

Hunter 101

Chapter 101: Mana 101

Jake awoke and felt well-rested and relieved. He had feared a nightmare when he closed his eyes, but instead, he got a pleasant dream. Like the last one, this one was also weirdly lucid throughout. Of course, this one didn't have some bastard god but was of his own making.

From the very beginning, some part of him knew it was a dream. Yet, he went through the motions as if he wasn't even in charge of his own body. He was just a ride-along, experiencing the memory as it had been. Everything up to the final conversation with his brother had been precisely the same.

The dream only served to cement his conviction to seek out his family after the tutorial. But to do so, he needed power. Or maybe that was just yet another excuse he made to himself to justify his obsession with slaying the King of the Forest.

Feeling out his body, he noticed that the soreness was mostly gone. He still felt a bit stiff. His stamina had regenerated to about 75%, with his health having regenerated a few hundred points too. Health didn't regenerate very fast by default, which is why he took out a healing potion and chugged it down.

It was good that he spent such a long time just hoarding all the potions he made while grinding levels. He was starting to get low, but the time remaining was also starting to get low.

[Tutorial Panel]

Duration: 5 days & 7:31:01

He had slept for longer than he hoped. Exactly how long he wasn't sure, but it appeared to be on the other side of 10 hours. It was time he honestly didn't feel like he could afford to waste currently. Though, of course, it was arguable if he had truly wasted his time.

The experiment he had made was partly successful. He had managed to temporarily boost himself with stamina without blowing himself up like a popped balloon of blood.

However, it was only partly. The weakness after the incredibly long winddown time made it useless in combat outside of the most desperate of situations. It had gotten Jake out of a bind once, but it wasn't a stunt he had any intention of repeating any time soon.

Getting up from the hard ground, he stretched a bit to get some flexibility back. He felt his body crack here and there, and he instantly felt refreshed. The healing potion was surely also doing its work.

He didn't delay any longer as he walked up to the wooden door and entered the dungeon once more. He was ready to repeat it from the beginning once more but found that the wall that had been broken down was still broken, confirming to Jake that the dungeon didn't reset.

Clear signs of the chase from the many beasts were also present. Jake decided to walk towards where the boars had come from, to see what the hell they were doing back there.

What he found was a large lake of murky water. It exuded clear indications of strong mana within it, and walking up to it and using Identify only confirmed that it did.

[Soilwater (Common)] – Water infused with strong earth-affinity mana, making it purer and hold certain magical properties. Can be used as an ingredient in many alchemical recipes or simply consumed in its raw form to restore mana for those possessing the earth-affinity.

This water was a lot like the Lucenti Water he had found in the Lucenti Plains dungeon. The description was pretty much the same, except this one mentioned earth-affinity mana instead.

The last time he had come into contact with this type of water, it burned him like acid. But he still cautiously placing his hand into this Soilwater, mentally preparing himself for the stinging sensation. However, to his surprise, it didn't even sting. It felt somewhat normal, actually, aside from the unmistakable feeling of mana within it.

I guess I do have some kind of earth-affinity? he thought to himself as he took out an empty barrel from his storage. It would be stupid not to collect some of the wonderful water while he was here. He was in a rush, sure, but who knows when he would stumble across earth-affinity water again.

As he collected it, he got an idea. He assumed that the boars drank this water and ran to eat the rocks afterward. That it was their "pattern," so to speak. But he would have to confirm it before he could turn his idea into action.

He finished up collecting water, and afterward, he jumped straight into the water. The lake wasn't very wide, perhaps only 50 meters in diameter, but it was quite deep. His Sphere of Perception extended effortlessly through the water as he dove downwards.

He felt something below. A feeling that only got stronger the further down he dove. The intensity of the earth-affinity mana increased the further down he got. Fifty meters down, he began to feel a bit of pressure, but he kept diving further and further down.

A hundred meters down, the pressure was starting to get to him, but he kept going. His constitution meant he did not need to really breathe, and his toughness made both the physical and energy pressure manageable.

120 meters

140 meters

160 meters.

Finally, his sphere picked up the bottom of the lake. His eyesight was nonexistent at this depth, with everything merely being colored brown.

His sphere did, however, pick up that the lake was deeper towards the center. Like a small crater formed the bottom of the lake.

Swimming towards the center, he soon found the epicenter of it all. And his sphere also picked up the source of the mana. No larger than a finger, a small shard was embedded in the soil, giving off incredibly strong fluctuations of earth mana. Focusing on it, he used Identify.

[Crystallized Essence of Earth (Rare)] – A crystallized essence of earth. Can be used in a variety of rare earth-affinity alchemical creations. Passively transforms atmospheric mana into the earth affinity. Has become intrinsically linked to the mana of the lake through time.

Yep, that ought to do it, he thought, as he dove closer. At this point, he was around 200 meters underwater, with the earth mana coupled with the natural pressure from being down there pressing unto him. He could still manage due to his physical stats, though, so he inspected the crystalized essence.

It truly did appear just like a small crystal. Rather unassuming if he didn't know any better. He didn't put it into his spatial storage as he began to think.

The idea he had was to poison the lake, making it toxic and weakening the boars. He didn't like the thought of doing it, as he felt it was a cheap way to fight, but he was in a rush. In fact, the thought hadn't even occurred to him during the Lucenti Plains dungeon. Not that he thought it would have actually worked with the Lucenti Water. Chances are, the deer would have also been able to sense it with their keen senses and high intellect. The boars... now they were another story.

The idea to poison it slowly died, however, as he dove further and further down. There was simply too much water.

He wasn't even sure he could get it up to a level where it was lethal or able to deal meaningful damage before the tutorial ended. But perhaps this essence presented an opportunity.

While he himself couldn't poison the water, that wasn't to say this essence couldn't. He could feel its connection to the rest of the lake and how every single strand of mana felt like it originated from it. Likely because it did. It also said that the mana in the lake was linked closely to it.

If he could corrupt the water source and not the water itself... perhaps that would make it possible to transform this entire lake into one big concoction of death. He wasn't sure if he could, but he wanted to try.

And his method of doing it would be through Touch of the Malefic Viper. The skill description also specified “being,” making him unsure if objects also fit that description. He didn’t know if water counted as partly living for some reason, or it was just because water appeared to be susceptible to absorb all kinds of mana by default.

He checked the skill to see if anything was stopping him.

[Touch of the Malefic Viper (Rare)] – With a single touch, the Malefic Viper has slain countless foes. Attempt to inject poison into a being through physical contact. The nature of the poison is determined by the user. The alchemist can only use toxic effects he has concocted or created prior. Some toxins cannot be used. Adds a minor increase to the effectiveness of Touch of the Malefic Viper based on intelligence and wisdom.

It mentioned him only being able to inject poison he had prior concocted, but that wasn’t entirely accurate. Besides the limitations - such as being unable to inject the Amalgamation he made to clear the Challenge Dungeon and whatever he made in the pond in the Lucenti Plains - he could create necrotic poison and hemotoxic poison with his Touch. But he could do one more type.

His Blood of the Malefic Viper created a poison that Jake honestly couldn’t quite identify. It clearly held signs of necrotic poison, but it also just straight up corroded and corrupted everything else. The description of that skill said it bases the toxin’s nature on his Records... so a mix of all poisons he had ever made or ingested?

What matters is that the toxin from Blood of the Malefic Viper counted for his Touch of the Malefic Viper. It was the type he pretty much always used with Touch of the Malefic Viper because it was the strongest type he had. At least it appeared to be effective against anything and everything.

So Jake wanted to try and corrupt the crystal essence with Touch. Perhaps trying to soak it in his blood would work too, but he doubted it could penetrate into it and corrupt it. Better to use the Touch.

But first, he would confirm that the beasts indeed did drink from this lake.

Swimming upwards, he went faster than when he went down. When he got close to the surface, his sphere picked up something at the edge of the lake, but he had too much momentum and ended up emerging. What he saw quickly made him rethink his decision. The entire lake was surrounded by boars on all sides, including the big boss.

Jake was smack in the middle of it and froze the instant his head popped up. He could see the beasts drink the water, with not a single one of them even throwing a glance his way.

Thank god for their shitty perception, he thought, as he slowly ducked his head under again - no reason to tempt fate more than necessary.

He had noticed before that the boars had sucky eyesight. They didn't appear to feel mana either, plus they also sucked in the hearing department. What they did have was some weird sense related to the ground. If he had to guess, then he would say they could feel vibrations - a tremor sense.

As the water wasn't ground last time he checked, he assumed it would help hide him, so Jake was pretty safe in the water.

Diving down once more, he headed straight for the crystal. Being so deep in the dense mana, he didn't fear the boars detecting anything he did as he placed his hands on the crystal.

He tried moving it but found that it was stuck to the ground. He could likely cut it out along with the surrounding stone if he wanted to, but that wasn't necessary.

Activating Touch of the Malefic Viper, he instantly felt the resistance from the essence. Like a barrier blocking the toxic mana from entering. However, he quickly found that the barrier was weak, as a small extra push broke it down.

His mana entered the gem and... nothing. Well, not nothing. It was just that what he did barely had any effect. It was like trying to make an entire bathtub acidic by pouring in a few drops of acid. It was diluted and barely did anything.

He kept up the injection for a minute or so longer but felt like he didn't even make a dent. However, what did take a hit was his mana pool, which was rapidly drained from the continuous use of the skill.

Stopping what he was doing, he started rethinking his approach. He could feel the toxins within the essence, but he would need more... a lot more.

What did bode well was the mana in his immediate area. All of it now carried a faint tinge of poison. His theory that the essence was inherently linked to the Soilwater had proven right. This meant that if he managed to corrupt the essence, he could poison the entire lake.

It did also mean that if he could not corrupt the essence, then poisoning the water itself likely wouldn't do much.

It appears like the water is filtered through the Essence somehow... he thought. It does help that the earth mana doesn't consume the mana, unlike the dark ma- wait.

Jake froze as he followed that thought. Dark mana could consume other kinds of mana. But dark mana alone wouldn't help corrupt the essence; it would just be making it into a "Dark Crystalized Essence," or maybe a weird mix of earth and dark.

No, he needed the properties of the dark-affinity mana in his toxins instead. Make it take over and spread. His poison already did this to biological beings. Necrotic poison invaded and consumed the flesh of whatever it infected, while his hemotoxin made itself part of the bloodstream, thinning it and making his foe bleed more.

What he needed was a magical version of that, and the dark mana was just what he needed. The poison from Touch of the Malefic Viper being purely energy-based made it all a bit complicated. This isn't to say the regular poisons were nonmagical, just more belonging to the physical realm.

His poisons didn't appear to belong to any specific affinity either.

But that didn't mean every type wasn't aligned to one. If Jake had to guess, then Necrotic Poison appeared to belong to the death-affinity, with hemotoxin poison maybe being blood-affinity... if that is a thing. Maybe it was just water-affinity?

The point is, he wasn't sure if the two would just go together. Wouldn't merging dark mana into the toxic mana from his Touch only consume whatever toxins there was?

Yet despite all his doubts, he couldn't dismiss the idea, and the one thing that kept his belief going was a particular vision he saw what felt like ages ago.

Within the challenge dungeon, he had seen a vision of the Malefic Viper and his growth to power. He remembered one of the visions where the winged serpent flew over the populace, spewing out some dark green poison.

All who were hit started decaying and dying. But that wasn't all. Every single entity hit by the poison was consumed and died, but their bodies continued to release even more poison into the air even after death. What's more, the area where the poison was spread became covered in a blanket of darkness and death. It was a memory he would never forget seeing, and the cornerstone of his theory now.

If the Viper had used dark mana or not, he didn't know. But he had a feeling dark mana was one of the affinities the Viper himself leaned most towards.

Perhaps it was just a pipedream, but he chose to believe it was possible as he once more placed his hands on the crystalized essence. He didn't use the skill immediately but began changing some of his mana into the dark affinity.

He instantly felt that the mana wouldn't work with the skill. Touch of the Malefic Viper consumed normal, affinity-less mana, the mana he had by default. He already knew this, but he continued to make the dark mana, nevertheless.

It had to be compatible somehow - his Descending Fang had transformed into Descending Dark Fang, the same skill but now with dark mana. Perhaps it was just that one skill that carried high combatability, but he also fervently believed that Touch of the Malefic Viper did.

It was one of the skills he got upon obtaining his profession. The skill he got after receiving a blessing from the god himself. Everything within him told him it would work.

He began using the skill as usual but tried pushing a bit of dark mana in too. Failure.

He tried forcing it to work with purely dark mana. Failure.

He used it normally, to begin with, and then tried to inject in dark mana during the process. Failure.

He tried first injecting some dark mana without using Touch but found himself unable to. Failure.

He continued testing for what felt like hours, experiencing failure after failure.

Jake was many things, and being stubborn was definitely one of them.