Camouflage (Uncommon)] – Sometimes, mere stealth is not enough, but one must hide their very being. Focus your mana and attune your presence to your surroundings, allowing you to stay hidden far more effectively when standing completely still. Adds a small bonus to the effect of wisdom when successfully remaining hidden.

This skill was a bit more exciting. Jake assumed it would allow you to hide from methods of detection other than the five senses. Likely even allowing him to avoid detection from magical perception skills. Would it work against my Sphere of Perception? he couldn't help but wonder too.

Another interesting point was that it used mana and scaled with wisdom. All his other skills in the archery class scaled with strength, agility, and sometimes perception. The resource used when activating the skills, or well, skill, as he only had Archer's Eye so far, had been stamina and not mana. This one was also of a higher rarity, so was certainly a contender. As for the last skill, it too was of uncommon-rarity.

[Powershot (Uncommon)] – An Archer with time to line up the perfect shot can be the deadliest foe. Allows the Archer to charge up a shot, increasing the power based on time charged. The longer the shot is held, the greater the stamina expenditure. Adds a small bonus to the effect of agility and strength when using Powershot.

This skill was relatively simple - channel and charge up a devastating shot. Jake thought of the application of the skill, as he had done with all the others. It would sure be useful as an opener since he would have plenty of time to charge up the shot.

One thing he had contemplated was also the possibility of the power behind his arrows not being high enough to penetrate the outer skin, or perhaps even natural armor of an enemy. For example, the big boars had a rough hide protecting them, and Jake remembered barely being able to penetrate it.

Beasts such as reptiles often had natural armor too. Heck, the Malefic Viper was a snake, and even his current form had scales covering the entire body. Jake would be incredibly surprised if said scales didn't offer a lot of defense.

If he thought of other humans, it would also be useful. The prior skills seemed to revolve around trickery and hiding, two things beneficial against humans but not very useful against beasts currently. Beasts at the moment had horrible perception of enemies in their surroundings and were far too easy to sneak up on. Trickery was also wholly unnecessary as the beasts did little more than just charge and used whatever innate abilities they possessed.

Powershot, on the other hand, would allow him to possibly take down one beast far quicker, hence making the fight easier.

On the negative side, the skill was channeled and likely took time to use properly. Chances are, Jake would only ever get one good shot off in a fight, possibly two if he somehow managed to open a lot of distance between him and his foe.

Overall, he was a bit disappointed by the skills offered. Then again, he had been a bit spoiled by the Malefic Viper skills.

Jake had no intention of going after humans at that moment. Never, if he could avoid it. Jake didn't like fighting people, and the challenges he sought after could as easily be found against beasts. So he picked the skill he deemed the most effective against those.

So, in the end, he settled on Powershot. Ultimately, the skill would allow him to take down powerful foes easier, and currently, he saw it as the most useful.

***New skill gained*:**

[Powershot (Uncommon)] – An Archer with time to line up the perfect shot can be the deadliest foe. Allows the Archer to charge up a shot, increasing the power based on time charged. The longer the shot is held, the greater the stamina expenditure. Adds a small bonus to the effect of agility and strength when using Powershot.

And with that settled, it was time to get some more levels under his belt.

As he was preparing to move, he felt something not that far away from him. It was still a few kilometers, but the feeling was... powerful. He couldn't quite describe it, but it felt like a huge mass of energy had gathered there, drained from where he was and everywhere around him. Maybe... maybe even from the entire tutorial area.

No matter the case, he had to investigate. Hopefully... he could find something worth fighting there.