

Hunter 135

Chapter 135: First World Problems

Jake sat cursing to himself near the cave entrance he had exited just a bit over a day ago. He wasn't here for a rematch with the Indigo Mushroom, but instead just to do his alchemy. The reason for his sour mood was because he, in his stupidity, forgot the book he was right in the middle of reading back at the pond.

Could he go back and get it? In theory, yes. Would he? Hell no. They had already begun constructing his new house, and Miranda, together with Louise, seemed very adamant about him staying away until it was done - something that should take less than a week.

While they hadn't explicitly stated he couldn't go there, he very much got that feeling from them. He had helped a bit by leaving behind a few dozen potions of all three kinds. They were some of the mid-tier iterations he made in his two weeks of mass-production, but they were still peak-inferior or common.

He had explained to Miranda about his plan of making the cellar. They had decided to simply build around the pillar while making the cellar. To make the basement a square with a hole in the middle holding the Pylon, it merely looking like a supporting beam for the entire house.

It wasn't strictly necessary due to the builder profession's skills and the far improved raw materials compared to pre-system construction, but aesthetically it would look relatively normal.

The reason why he wanted to do it like that was relatively simple. He wanted to make that cellar into his secret alchemy lab to truly keep anyone out, which meant that he would make it a place where no one could easily enter.

He had learned from both Duskleaf and the Viper that alchemists of the Malefic Viper often designed their labs with affinities in mind. They often flooded a room with a certain kind of poison gas, creating a field of deadly miasma where anyone without strong poison resistance would quickly find themselves poisoned and dying.

If he could do that in the cellar, it would function as both an improved lab, and at the same time, keep anyone too nosy out. Quite a win-win if he said so himself. And from how Hank spoke during their final stages of planning, the man seemed like he knew how to do his job. The fact that he had been working in construction before the system was showing.

Though it was a bit surprising that the quiet kid Mark had followed in his father's footsteps and chosen the builder profession. In retrospect, this was quite a nice thing, as it would speed up the construction by quite a bit.

Louise served as the architect, and Miranda was apparently still messing around with her new skills. She had been above level 40 before her profession change but surprisingly hadn't lost a single skill. She had only gained new ones. A part of Jake couldn't help but wonder if this could somehow be meta-gamed by switching between professions, but then again, it more likely just had something to do with the City Lord profession being unique.

He was sure that he would have lost any skills related to the Malefic Viper if he changed. And speaking of skills associated with the Malefic Viper... he felt level 70 creep closer than ever before. So with nothing else to do, he began making the final push.

As his book was left behind, he just began experimenting instead. He already had gotten a few ideas, so he started by testing those. He still had many ingredients from the challenge dungeon left, and he reckoned some of those had to be useful.

Only a few hours later, he got his level.

'DING!' Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 70 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

And with it the expected message.

Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper profession skills available

The last time he got a skill at level 60, he got offered quite a few useful skills, with Sagacity of the Malefic Viper being the clear standout. It was a no-brainer.

But when he opened it this time... he saw five options as always. He ignored two of them right away, both of them being rare skills related to being some fanatical prophet for the Viper or whatever. No, the issue was the next 3.

[Wings of the Malefic Viper (Ancient)] – Refusing to remain earthbound, the Malefic Viper sprung wings to devour the skies. You too refuse to be earthbound. Allows the Alchemist to summon two phantasmal wings and take flight. While active, you can burn the blood within the wings and release potent toxic fumes. The toxicity and effect of the poison are based on Blood of the Malefic Viper. Toughness and maneuverability of the wings and speed are based primarily on agility but receive a bonus from all physical stats. The wings count as part of your body for all relevant skills. Passively provides 1 Agility per level in Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper. May the sight of your wings be the harbinger of death.

[Fang of the Malefic Viper (Ancient)] – When born, the Viper had little weapons to fight with, yet it prevailed only with its fangs. Its bites the deliverer of death. As a human, you have taken inspiration and learned to apply the same concept. Allows the Alchemist to coat his teeth in deadly venom, sharing all the same effects as Blood of the Malefic Viper in an empowered state. Additionally, all poisons you have crafted or created are significantly more effective when injected directly into the body of your foes. Passively provides 1 Strength per level in Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper. May you bring death in a single strike.

[Pride of the Malefic Viper (Ancient)] – The arrogance and strong will of the Malefic Viper is known throughout the multiverse. Now, you have learned to take after him, your own pride now a tangible weapon. Allows the Alchemist to force their will upon the world far more easily. Significantly increases the effect of all Words of Power spoken. Your pride increases all resistance to any kind of mind-affecting effects but be warned that it wanes in despair. Passively provides 1 Willpower per level in Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper. May your will be truth, your pride eternal.

Reading through all of them was quite something. Each one powerful, each one ominous in its own way. He wanted all of them, but he could only pick one. This was by far the most challenging skill choice he had ever had. Truly the definition of a first-world problem.

So, he returned to his true and tested method of going through them one by one. Starting from the top as always

First off: Wings of the Malefic Viper. The biggest pro of this skill was in the name alone. Wings. Flight. What human didn't desire to sprout wings and take to the air like a bird? It was enough for him to nearly make the impulsive decision of just picking the skill up right away.

He had to calm himself down and analyze it more objectively. Of course, the ability to fly was a huge plus and would very likely serve him incredibly well in combat. One of his most significant weaknesses

currently was his inability to move properly when airborne. He had to fire off blasts of mana to push him in different directions, and that was both ineffective and wasted a lot of mana.

The part about burning the blood within the wings was also impressive. It even burned the blood from Jake's Blood of the Malefic Viper, once more proving the synergy between all the skills.

Burning this blood would give him an area of effect ability. It could even be effective against the Indigo Mushroom that he was having trouble dealing with. If he could release toxic gas into the chamber, he could potentially kill it. Though he seriously doubted it for several reasons. Likely it could just retreat underground or something.

The final good part was the stats given. Outside of perception, agility was the stat Jake desired the most, and, if he had to be honest with himself, needed most for direct combat. Perception was a weird stat, that while helping his damage quite a lot, didn't have much effect outside of boosting his skills and bloodline. At least not as far as he could directly tell.

Agility, on the other hand, helped tremendously. It allowed Jake to move faster, improved his reaction speed, and of course, also helped boost pretty much all of his class-related abilities. It was a stat he very much wanted, and picking the skill would instantly get him 70 in it. Factoring in his title bonuses, it would be closer to 120.

But... all of the skills gave stats. Another stat Jake felt like he could never have enough of was strength.

Fang of the Malefic Viper was a skill that was clearly just directly combat-related. It didn't even appear to have a single application while doing alchemy. Then again, neither did the wings.

The application for combat it gave was quite massive for his current fighting style. He chose to completely ignore the part about coating his teeth in poison, as there was no way he would go around biting people. He wasn't some kind of vampire. Wait, do vampires exist now? Do they sparkle or not? Moving on.

It also again borrowed from Blood of the Malefic Viper. He was happy that he had managed to upgrade it to ancient-rarity, as it would hamper many other skills if he hadn't. Then again... maybe he wouldn't have even gotten these options without it.

Thinking back, he didn't have any of them when he hit 60 despite the skill being upgraded then. Sagacity might have also been a pre-requisite.

Focusing back on Fang, however, there wasn't honestly much to say about it. It was relatively simple but would very likely provide him the most significant boost in overall fighting power here and now. Making all toxins he injected directly into his enemies stronger was just massive.

He knew it worked with his arrows. Why he knew, he didn't know. He just did. If he had to guess, it was likely related to Sagacity giving him knowledge of things. But the knowledge still felt locked away for the most part.

So, if he purely wanted to be stronger in combat, he would go for Fang.

Wing and Fang had both been relatively straightforward, but the last one was a bit of a curveball.

Pride of the Malefic Viper was the kind of skill that had more things in the description he didn't get than he actually understood. Sagacity was not helping at all here for some reason. Honestly, what the hell?

Force his will upon the world? Words of Power? He didn't get any of those. Like, could he just think stuff, and then it happened? Was that what it meant by forcing his will upon the world?

Maybe it instead was some kind of mind-affecting skill? One part of the skill he did get was the fact that it improved his mental defenses. That part he very much desired. However, he did find the whole 'waning in despair' part a bit ominous.

Getting more stats in willpower was also easily understood. However, Jake had to say that the stat was his most useless by far. Aside from the passive effects of improving mental defenses and increasing mana regeneration, he didn't notice it at all.

Even the mana regeneration part barely mattered as he chugged down mana potions like a teenager consumed energy drinks during a 24-hour gaming session. The mental defenses were passive, making it also unnoticeable.

He had already been explained that willpower didn't help with mental things that weren't affected by skills, so it wasn't like he could overcome his social anxiety by dumping more stats into it. If that worked, he wouldn't find talking to anyone besides Miranda as complicated as he did.

It was pretty safe to say that he wouldn't go with Pride. He knew that he would pick up all three skills, the next one at 80 and the final at 90. If he also managed to get his Sense and Touch of the Malefic Viper to ancient-rarity, and his theory proved true, he would have completed the 'set.'

For now, however, he needed to make a choice. He liked pretty much all of them, the last one the least, of course. Now he just needed to decide.

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After sitting for a while, unable to decide on anything, he took out a piece of paper and wrote down each skill's pros and cons.

[Wings of the Malefic Viper]:

Pros: Freaking wings. Gives agility (best). Good in combat. Area of effect attack

Cons: Lots of unknowns as to the strength of the wings. Not as useful/impossible to use in small spaces.

[Fang of the Malefic Viper]:

Pros: Best in combat. Can technically make an improved version of Blood of the Malefic Viper. Can technically bite people better? Gives strength (second best).

Cons: Does not give flight. I don't wanna bite people. A relatively simple skill.

[Pride of the Malefic Viper]:

Pros: Increases mental defense. Probably other good things?

Cons: Not understanding half of what it does. Needs to avoid despair (obvious). Gives willpower (worst stat). Limited to no use in combat when fighting enemies not using mind-affecting skills. Also, no flight.

Alright, he thought. Pride is out. I just don't know enough about it.

So the decision was between Fang and Wings. His intuition was annoyingly silent. He nearly wanted to just sit down and grind another 10 levels in alchemy and pick both of them at once but knew that wasn't possible.

He even considered just flipping a coin for a moment. It was stupid, but he just couldn't decide. He had always sucked at making important decisions like this. He remembered how he spent over an hour unable to decide between getting a black or a silver car. It wasn't until his dad hit him over the head and told him just to pick one... so he got the blue car.

If he really had to put on his full-analysis glasses, he would have to rate Fang of the Malefic Viper highest. The Wings mainly provided flight and poison in an area. He didn't really need an area skill as he was now, and the wings also had limited use.

For pure travel, he was nearly 100% sure One Step Mile was still superior. It was an ancient skill designed for efficient travel, while the wings had many other things packed into the skill.

And while agility would be better than strength, both stats were tremendously powerful. One could even argue that strength could be best in some cases, as it would have a higher impact on Jake's Infused Powershot than agility.

So when he added all of the factors up, he would have to go with Fang of the Malefic Viper being superior. Improved effectiveness to all his poisons was just too good. It was still his main source of damage against powerful foes.

His analysis complete, he naturally picked Wings of the Malefic Viper.

Because flight.