

## Hunter 186

### Chapter 186: One Step Closer

Jake raised his arms as the thunderbolt hit him, sending him tumbling back. His entire body was smoking, but his Scales of the Malefic Viper had nullified most of the attack. He took out his bow again as he side-stepped a massive blade of wind coming towards him.

The wind blade tore into the clouds below, cutting off a huge part of it and sending all the surrounding birds and elementals scurrying even further away. Jake smiled a bit as he fired a Splitting Arrow towards the small bird that was his opponent.

It dodged all of them easily as the hawk zoomed through the air, far faster than any opponent Jake had ever fought before. Simultaneously, a constant stream of attacks headed for him, but he was no slouch when it came to speed and avoiding blows either. Jake was enjoying the small bout quite a lot, and his opponent also seemed to enjoy being able to let loose its power and practice its newfound strength.

Hawkie had gotten a lot faster and stronger after his evolution.

And while the power-dynamic had changed slightly, with Hawkie no longer utterly outmatched... it still wasn't the superior predator.

Jake flapped his wings as he chased after the far-faster bird while shooting the occasional arrow. One would assume it could get away... but Jake had quite a few tricks up his sleeve. His gaze landed on the hawk, making it freeze up momentarily, and at the same time, solidified the mana under his foot as he took a step.

He appeared right above the hawk, stepping on an arrow he had fired just beforehand. He was now right above Hawkie and within range of the bird. Jake reached down and pulled the bird towards him with a hastily constructed web of mana strings.

Hawkie had only been frozen for a moment, but it was enough for Jake to land his hand on the hawk and grasp the wings that were already crackling with electricity to get him off.

“Won’t work,” Jake snickered as he dragged the hawk down and smashed it into the cloud.

Size had some strengths and some weaknesses. Being large made you immune to some physical attacks from smaller forms, such as pretty much making it impossible for them to tackle you. But it made you slower and a far easier target.

In the same vein, being small made you susceptible to being wrestled around by a larger opponent. This was especially true for the Stormsong Hawk that relied on speed and high damage output to fight. In summary... Hawkie was screwed if Jake got hold of him.

“I win again,” Jake said with a big grin as the hawk pecked his hand in annoyance.

“Don’t be a sore loser; it’s just sparring. Besides, I doubt I could catch you if you decided to just bail from the fight,” Jake shrugged.

Hawkie, of course, knew this but was still a bit sour. Today was far from the first time the two had fought, as it was just one of many bouts. It was great practice for both of them, and Jake had learned a lot about magic combat from it.

It was rare to find an opponent that could shoot lightning bolts at you to practice making a mana barrier.

“Aight, let’s head back,” he said, motioning for the hawk to follow. It happily did so as Jake threw one last glance towards the massive tree on the cloud continent. Jake could feel that this is where Hawkie and Mystie had gone when they were gone for over three weeks. They were doing as the Thunder Roc and Storm Elemental had done before and claimed the massive tree for themselves. With Mystie putting down formations to increase the absorption rate and Hawkie already at 99 when they left, the hawk had achieved D-grade pretty quickly.

It did help that Jake had killed all other powerful contenders for the tree, making Mystie able to easily handle any other bird or elemental that decided to get in the way of Hawkie’s evolution. He did see that many other birds and elementals now swarmed the tree, and it was just a matter of time before a new D-grade would appear.

Arriving back at the lodge, Jake touched down on the ground, and instantly a tiny goofball of a hawk jumped out of the lodge and ran up to him.

“Chirp! Chirp!”

Sylphie looked expectantly up at him as Jake picked her up and placed her on his shoulder. She had begun getting a bit big for his head, even if she did occasionally climb there anyway. He kept playing with her a bit as he made preparations for his next crafting session.

Nearly an entire month had passed since Hawkie returned in his evolved form, and Jake had made plenty of progress in that time on his newest crafting projects. He had already made plenty of common-

rarity fungicides that were all far better than what he had used on the Indigo Fungus what felt like so long ago.

In this time, he had also gained another five levels in his profession, getting him to 89. Just one more level and he would get the final skill in the stat-granting “of the Malefic Viper” skills. Hopefully, today would be that day, as Jake was preparing to finally make the final push.

Looking over the materials he would use, he did a bit of counting and concluded that he only had enough for a total of twenty attempts or so. It sounded like a lot... but this was also his first time truly trying to concoct an uncommon-rarity poison.

[Lesser Ethwood Ashes (Uncommon)] – The ashes left behind by burnt Lesser Ethwood. Used in a myriad of recipes related to the soul and mind. Has no effect upon direct consumption.

[Soothing Bellberry (Uncommon)] – A berry that provides a soothing effect to whoever consumes it.

Throughout this period, Jake had analyzed and done many experiments with the samples he took from the Indigo Fungus. He had already used a bit of the ash in prior concoctions as he had enough of it to do that. He patted himself on the back for burning down all the traps within the Forgotten Sewers and looting all the ash he could get.

The ash contained a weird sort of energy that was a bit like mana, but not entirely. Jake was sure it still actually was mana; it just acted so differently. So ethereal. He had trouble controlling it within the concoction but found that his Pride of the Malefic Viper and the whole “imposing your will upon the world”-thing also applied in alchemy. It was small, subtle things, like slightly nudging the mana here and there, but it helped immensely.

Now, he was a bit ashamed to admit it, but he had tried talking to the concoction using Words of Power. He had done so when no one else was around, but he still felt stupid for doing it. Naturally, it hadn't done jack-shit, and the only real feedback he got was Villy sending a divine message that was just him laughing.

Well, the Viper did finish off by saying that he had sure as hell had never seen anyone using Words of Power while doing alchemy. Still, Jake was totally welcome to develop his own new innovative style of singing to his cauldron.

So yeah, he never tried that again but returned to the methods he knew worked.

After offloading Sylphie to her parents – much to her displeasure – he finally went out onto his porch, where he sat down on a chair and summoned his Altmar Cauldron. The ingredients were already on the small table beside him as he began his concoction.

He wouldn't use a lot of Purified Water for this concoction. No, nearly all the liquid would stem from his own blood and the juices inside the berries. He still needed a bit of Purified Water for when he mixed in the ash, as otherwise the entire concoction would become way too solid to work with.

Next, he added some Aged Green Moss he had been preparing for more than a month. The moss was normally a common-rarity herb used in nearly all kinds of poisons, but this moss was a bit different. He had several batches he had taken out daily to use Cultivate Toxin on to prepare them for these concoctions. It was far from enough to bring them to uncommon-rarity, but it did make the herbs far more potent.

He let it all swirl a while as he integrated the moss and his blood. He was meticulous throughout the entire process, not rushing anything. He wanted to make the most potent toxin possible, not create a lot of it – his only goal was to succeed.

When the entire concoction was stable, he added a bit of liquid from a pre-prepared common-rarity fungicide. It wasn't more than a few droplets, but it was enough to throw the entire mix for a loop for a few moments, with Jake working to stabilize it. It was an easy task for him now, but a few months ago, he would have had all the contents of the cauldron blow up in his face.

The fungicide was quickly diluted into the mix, and Jake had a strong feeling that if he finished up now, he would have just made a large batch of inferior-rarity fungicide. With this method, he could easily turn one bottle of common-rarity fungicide into a dozen inferior-rarity ones... but of course, that wasn't his goal.

Instead, he took out some of the Lesser Ethwood Ash and threw it into the cauldron before quickly placing the lid back on. The expert craftsmanship behind the cauldron completely sealed in all the energies, including the mysterious ethereal energy that the ash released when Jake directed his mana to break it down.

Jake carefully tried to control the energy, but it just refused to mix correctly with the rest of the concoction. He used all his willpower and mana control to try and integrate it... and eventually, he did. It was incredibly inefficient, but he breathed out a sigh of relief anyway. This part he had even trained before, and yet it was so hard.

Moving on, he slowly began using Touch of the Malefic Viper to mimic the poison found in the fungicide, but at a very low intensity. He would slowly bring up the entire concoction's toxicity without accidentally overwhelming the oh-so-feeble energy from the Ethwood Ash.

He had to walk a very narrow line between the poison not being toxic enough to reach the threshold of uncommon-rarity and have enough potency while at the same time allowing the soul-affecting energy to assimilate with the entire mixture.

It took careful control to-

And it's gone.

He slipped up for only a moment, and instantly all the soul-affecting mana was gone. Consumed by the poison around it, turning it into nothing.

Jake just sighed as he cleaned up the cauldron, downed a mana potion, and started over again.

Two hours later, the entire concoction was ruined because he added too much common-rarity fungicide too quickly.

His third attempt failed when he used Touch of the Malefic Viper at a too high level of intensity and completely overwhelmed the other toxins in the mix.

The fourth time he got further than ever before. He had managed to raise the toxicity level adequately. However, the ethereal energy from the ash still wasn't 'active.' It was more a catalyst than anything else, and the Soothing Bellberry would be the effect it would amplify.

He added the berry and instantly felt it clash with everything else in the concoction. Jake already knew this would happen, as the berry wasn't considered a toxin at all. Far from it. It had the gentlest energy one could imagine within it and held purely beneficial effects.

Except Jake wanted to turn those beneficial effects of soothing the mind into instead soothing the experienced effect of the fungicide for the Indigo Fungus. To that end, he also added one final vital part:

[Indigo Fungus Mycorrhiza Lifevine (Rare)] – The Lifevine of an Indigo Fungus Mycorrhiza. The Lifevine is a part of the main body of the fungus. Contains intense amounts of vital energy and is incredibly resilient. Can be used in a myriad of alchemical creations.

Granted... it wasn't the entire Lifevine, but a small part of it. This was another reason he had limited attempts... because he, of course, had pieces of Lifevine to make the concoction's energy feel more familiar to the fungi. Make it feel like it was just its own energies.

He would make it so that the toxin would slowly and unnoticeably spread throughout the massive creature, into every little crevice of its body.

The fungicide would slowly erode it from the inside out, with the damn mushroom unable to feel it before it was too late. Jake wanted to make it so there would never be a fight... but just a poisoning and then a slow death. It was very ambitious of him, but then again, he was an Ambitious Hunter.

Jake carefully tried to integrate the berry, but it felt like the toxic energies pounced with great vigor to devour it only a few moments later. He was a second too slow to react adequately, and yet another concoction failed.



Well, he said he failed, but even these failed attempts still resulted in crafting either an inferior or common-rarity fungicide every time after all the effects from the ash and/or berry were consumed. It did result in a worse toxin than if he didn't use the ash at all, so it was a very suboptimal way of crafting fungicide.

His sixth attempt failed right away as Jake just wasn't in the right mindset when he began, so he took a break and played with Sylphie, afterward taking a quick nap with the small hawk when she got tired.

The entire second day of attempting to create the fungicide was spent failing repeatedly but getting a bit better every time.

The third day went the same, but he got to the last part of the process pretty much at every attempt. He only had a dozen attempts left on the third day. He only used his more limited ingredients for the last part... so he used more now than in the beginning.

During the fourth day, he got so close that he could practically feel the concoction just about to complete, but he got impatient and tried giving it a final push, ruining it all.

On the fifth day, he failed the first craft... but on the second concoction, everything finally went well.

The first steps had been easy for a while, and even when he infused it with Touch of the Malefic Viper, everything remained stable. He added the ash and controlled everything near-perfectly. Finally, when he added the berry and part of the Lifevine, he took it slow and handled himself.

Sweat poured down his face as he kept his cool. He felt how close it was yet didn't get impatient, but just kept slowly integrating grain of energy after grain of energy. Finally... everything seemed to just

click. The energy from the Bellberry mixed perfectly with the concoction, and Jake even felt the entire concoction now faintly give off an aura similar to the Indigo Fungus.

\*You have successfully crafted [Ethoxic Fungicide (Uncommon)] – A new kind of creation has been made. Bonus experience earned\*

\*'DING!' Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 90 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points\*

\*'DING!' Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 91 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points\*

\*'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 95 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points\*

\*'DING!' Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 92 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points\*

Jake basked in the feeling as he felt the level-ups but was even more excited about the liquid he saw upon removing the cauldron's lid.

[Ethoxic Fungicide (Uncommon)] - A poison created to kill fungi and similar lifeforms. This type of poison is made to spread through any physical connection of the fungi, quickly infecting large parts of it. Deals relatively low damage to the mushroom but is hard to cleanse. A distinct trace of ether-mana makes the poison incredibly difficult to detect for the fungus that has provided life-energy to the concoction.

One step closer, Jake thought. I'm coming for you, you fucking blue mushroom.