

## Hunter 130

### Chapter 130: Going down

That was pretty cool if I say so myself, Jake thought walking away from the valley, trying to look as cool as he possibly could. It had nothing to do with how he had no idea where the hell to take the conversation after his whole 'murder is fine' speech.

Besides, maybe it was time to go for a bit of a walk. Jake hadn't left that small valley for the better part of two weeks before today. While some immortal god may scoff at him for thinking of that as a long time, he did feel like it was.

He just needed a bit of a push to get him out of there.

Talking with Miranda had been very enlightening in many different ways. He had learned a lot about other people's thoughts on the system and even learned quite a lot about other classes, professions, and other tidbits. He was also coming to understand that his tutorial was very much an outlier.

The Viper had told him that, but it helped to have a human reiterate and put it into perspective. Just the sheer amount of god-fuckery and interference that had been going on. Grand designs of fate and all that bullshit.

While in Miranda's case, she hadn't spoken of gods a single time, and Jake hadn't felt like bringing it up either. Perhaps she didn't even know they existed. It was a very teaching moment. He had heard that other tutorials were very closely related to a god... but clearly, hers wasn't.

Having a tutorial like Jake's hadn't exactly turned out well from an outside perspective. Only having one real survivor, with four others only living due to weird items or skills bringing them back from the dead... or made them able to 'live' on as undead. Again, this was a testament to how different his tutorial had been, as people were actually revived during it.

It did allow those who made it out to be well ahead of the curve.

Miranda had been in a far more normal tutorial. None of the thousands of people she interacted with had a level close to him, Jacob, Casper, or even Bertram from what she said. Anyone that reached level 25 in their race level before the tutorial ended was seen as a pinnacle elite.

Even just having a class or profession at level 25 put you into the 'elite' tier. Hank had been one of the stronger ones in her tutorial. Not the strongest, but strong enough that no one messed with them. Likewise, Miranda was one of the most recognized 'professionals' as they called those who focused on professions.

Those who focused on classes were talked of as fighters and those with professions as professionals. Why they hadn't settled on 'classers,' he didn't know, but the word 'fighters' was pretty descriptive of their focus and purpose, so it was fine... though he did like classers more.

If you focused on both, there didn't really appear to be a name. Besides, nearly everyone ended up being more in one lane than the other. Even someone like Hank, who had both an evolved class and profession, was considered a fighter with both being very close in level.

It was all fascinating. It was a part of the tutorial Jake never got to experience. Granted, others hadn't experienced dungeons and fighting D-grade unique lifeforms, so maybe he wasn't the one who missed out on the action.

While thinking, he soon found himself in front of one of the two cave entrances in the valley. It was his target, after all.

Last time he only briefly went in and looked around, finding nothing of particular interest in the first part of it. The only thing interesting was that he had no idea exactly how far it went. Or how deep it was.

Walking in, he could tell that it was indeed leading slightly downward. He also detected the small differences in the atmospheric mana - Sagacity of the Malefic Viper allowing him to tell the difference far easier than before.

Countless concepts were always in the mana around him. Except for unique places like the Forgotten Sewers dungeon, it was like this everywhere. The forest outside was also like this, with the mana mainly having what he assumed to be nature-affinity mana.

In here, however, he quickly began to feel a difference. The humidity in the air increased, and with it, water-affinity mana. The intensity of earth-mana increased too, with even tiny fragments of the dark-affinity, though nowhere near enough to begin devouring the other affinities.

Of course, many more were present that he couldn't detect. One of them reminded him a lot of vital energy, making him guess it was some kind of life-affinity. One that was also abundant outside.

Continuing onwards, he focused on his Sense of the Malefic Viper. Closing his eyes, relying solely on the sphere to guide him, he took in all the information.

He felt the mana in the air, the moss, the mushrooms. It was a nearly forgotten skill for the longest time, where he only relied on the passive sense. Now, however, he was actively focusing on it.

His perception had grown to monstrous levels since the last time he really focused on the skill. His knowledge of mana had grown even more than that. Which resulted in a system message barely a few seconds into using the skill.

**\*Skill Upgraded\*:** [Sense of the Malefic Viper (Rare --> Epic)] – The Malefic Viper sought out many natural treasures on its path to power; it is only natural to learn to sense them. Having walked further on your path as an Alchemist of the Malefic Viper, your senses for poisons and herbs only sharpen. Gives a passive ability to detect herbs and poisons in different forms and a strong feeling of their properties and affinities. Allows you to far better sense the poison you have inflicted. Allows the Alchemist to far more easily detect affinities in the environment and detect areas optimal for cultivating herbs. Adds an increase to the effectiveness of Sense of the Malefic Viper based on Perception

The message was in many ways unsurprising. Jake had expected it, but not this soon. Comparing mental notes of the version before it, he noticed that the main difference was that it now also included sensing mana and mana affinities more easily

He couldn't help but compare it to Sagacity of the Malefic Viper and even Palate of the Malefic Viper. The overlap was truly beginning to show in his mind. Palate gave him instinctive knowledge of herbs and toxins, Sagacity allowing him knowledge of mana affinities and ingredients, and Sense to detect them with.

Progress in any one of the skills would affect the others. And as Jake grew, so did the power of other skills. Blood of the Malefic Viper and Touch of the Malefic Viper were affected by all the poisons he had consumed. Even Scales, which was a bit of an outlier, did allow him to obtain and handle the poisonous substances more easily.

A theory had already formed in his head a long time ago. All of his skills with 'of the Malefic Viper' were part of a set. It was once a complete whole. Either by design or through natural means, it was now split up into many different skills, all giving a part of that whole.

And if he was right, then it meant that getting Sense of the Malefic Viper to ancient rating would net him another stat bonus per level in his profession. Perception most likely. Something he very much desired.

At the same time, he guessed that Touch of the Malefic Viper would end up giving intelligence. It was the only directly offensive skill the profession granted him thus far, making it seem very likely. Which meant he still had three other skills to discover. If he was correct, that is.

One that gave willpower he could easily see. His blessing already awarded that along with his profession itself, clearly marking it as a stat significantly associated with the Alchemist of the Malefic Viper profession. As for strength and agility, however... he wasn't sure precisely if those even existed.

Either way, it was useless to ponder on. He firmly believed himself to be correct, which was one of the main reasons he was rushing to 70. Only one more level to go.

As Jake focused on the skill and basked in its upgraded glory, he sensed far more things and even noticed minuscule, almost ethereal, fragments floating in the air all around him. Too small and insignificant for even his sphere to have detected them before. But with the skill, he became aware of them.

He wondered what they were. He even tried using Identify on them but failed. So instead, he just followed one of the small things. Very slowly, it floated through the air and landed on the moist ground, only to sink into it. It went down a few centimeters before becoming dormant.

Frowning, he tried to find another fragment to focus on. This time he instead tried to trace its source. It didn't take him long to find out what exactly was the cause. Small mushrooms on the ground occasionally released one of the small fragments, and it was only due to the ground being littered with them that so many small things were in the air.

They were spores. Microscopic spores were how these mushrooms propagated and spread. Walking up to some of them, Jake saw two different kinds. Both no larger than half of his pinky finger, they were genuinely tiny.

Both mushrooms were pure white, with different colored spots on them - one with yellow spots and one with blue ones. Identifying them, their names were as they looked.

[Yellow-spotted Mushroom (Inferior)] – A poisonous mushroom of the earth-affinity. Causes stiffness and mild paralysis. Not fully grown yet and will have a weak effect if used as an alchemical ingredient.

[Blue-spotted Mushroom (Inferior)] - A mushroom of the water-affinity. Safe to consume, but its liquids can be highly poisonous and cause blood-thinning. Not fully grown yet and will have a weak effect if used as an alchemical ingredient.

Baby mushrooms, he thought with a slight smirk. He considered picking some of them to eat for his Palate skill but decided against it. Instead, he would give them time to grow big and strong. Then he would come back and eat them. How kind he was.

Getting up, he moved further into the cave. By now, he was around sixty or so meters in. Looking back, he could still see the entrance, but it was slightly obscured by the ground of the cave, as well as a part of the wall. Meaning that the cave was indeed leading down but also curving slightly.

So far, he hadn't encountered any living things besides small bugs that were all identified as lvl 0. In other words, they weren't able to level or hadn't done what was required for them to do so. In nearly every way, they were just ordinary animals. If slightly stronger from the mana.

Which made sense, as he was still within the area of his Pylon of Civilization. The pond it was buried next to was only a few kilometers away, making the area the Pylon covered pretty big. Exactly how big he didn't know, but the group of four he saved were all nearly 5 kilometers away from the Pylon itself, making him guess that was around the maximum range.

Yet, he was actually beginning to feel its effects wane after walking only for a few more minutes. Now around 300 meters into the cave, the entrance was entirely gone from sight, and darkness dominated. Not that it bothered him, as his vision was clear as day. The only difference was the slightly increased dark-affinity mana in the air, but he had adapted to that long ago.

This was also the time he spotted the first actual monster. Though not a very impressive one.

[Flyeater – lvl 8]

It was some kind of plant. And while it was large for a plant, it was relatively small compared to beasts Jake saw, perhaps no bigger than one of his arms. It was entirely green and looked like a regular flytrap, just larger.

Pretty sure flytraps don't grow in caverns, though, he thought. It did remind him of another kind of herb he had. Mentally checking out his spatial storage, he found the pile of mushrooms he was thinking about and took one out.

[Flytrap Mushroom (Inferior)] – A carnivorous poisonous mushroom eating insects in order to accelerate its growth. Possesses a strong life affinity and has strong acidic qualities.

The name was even slightly similar. But why was this just a normal herb, and the Flyeater instead a monster with levels?

He knew plants could somehow evolve into sapient creatures, but it was another thing to see it right in front of him. The Flyeater was squirming forward, with small vines dragging it around. It looked unbelievably slow and clumsy.

Entering sneak mode, he got closer to observe it better. As he did so, his sphere picked up something he hadn't expected. More Flyeaters. Not on the surface, however. Tens of them had dug only a few centimeters under the ground and now lay in wait.

Their posture made them look like buried bear traps, ready to clamp. Jake doubted they could do him any harm even if they bit him but decided to avoid them anyway. None of them were above level 10, making them actually seem kind of cute.

Not wanting to disturb them, he snuck by as he made his way further into the depths. He hadn't exactly planned on how far he wanted to go, but at least to where he couldn't feel the Pylon at all. Currently, it was so faint that it was barely noticeable, but it was still there.

The only monsters that dared enter the domain were those Flyeaters, it appeared, as he didn't encounter anything new for the next few hundred meters, except for more Flyeaters. No flies, though, making him wonder if their name truly represented their dietary preferences.

He had to be at least 800 meters in and likely 50 or 60 meters down by now. Maybe even further. He had found quite the assortment of interesting herbs on his way, but pretty much all of them were not fully grown yet. They hadn't had more than a bit over two months to grow after all.

At 1 kilometer or so, the influence of the Pylon was totally gone. At least Jake couldn't sense it at all. The cave was just long and narrow, no more than four or five meters across the entire way, with no other opening anywhere.

From the mark where the Pylons influence disappeared, he began seeing creatures here or there, but none that had even reached level 25. He would consider this entire trip a waste of time except for the herbs. Yet he kept going, and after reaching around the two kilometers mark, his disappointment was only growing.

This is why he found what he saw next pleasantly surprising. The entire cavern opened up before him after he entered a small entrance.

He hadn't entered any portal or anything, yet it felt like entering another world entirely. The entire cavern had to be more than a hundred meters tall, meaning that he genuinely had gone far deeper underground than he first anticipated.

The other end of the cavern wasn't even visible. Instead, Jake saw hundreds of different wild and alien plants everywhere. Some more recognizable, like giant mushrooms the size of trees, all the way to these weird bark-covered, almost metallic, tubes. It indeed was like entering another world.

And then he saw movement. An insectoid monster crawled on top of one of the mushrooms nearly right in front of him. Long blades instead of forearms, both gleaming from the light of the glowing moss above. It was a giant human-sized mantis.

[Mantis Scyther – lvl 42]

Jake chuckled to himself as he saw its level, even more so when it charged towards him. Maybe this trip will be fun after all.