

Hunter 102

Chapter 102: A thoughtful touch

Affinities, mana, magic as a whole, actually, was still a new concept to Jake and everyone else going through the tutorials. Books in the Challenge Dungeon had all been very unspecific about how mana and magic worked and only described possible methods of using it.

Jake's most significant source of information had been the Viper himself, and even that had been broad and nonspecific. Jake had no concept of what he could do with his mana, nor what he couldn't do.

Alchemy had given him a headstart, and his early practice with mana had only boosted him further. He had started making the strings of mana, and he had learned to transform his mana's affinity quite quickly. The thought of him being unable to somehow use the dark affinity elements in the mana in his Touch of the Malefic Viper didn't even enter his mind.

If there was one thing the system had proven so far, it was that nothing was as simple and as rigid as it seemed before. Jake would just have to find the trick. Whatever made it all click into place.

Currently, that epiphany still eluded him. But the thought of quitting didn't occur to him for a single moment. He just kept going, as he cut out all else, immersed in the skill. In his world, there only existed the flow of mana and the Crystalized Essence.

In the weird state of meditation, he focused more than he had perhaps ever done before. He felt his control of energy improve and his focus only increasing. He didn't even take notice of the system notification.

But he did quickly begin to notice an issue. It was indeed with the skill Touch of the Malefic Viper, it allowed him to inject a poison he had made prior, and in his repertoire... not a single poison compatible with dark mana existed - not even the toxin from his Blood of the Malefic Viper.

Him trying to inject it together with dark mana was like mixing in dark mana in the middle of concocting. In other words, he was trying to introduce an incompatible ingredient, thus ruining the entire concoction every time he tried.

He instead needed a type of poison that was compatible, hopefully even based on dark mana. The descriptions of some of the items mentioned alchemical creations built around mana affinities, making it a logical conclusion that poisons based on the dark-affinity also existed.

Without any prior concoctions of it, his Touch couldn't manifest it... so he had to find a way to make it do it anyway.

What would a poison that is based on dark mana look like? It would be something that spread by itself, something aiming to consume every other source of energy it came into contact with. Hopefully, something akin to a virus that can infect different types of mana.

But that idea was nearly instantly dispelled. For such a poison to exist, it would be impossible to stop. It would be a poison of the highest order. One, if applied correctly, could wipe out worlds.

No, he needed only something similar. Something that could infect, but it didn't need to do so very well. It only needed to be able to spread to other types of mana, and it didn't need to be automatic either. It needing constant input and guidance to continue spreading would be fine too.

He needed it to be a poison... that simply was dark mana. Dark mana consumed other kinds of mana, but it couldn't consume "active" mana in any way. Passive dark mana would only deplete different passive types of mana and only do so to a certain extent. If not, the entire world would be covered by only dark mana, after all.

Of course, merely pumping dark mana into the Essence was an option. If Jake did it enough, then the essence would likely either break or turn into a dark essence of some kind. But that wouldn't help him with anything. Besides, he seriously doubted he had the mana pool to do it.

In conclusion, he needed toxic mana that spread like dark mana but wasn't dark mana. Toxic mana he could do, as that was kind of what Touch of the Malefic Viper was. Dark mana he also had. The combination was the issue.

In his mind, he began a concoction. He thought back to his experience with corrupting the moon in the Lucenti Plains, the many types of toxins he had concocted. He thought of the feeling of the poison from the end of the Challenge Dungeon ravaging through his system.

Every bit of poison he had experienced was still within him - in his Records. Palate of the Malefic Viper had at least partially absorbed it. And anything in his Records would be manifested through Blood of the Malefic Viper. And anything from Blood of the Malefic Viper could be injected with Touch of the Malefic Viper.

It was a constant cycle of skills working in synergy. Unsurprising, considering they all came from the same source – the Malefic Viper himself.

Jake's hands were glowing a black color as he had channeled dark mana into them long ago. It simply lingered as Jake was submerged in his meditation. Hours passed as the mana within him moved in

erratic patterns, the dark mana sometimes disappearing from his hands, only to reappear moments later.

Time passed, and suddenly the mana on his two hands starting changing color. At first, it was subtle, but soon a small speck of green became two, and then four. The color changed as his hands turned from the pure darkness of dark mana to the dark green of Touch of the Malefic Viper.

Jake opened his eyes, his mind clearer than ever as he put his hands upon the Crystalized Essence once more. He activated his Touch of the Malefic Viper, and what was injected was not the same poison as before.

The moment it entered the Essence, it reacted. It started eating into it, consuming it. The consumed mana became the same toxic mana that Jake infected, as it began infecting even more around it.

Within only minutes, the small infection had turned into a full-on pandemic for the earth mana. But Jake didn't stop. He couldn't stop, in fact.

If he stopped, so would the infection. It was only with his constant injection with Touch of the Malefic Viper that the poison kept spreading.

But that wasn't an issue - because the surrounding Soilwater was changing just as fast as the essence itself.

Jake could feel the toxicity all around him with his Sense of the Malefic Viper. He could feel it intensify every single second, and it was only speeding up.

Another ten minutes later, the entire Essence had changed color from the yellowish-brown to a yellowish black. Still of the earth affinity, but clearly now something more. It was corrupted. Or, upon Identification, contaminated according to the system.

[Contaminated Soilwater (Common)] - Water infused with strong earth-affinity mana, now contaminated with potent toxins. Limited use as an ingredient in alchemical recipes. Will restore a minor amount of mana if ingested by those with the earth-affinity but will also poison the consumer.

It was still Soilwater, and it didn't really appear to look any different. Without an ability to sense poison as he had, or identifying the water itself, he doubted anyone could tell the difference. It was perfect. Exactly how he had hoped for it to go.

Without the new method he had used, it would have been impossible. Every point of mana he had spent had led to thousands if not tens of thousands of mana worth of contamination.

He could feel it still slowly spreading throughout the rest of the pool. The essence was as corrupted as he could make it, and it would now do the rest of the work.

Jake was unaware of how much time had passed when he was in this state of meditation. He had been more focused than ever before during it. When he looked through his notifications, he quickly discovered why.

Skill Upgraded: [Meditate (Common)] -->[Thoughtful Meditation (Uncommon)]

[Thoughtful Meditation (Uncommon)] – Enter a state of meditation, cutting off the outside world. While in meditation, regenerate stamina and mana significantly faster. While in meditation, perception is reduced immensely. Increases concentration and control of energies while in meditation at the cost of further limiting perception.

He had received the upgrade when he immersed himself deeper in his meditation than he had done before. He had at other times meditated deeply, like when he was practicing dark mana in the sewers, but even then, he always kept connected to the outside world.

However, this time he had even cut off the information from the Sphere of Perception. And his random burst of concentration and focus had clearly been rewarded. Of course, this wasn't the only thing he had gotten.

His Touch of the Malefic Viper had also reacted to his improvements. He knew that he had evolved the skill when his mana started entering the crystal as he intended, and the notification only confirmed it.

Skill Upgraded: [Touch of the Malefic Viper (Rare --> Epic)] – – 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. Can be used with all compatible types of mana affinities, further altering the effects. Some toxins cannot be used. Adds a small increase to the effectiveness of Touch of the Malefic Viper based on intelligence and wisdom.

The name of the skill hadn't changed. That was a first for any skill he had ever upgraded. Then again, it was also the first skill directly related to the Malefic Viper, so maybe whatever he did hadn't warranted a name change.

Or maybe he had just unlocked something the skill was meant to do all along. He didn't know, but he did feel like the ease of the upgrade had been, well... too easy. It was like the skill would gladly do what he wanted; he just needed to give it that one extra little push to get it there.

Not that he wasn't going to take anything away from himself and his accomplishments. He had managed to upgrade the skill and synthesize a poison through the synergy of skills, his efforts, and ingenuity. Sure, likely many other factors also played a part, but he had to give himself credit where credit's due.

It did help quite a lot that the system appeared to agree that he had done something noteworthy. At least if the levels gained were to be believed.

'DING!' Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 52 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

...

'DING!' Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 55 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 59 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 60 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

It was quite insane. Four levels in his profession awarded for only a bit of work, a measly... 19 HOURS?

What the fuck, Jake thought fittingly, as he rechecked the tutorial panel. Maybe the new Thoughtful Meditation was a bit too good at making him focus on things...

The entire thing was still clearly a huge gain for him; he just felt a bit salty over not even noticing the time ticking by.

Maybe this is what people call an epiphany?

Jake wondered as he began swimming upwards. He didn't quite yet close his status menu, however. He had gotten a total of 30 free points from the combined 6 levels in his profession and race.

So far, he had just thrown most of it into perception and quite a bit into wisdom during his days in the challenge dungeon. He focused on the free points and willed up a chart showing the distribution.

Status

Free Point Distribution:

Strength: 57

Agility: 57

Endurance: 1

Vitality: 26

Toughness: 22

Wisdom: 100

Intelligence: 0

Perception: 362

Willpower: 0

Total Distributed: 625

Looking over the distribution, he actually thought it was an interesting telling of his journey. The one point in endurance in his early days to figure out how stats worked, his seemingly random points in vitality and toughness as he prepared to drink his 'cure' in the challenge dungeon.

The points in wisdom while he did alchemy, and the points in strength and agility just after he exited the dungeon as he severely lacked in those compared to his defensive stats back then.

Of course, his perception was the most significant outlier with an immense 362 points invested. It was perhaps a bit overdone, considering how little it helped him during normal combat. His sphere didn't really get much affected by it anymore, and his other bloodline-related abilities didn't improve as far as he could tell. But maybe that was where his thinking was off: As far as he could tell.

Perception likely helped in areas he didn't think about. Passive small things here and there. He didn't notice them, the same way he didn't usually see how stuff like his memory and ability to do calculations improved with his mental stats.

It just did, and he adapted to it nearly instantly, letting his altered state become his new normal. It was likely something natural for everyone with the system. Mulling over how one magically became stronger with every level was becoming quite commonplace after all.

That wasn't to say he didn't notice many of the benefits of perception. One of those was, of course, his reaction times. They were always strong and had only improved. His ability to predict and read his opponent improved.

What was starting to become an issue was his body's ability to react fast enough to what he wanted it to do. He didn't feel fast enough; he needed more speed. Agility would help every aspect of his fighting, both melee and ranged.

So he had decided to invest his free points into agility to increase his combat abilities. It was 30 points, and while he already had 539 agility, it would clearly be more beneficial to add 30 to that compared to his 1059 perception.

The fact that I got trampled by an army of angry pigs because I wasn't fast enough didn't play any role in my decision whatsoever. Not at all, he rightfully denied.

Putting in the points, he felt the warm flow of stats increasing as he began swimming just a little bit faster. He knew it took a bit for his body to adapt and make full use of the stats, but he still noticed it.

As he got further and further up, he noticed the amount of poison decrease. Not that it was an issue, as he could still feel it rising up from below. It would take a bit for all the Soilwater to be thoroughly contaminated.

Seeing the surface of the lake, he considered if it was safe to pop his head up. A thought swiftly followed by another.

... Do I need to breathe?