

## Hunter 90

### Chapter 90: Nest Watcher

The tunnel opened up once more as Jake found himself in a small circular cistern. Water was stored below and a cross-shaped bridge allowed one to get across without getting wet. The road straight ahead led to another hallway while the path to either side led into pipes.

Jake had just entered the area when a rat appeared directly opposite him. He was prepared to take it down when it took the path to the left and entered the pipe. And that was when something truly interesting happened.

The pipe disappeared for just a few seconds before a new, perfectly identical one appeared. Jake couldn't be sure if it was the same pipe; all he knew was that some dungeon-fuckery was going on. Was this perhaps where all the rats in the dungeon came from?

He knew that he was looking for a nest of some sort. His objective was to kill the Nest Watcher after all and to watch a nest, there needed to be one. And for the nest to be where the rats came from also seemed rather logical. I'm a genius, he joked to himself.

Checking his stamina and health one final time, he proceeded forward. The trap-filled tunnel had given him time to down a few more potions, topping him up entirely.

Walking at a brisk pace, he crossed the bridge and entered the tunnel, headed towards what he presumed to be the nest. A prediction that proved correct as he soon found himself on yet another platform overlooking a reservoir. But unlike the last, this one didn't appear to be filled with thousands of weak rats.

The darkness still obstructed his vision, making him unable to get a good look, but he could feel something down there. Four strong presences, none of the auras weaker than the Den Mother had been. Unless the dungeon had decided to up the bullshit even further, this had to be the end.

He prepared his arrows and sword and dagger with poison as he waited the last twenty minutes for his potion cooldown to be over. Good to go, he began his assault.

Jake jumped down into the basin, his bow already out and an arrow nocked, ready to be drawn.

Advanced Stealth on full display, he advanced as sneakily as he could. He could feel the auras of the four powerful beasts, but none others. Perhaps they were hidden by a stealth skill like most rats possessed in the dungeon, or there were indeed only four of them.

Soon the situation became clear to him, and it wasn't what he had expected. Four giant rats were lying on the ground together, surrounded by a massive number of smaller rats. The big rats were quite frankly far too big for it to make any sense. They looked like they couldn't even move...

They were hairless like most of the other rats in the sewer, but their proportions were just all off. Their bellies were inflated to ridiculous sizes, and their external limbs looked like they could barely carry the beast. It didn't even have any claws.

He identified one of the enormous rats and got at least a partial answer through it as to what the hell these things were.

[MoleRat Incubator – lvl ??]

The name made it quite clear what the function of these rats was, and it also explained the many tiny rats around them, one of which he also identified.

[Molerat – lvl 10]

They were indeed just pups. Far too small to pose any threat, yet Jake knew that leaving them alone would be unwise.

This was a dungeon and not the actual world. The death of these pups would mean nothing. They were never going to mature; they were just background noise added to the real challenge.

Jake looked around a bit further but didn't spot the so-called Nest Watcher.

If it doesn't want to show itself, then I will make it, Jake thought as he covertly marked the first Incubator with Mark of the Ambitious Hunter while he made tendrils of shadows attach to the three others. None of them even reacting to his actions.

After that, he retreated to the entrance of the reservoir once more. There were no obstacles between him and the Incubators, meaning he had a free line of sight. Well, he couldn't actually see them, but his arrows would move unobstructed.

With the mark as a guide, he started channeling an Infused Powershot. There were roughly ninety meters between him and his target, giving him ample time to bombard them before giving them the

chance to retaliate. He was unsure of the Incubators' combat capabilities, so he decided that it was better to be safe than sorry. Maybe they would awaken and be true monsters after he attacked it?

When he reached the limit of energy he could charge, he released the arrow. The explosion of mana pushed back the dark mana around him for a brief moment and shattered the stones directly below him as a testament to the power behind the shot.

A power that soon tore into the first Incubator's head, obliterating it entirely.

\*You have slain [Molerat Incubator– lvl 86] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 132000 TP earned\*

Focusing on his tether attached to the second Incubator, he managed to focus on it enough to place a new Mark.

Nocking another arrow, he prepared another shot right away and released the string once more towards the next target.

\*You have slain [Molerat Incubator– lvl 85] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level. 130000 TP earned\*

\*'DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 63 - Stat points allocated, +4 free points\*

\*'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 57 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points\*

Surprisingly it also died in a single shot. The second attack hadn't even been close to as powerful as the first, yet it had proved lethal. But the momentary surprise didn't slow down his movements at all as he marked his next target, charged, and released yet another attack. This one didn't manage to kill it directly, but he felt it hitting through the mark.

He instantly fired another, but this arrow didn't hit at all. The Incubator still lay unmoving where it had always been so something had blocked his attack.

He quickly tried switching the mark to the next Incubator. Firing another arrow, it too got blocked. Jake decided to just charge a powerful Infused Powershot once more before shooting. He guessed that the last two had erected a barrier or something, and the best way to break that would be through sheer force.

Charging it up, he felt his danger sense explode, followed by something entering his sphere - something fast.

Jake fired the arrow prematurely at one of the incubators as he ducked. Where his chest had been only milliseconds prior, a crescent wave of dark mana passed. The wave continued as it cut deep into the stones behind him, making the entire wall explode and crumble.

To his surprise, he heard the sound of a kill notification on yet another Incubator as he was forced to once more jump to safety from another dark wave of destructive mana. And just as he was starting to get his bearings, he saw it enter his sphere.

It was tall and standing on two legs, easily towering over two Jakes put together. It had hair all over its body and looked almost human except for its head. It was another ratman - a ratman wearing a helmet.

It was a lot like the Swarm Controller, but this one was far bigger in every aspect. It wore heavy armor that looked to be made of some kind of black exoskeleton, and over its shoulder, it carried a huge crude black sword that looked to be made of stone. He could see the muscles hidden beneath the fur, making it crystal clear it was the warrior-type.

But as Jake observed it, it observed him back, and to his surprise, opened its mouth in a roar.

“Human! Why kill!?”

Jake was taken aback by the words. No, by the fact that it could even speak. He had assumed all the enemies he met in dungeons just to be common beasts. While some, like the White Stag, had shown signs of intelligence, it was nothing close to speaking.

This ratman, however, overturned his expectations...

As he took too long to answer, the ratman roared once more.

“King send? Why come?”

Jake finally collected himself as he answered honestly, seeing no reason to hide anything.

“I have come to defeat the Beast Lords on my way to kill the King of the Forest.”

Now it was the ratman’s time to be taken aback for a moment before it started laughing with a bizarre rat-like laugh.

“Hah! You pup! King's strong! Human weak!”

“Must be embarrassing to die to a pup,” Jake answered as he once more lifted his bow. He didn’t bother chatting with the ratman any more than this. They would have to fight no matter, as he had already identified his opponent.

[Nest Watcher – lvl ??]

If the fight was inevitable, why delay it? It was doubtful that he could learn anything useful from the ratman. On the other hand, it would give the Nest Watcher time to maybe call for reinforcements or have the one remaining Incubator to do something. He also wasn’t sure if there was only one Nest Watcher...

The ratman reacted as Jake fired a Splitting Arrow towards it by swinging his oversized blade, releasing a crescent wave of black mana. The arrows still in mid-flight were annihilated by the wave as it continued onwards straight in the direction of their shooter.

Dodging, Jake fired another barrage of arrows but was met by another wave of mana released by the now charging ratman. The ratman didn't look like it had any intention to chat anymore either.

Jake decided to switch it up a bit as he used Badger Jump to create some distance as he charged an Infused Powershot. This time, the Nest Watcher didn't attack but blocked the arrow with the blade's flat part.

It was pushed back a few steps but didn't seem otherwise affected as it continued its charge. Jake continued firing a few more arrows, but they were either blocked or pushed away with a wave of the giant blade.

Soon he could no longer keep the distance as he came face to face with the giant figure. He barely reached its waist, and he felt the overpowering aura as it brought down its sword upon him. He dodged to the side as the ground where he had once stood exploded in a flurry of dust and dark mana.

Jake managed to make use of the opening as he landed an arrow in the leg of the ratman. Physically it didn't do much damage, but it had managed to penetrate the skin. Soon the area around the wound was black from the necrotic poison, clearly doing worthwhile damage.

Not that it could be seen on the bipedal rat as the assault continued with the same vigor and power as before. Jake kept dodging its blows as he managed to land potshots once in a while. The damage slowly accumulated as the poison ravaged the system of the ratman from within.

After a solid shot to the knee with an Infused Powershot, Jake finally managed to stumble the Nest Watcher and making it fall on its knee. This allowed Jake to open up a worthwhile distance between them. A quick Badger Jump coupled with a Shadow Vault put a good 50 meters between them almost instantly as he began charging yet another Infused Powershot.



The entire reservoir was a mess at this point, with broken stone everywhere and considerable gashes in the walls and ceilings.

He felt the power build up as the ratman got up once more. But contrary to belief, it didn't charge again but instead pointed its blade towards him - black mana condensed around the blade as it started being charged with energy too. To Jake, it only looked like a black hole condensed somewhere in front of him, his sight still impeded by the dark mana. An affliction the rat clearly didn't suffer from.

Jake welcomed the challenge with a smile, however. The battle seemed to come to a standstill as both charged their attacks for nearly ten seconds. The hunter was the first to release his string. The attack was the most powerful one he could muster with his current stats and skills.

Right after, the ratman also released the energy he had built up. A torrent of dark mana poured forth and condensed into a blade-shaped beam headed straight for the incoming arrow, and of course, the one who had shot it.

The attacks crashed together in an explosion that seemed to shake the entire dungeon. However, it was clear that the dark mana won out as it continued onwards, weakened but far from weak.

Not that Jake had any intention of being in its way. He had already used a Shadow Vault to the side even before the attacks hit each other, as he had no confidence in winning a direct confrontation of power.

He was faster than the Nest Watcher, but he was far behind in the strength department. His most considerable advantage, as always, was in his instincts and high perception, allowing him to read the situation better and make the best split-second decisions in the spur of the moment. And now was one such moment.

Quickly he fired yet another, far weaker, Infused Powershot at the ratman. It was something he had clearly not expected as the arrow hit him in the chest, blasting him backward and shattering a part of his armor. Jake followed up with a Splitting Arrow towards the still shaken giant, managing to land additional wounds. They were minor, but everything was starting to add up.

The ratman roared as he released a barrage of black mana waves, forcing Jake to retreat once more. He could feel that draining the Nest Watcher of mana likely wasn't going to happen due to the atmospheric mana, but its health and stamina had to be lacking at this point.

This was the first dungeon boss that Jake had faced in what he would call a genuinely straight-on fight. The Den Mother had been poorly matched against him, and he had partly cheesed the battle, while the fight with the Great White Stag had been more about the moon and ponds than any direct confrontation.

It felt good just to have a fight like this. The Nest Watcher was powerful but not above what he could manage at his current level of power. Overall, it was quite a lot stronger than him, but he was now about to bring it down with his instincts and effective kiting tactics. Of course, he knew that ninety percent of the damage he had done was due to his poisons, but all of it was part of his strength.

Jake continued his assault as he continued dodging wave after wave, as he kited around the hall, never allowing the ratman to get in melee range and land a blow.

As victory was in his grasp, something suddenly changed. The ratman stopped attacking as he stood up straight and regarded Jake, who had also stopped attacking.

“You strong... but King Stronger.” The ratman said as it heaved for breath.

“Right now... maybe this King is. But I only grow stronger. Perhaps I can’t win today, but I still have time,” Jake answered as he already expected the fight to be over. The ratman was a dead rat walking with all the poison in its system. It was a foregone conclusion already, and he had nothing against waiting for the last of its life to drain away.

“No. You not,” it answered. “King... too strong. He... apex... you do lose... not that matter-“

With those words, the Nest Watcher exploded in a torrent of darkness that consumed all light, and Jake's sight disappeared completely once more. Energy pressed down on him as he felt like a tsunami of dark mana suddenly washed over him.

“-cuz you die now.”