

Hunter 117

Chapter 117: Danger Bath

The days passed by quickly as the two gods and one mortal immersed themselves in the laboratory. At first, Duskleaf had been less than excited, to say the least. Jake had already guessed that the Viper had forced him into it, and he was entirely correct. What he didn't know was that Duskleaf didn't like Jake himself either.

Why do I have to waste my time on this, was what the god thought in the beginning.

Duskleaf was an alchemist. Period. He had always been an alchemist and never cared much for anything else. He had mostly ignored his class, only leveling it sparingly whenever necessary. It was due to his extreme talent and dedication that he managed to ascend to godhood. A commitment he had believed Jake to lack.

The old alchemist had believed Jake just to be yet another of the young talented fighters that had picked up alchemy as a side-profession. A sentiment he well and truly hated. The Alchemist of the Malefic Viper profession and its related evolution were among the most combat-focused of all alchemy professions. This had led many to simply pick it up for those reasons, and that they didn't care for alchemy itself.

After the first day, however, he began to change his mind. He had seen Jake fight the King together with the Viper, and from that had indeed formed the image of a talented fighter who was far more brawn than brain.

Yet the young mortal dove into alchemy with the same zeal as he did a fight with a formidable opponent. His eyes burned with passion whenever he met a challenge, and his happiness genuine whenever he overcame his own limitations. It was as if every brewing or concoction was a fight to the death. And that... that Duskleaf liked.

Of course, all of it would be for naught if the kid was untalented. Another doubt that quickly got dispelled. While Duskleaf found it hard to evaluate him properly, he did see endless potential. The issue was just how raw it all was. Despite his passion, it was clear that Jake had never had proper training in alchemy or mana control in general. But at the same time, his skills made it hard for Duskleaf to believe that he had only been in the system for a couple of months.

When he learned that Jake had spent two of his five chances in the tutorial store to buy cauldrons, he truly got his seal of approval.

Jake himself didn't have the faintest clue about the old man's thoughts; he had only noticed that he now appeared at least marginally less bored. The Malefic Viper was full of energy as always, and he had to say... he was having a damn good time. It was hard but fun.

The only downside was how little experience he got. After a week, he had only gained a single level in his profession, taking him to level 56. The leveling was incredibly slow, without a doubt, due to the time distortion going on. He had been warned about it, but it still stung.

This isn't to say he didn't improve. Because oh boy, did he improve. It turns out that having two gods giving pointers helped a lot. Their advice was minimal as they mostly just told Jake to try something and then observed, only giving general advice here and there.

From what he had gathered, the Viper didn't want to limit him in any way by giving him too clear directions. He was very much a hands-off teacher. However, he did have many fun tests and challenges, his favorite by far being a particular cauldron.

[Practice Cauldron of the Malefic Viper (?)] – A cauldron with imprinted challenges and trials.

His Identify didn't give much, but he didn't really care either. The thing was awesome. It was like he was doing actual alchemy when using it, except it didn't use any ingredients but focused solely on the crafting process itself. It was like simulating a brewing or concoction, and he loved it with all of his heart.

Sadly he learned that he couldn't bring it with him due to restrictions on new multiverses. A sad day indeed, but that only motivated him more to spend his time efficiently with it.

Restrictions on him were actually quite far and wide. He couldn't get any items, and he couldn't use any consumables items that weren't his either. Which meant he couldn't just get handed a bunch of elixirs and free stats. He had, however, learned that the Viper was onto something in one of the side-rooms. What looked like a jacuzzi was being filled with all types of herbs and poisons, with the god himself carrying a quite malicious smile.

Eight days after he entered the chamber, Jake collapsed. Initially, he startled Duskleaf until he scanned the human and found him merely asleep. Even with all his stats, Jake was, in the end, still only E-grade. What was surprising, however, was Jake being so immersed in his practice that he simply collapsed. Second seal of approval earned. Duskleaf remembered how he had once burnt off half his hair and melted off the right side of his face because he fell asleep during a concoction. Good times.

Fifteen days in the chamber, and Jake earned his second level taking him to 57. He had also learned that apparently, 4-D chess was a thing. Or maybe they were just fucking with him. Most likely, the last one.

Eighteen days in and Jake collapsed for the second time while grinding out the trials in the cauldron. This time the old alchemist didn't even react as he just nodded proudly at the young man lying face-first, bent over the cauldron.

On the twentieth day, the Viper came out of his secret room with a larger than usual malefic smile.

"It is done! The Trial of Myriad Poisons has been prepared!"

"Master..." the old alchemist said with a sigh. "We are teaching him, not killing him. Even then, with the restriction in place, you know it won't work..."

"Ah, but I am only giving out an already promised reward. Remember what I offered you, Jake?" the Malefic Viper asked, still grinning.

"Alchemy training and alcohol," he answered.

"Exactly. So follow me."

None of them bothered to question the god as they both just followed him into the room. Within there was a massive barrel of sorts - more than big enough to hold a human within. It was filled with a liquid that set his Sense of the Malefic Viper off like never before. He could sense so many herbs and toxins it felt overwhelming.

Thousands... no, more. Millions? What the hell is this? Jake thought.

"Now, what I offered was a bottle of vodka, to be more precise," the creator of the barrel said, as he pulled a bottle out of thin air. Not a bad brand, Jake barely managed to think before the Viper opened it and began pouring it into the barrel.

"Oh no, I accidentally dropped it into this suspicious barrel. Well, it appears you will have to consume the entire thing to get your vodka!" the Viper said, his grin not able to get any larger.

"... While I am into experimental cocktails, I do have my limits," Jake managed to answer after looking dumbstruck at the silly actions of the scaled god.

"Ah, but it will be good for you, I promise!" the Viper laughed for a bit before turning serious. "Cutting the bullshit, this thing is called a Trial of Myriad Poisons. It is something that is sometimes offered to talented alchemists of the Malefic Order. Jake, do you know why my class is considered one of the best for alchemists?"

"Membership discounts? Dude, this is the first and only profession I have ever really seen."

"Yeah, yeah. Anyway, the reason is of course because of the skills. The most sought-after being my Palate skill. A skill that is extremely strong even when first gotten and only gets better. However, the main issue is how difficult it is to upgrade and evolve due to its nature. One needs to consume and become familiar with a lot of toxins. Which is where the Trial comes in," he said, slapping the big barrel with his scaled hand.

"This bad boy can fit so many fucking toxins in it. The alchemist can, through this, enhance the skill, even possibly its rarity. Of course, while also vastly increasing their innate knowledge of many different toxins and herbs, which is undoubtedly a huge help on their path. Of course, actually absorbing all of that isn't easy. Hence why it is considered a Trial."

Jake looked between the barrel and the Viper for a bit as he considered his words. It all seemed too good to be true. "Isn't this just a straight-up cheat? Also, Palate only works with toxins last time I checked, and this thing has plenty of herbs within."

"Due to how the concoction is made, the herbs have become mixed with toxins and will be recognized as such by the system, so in that regard, it is a bit of a cheat. For the first part, even by ignoring how ridiculously expensive and hard it is to make the Trial, most alchemists fail to get anything worthwhile out of it. Most just die, actually. Also, it is often done with far more experienced alchemists. You have to actively absorb and digest the poison during the Trial while also managing to stay clear-headed," Duskleaf muttered, clearly not a massive fan of the entire ordeal.

"Meh, stop worrying, it'll be fine!" the Viper said dismissively while gazing towards Jake. "Besides, it's up to Jake. So, you up for it?"

Jake looked at the barrel a bit as he considered what both of the two gods had said. Apparently, this Trial was both a great opportunity as well as risk. High-risk, high reward if you may. Just the way he liked it. "Fuck it, let's go."

"Knew it! Take off ya garbs and get ready. A fair warning, it will hurt like hell, and you will feel like your entire body is burning from the inside out the entire time while simultaneously being eaten by maggots and on a pain-amplifying stimulant. But just focus on absorbing the toxins. The more you absorb, the larger your gains."

"How long will it take?" Jake asked. He had no idea how long he had left within here. After entering, he had lost the timer and had no real concept of how much time had passed out in the real world.

"Once more, that depends on how long you can hold out for and how much you can absorb. But if you can't even hold out for a few hours, you suck," the Viper half-jokingly said while Jake disrobed. Disrobing, meaning just to put all of his clothes into his spatial storage. The only things he kept on were his rings and necklace as well as the mask. The rings and necklace because they were embedded in his body anyway, and the mask because he had completely forgotten he was even wearing it.

"I just jump in?" he asked out loud to the room, getting an answer from Duskleaf.

"I would suggest steeling yourself first. It will take every shred of willpower you have to succeed."

"Got some free points. Would it help to increase the stat?" Jake asked.

Shaking his head, the Viper answered. "I think I already told you this once. Willpower doesn't work that way. What my disciple means is to stay headstrong and determined. No number of stats can truly affect your mental state. Willpower helps defend against outside influences that can shatter or weaken that mental state, but it can never form it, to begin with. No skills or stats would help a thing against a Trial like this."

"Alright then, let's just jump right into it," Jake said as he leaped up to stand at the edge of the barrel. He stared down at the black sludge below him. Didn't look particularly appetizing or healthy. But he had already decided to do it, and he wasn't a quitter.

"Here we go."

Taking a step forward, he sunk into the sludge, slowly getting immersed into it. The first thing he felt was his feet, feeling like they were on fire. Then next was his legs, and then his entire body as his head slowly sunk beneath the surface. It honestly wasn't that bad. A thought he quickly came to regret.

It took only a few moments before he saw the Viper do something outside, making faint runes glow on the barrel. Around him, he felt the toxins and herbs become active. Like they had all been sleeping before, they now all awakened. The Trial had now begun.

Jake felt the toxins around him slowly seek out his pores and every other opening in his body. Resistance was futile as it slowly entered him. As if he had been hit with thousands of needles at once, it entered his body. Then the real pain came.

His teeth clenched shut first thing as he suppressed a scream. Blood began flowing from his mouth as his teeth pressed down. A few teeth even ending up being cracked, but he couldn't even feel it. The pain from that was trivial compared to what he experienced from the poison.

Now that he wanted to scream, he failed as his entire body was paralyzed from the poison. He couldn't move and felt like he was locked within his own body. Like a worse kind of sleep paralysis, he couldn't do anything at all.

Mentally gritting his teeth, he began focusing on his body and felt the many different poisons and herbs. He needed to not focus on the pain, no matter how hard it was. He needed to focus on all the energies in him. Feel them and absorb them.

His senses slowly faded away until there was only his internal realm. The pain a constant buzzing, knocking to try and shatter his feeble focus. He tried to concentrate on only his mana and internal energy. He distinctly felt a part of him grab onto the poison and absorb it. That part being the skill Palate of the Malefic Viper. It did so at a disappointingly slow pace, however.

For every unit absorbed, ten entered his body. He could feel his health dropping as his body began breaking down, yet he didn't feel any fear, only more focused. He slowly observed the process in which his skill made the toxins a part of him. Observed and emulated. He focused on how it felt over some advanced analysis of the skill.

It didn't take long for the process to get faster when he actively focused on it. Using his internal energy as a guide, he gathered the poison up to more easily absorb it. With every bit absorbed, he felt his understanding of what he consumed increase second by second.

One would think that his use of mana and inner energy would decrease those resources, but it was quite the opposite. He felt over-saturated as with every consumed bit of energy, he was replenished. Some of the poison would restore his mana, some his stamina, and some his health. He had reached equilibrium as he focused on the process, trying to push the pain to the back of his mind.

All went well for a while until it didn't. Jake had a huge misunderstanding of the Trial. Before, when the toxins were activated, it was only a tiny part of it - a mere fraction of a fraction. With a glow of the barrel's runes, the second wave came, harder than the first.

Nearly falling into delirium, he felt his mind waver for but a second until he steeled himself once more. It was a race, with the ever-increasing influx of energy competing against his capability to absorb it. It was a challenge that Jake didn't have the faintest intention of losing.

Time passed, and outside the barrel, the two gods stood observing the entire process - the Viper, a stoic neutral look on his face as his glowing green eyes seemed to peer directly into the young mortal's body - the old alchemist with a slightly worried look. Both could only choose to believe in the young man.

Without Jake noticing, the first day of the Trial quickly passed.