

Hunter 188

Chapter 188: A Plan Brought to Fruition

Jake sat in meditation with a sword placed on the palms of his hands. He slowly began using Touch of the Malefic Viper as he pushed the corrupting mana into the blade. He felt it resist at first, but Jake was too strong for the metal, and soon he forced his energy into it.

Like a trillion microscopic tendrils, the mana invaded every part of the blade, coloring it from its old steely color to a dark, almost entirely black, palette. The mana it gave off grew with every second as the blade went through a complete transformation.

Jake opened his eyes and quickly Identified the sword.

[Unstable Necrotic Steel Shortsword (Common)] – A blade made of steel that has been soaked in mana and crafted by a still-growing smith, infused with powerful necrotic mana. The necrotic mana has increased the blade's rarity and power but made it incredibly unstable and fragile. Will break apart within 12 minutes and 13 seconds. Enchantments: Necrotic Strike

Requirements: lvl 45+ in any humanoid race

Still not good enough, he admonished himself as he shook his head. Sure, the blade looked better, but it was just a broken object already. He could see the minuscule cracks across its edge, and he was sure that it would break apart if he tried hitting anything with it.

Jake had come to another realization about the Touch of the Malefic Viper skill and its relation to more regular alchemy. The Viper clearly focused on poison above all other things, but his skills also helped with other parts of alchemy.

Palate could now also allow him to eat herbs to learn their effects, while the rare version only allowed him to learn from toxins. It also increased the effects of potions, making brewing those clearly a part of the Malefic Viper's repertoire of skills.

Sagacity of the Malefic Viper was another piece of proof that the profession was about more than just making poison. It helped create a plethora of other alchemical creations, including flasks and elixirs, making Jake believe that the Legacy of the Malefic Viper encompassed pretty much anything that had to do with alchemy, even if it was highly specialized in making toxins.

And when Jake thought back to what an alchemist was supposed to do, he missed one very apparent ability: transmutation.

To alter an item, transforming it from one state to another. It could be argued that any alchemical creation had some aspects of transmutation. Still, nothing was more evident than the changes he had brought about in items through Touch of the Malefic Viper.

So... he reached the conclusion that a core part of the authentic Touch of the Malefic Viper revolved around transmutation through corruption. Even if the skill description didn't currently say it, it very clearly had at least partly such a function already.

And now he was trying to improve that part of the skill. So far, there was the minor issue of his Touch of the Malefic Viper kinda breaking stuff. Jake was looking for a way to both infuse the mana and at the same time make it stable.

This had resulted in a pile of broken metal off to the side of the valley lying on a large wooden platform. Before it was on the platform, all the metal had just been placed on the ground, but Jake noticed that the grass surrounded it withered as the metal's corrupt mana began soaking into the ground.

At that point, Jake had gotten the brilliant idea of maybe trying to do something with all the discarded metal. Sadly, that proved to be a worthless idea as the metal had truly become too brittle and broken after his failed experiments.

He kept working for the rest of the day and into the morning, only taking breaks to play with Sylphie while regenerating mana or diving into his Thoughtful Meditation to mentally go through what he had just learned from his last practice session.

On that morning, it wasn't Miranda but Lillian that came by.

She was dragging a small cart with metal tubes in it, and Jake quickly ran over and helped the moment he saw her. On his way over, he made his mask invisible, internally praising himself for remembering it.

"Thank you," she said, as Jake lifted up the cart with his mana control, allowing her to just walk to the lodge with him. It wasn't that she couldn't move it herself; Jake was pretty sure any human at level 10 could easily, but it was still a bit awkward to move through the grass.

A few days before he finished his first fungicide, he had sent another commission to the city with another item he needed. Today, they had finally arrived, and Jake expectantly identified the first of them.

[Simple Timed Injector (Inferior)] – A simple tool to inject a liquid from a bottle fitting the form after a set timer. The injection method is through a long metal barrel shaped like a large needle. Solidly, if hastily constructed from steel and simple Manuscripts.

Requirements: Variable

Just what I needed, Jake thought as he smiled.

Lillian noticed his smile and added: “Arnold worked quite fast in making them, and even if he wasn’t satisfied with their rarity, he was quite pleased with their functionality. The slot in the side is explicitly made to the poison bottle you provided, and on all his tests, they appear to work as intended. Here, he made this small manual for some reason.”

She handed him a small pamphlet with some easy-to-understand diagrams that explained how the very self-explanatory device worked. Jake couldn’t help but chuckle a bit at it.

It reminded him of before the system and of the absolutely inane guides found on the intranet of the company he worked at. The simplest things were explained to the lowest denominator. Jake heard it had something to do with regulations or avoiding lawsuits or something. Still, he was personally sure it was just because there honestly were many people out there who were absolutely technologically illiterate.

Jake was pretty damn sure Arnold had worked with making inventions or something like that before the system, and he must have made the small guide by habit. Or maybe Phillip’s men also kind of sucked at using technology? Well, he had learned that a lot of people sucked at manipulating mana, so perhaps it made sense to give people guides.

After unloading all the injectors, he held one up and inspected it deeper. They were nearly two meters tall and had a piston-like device installed to drive a needle-like barrel into the ground before injecting the payload.

It was solid workmanship, and Jake was more than happy with it after doing a few of his own tests. Mainly with how durable it was. Sadly he didn't have any spares for testing, so he chose to believe in them working.

Now, what would he need eleven large timed injectors for? Well, quite simple, actually. To kill a fucking mushroom.

Eleven doses of uncommon-rarity fungicide were all he had enough materials left over to craft. He didn't know if it would be enough, but he hoped so. His plan was to place these all over the biodome and set the timer to inject, so they all went down simultaneously.

With the powerful fungicide in the ground, the mushroom would naturally begin absorbing it little by little without noticing. Maybe it would even believe the energy to be beneficial due to the effects of the Soothing Bellberry.

But he had another trick up his sleeves to attract it.

Jake had studied fungi monsters a lot, and they tended to have a few things in common. They tended to require a lot of nutrients due to their large size and because often their progression relied on expanding their sizes.

To do this, they often preyed on living things – or far more frequently – absorbing powerful natural sources of mana. And of the many mana affinities, they were known to mainly prefer water and earth-affinity mana. Well, besides pure mana, but pretty much everything wanted that.

For pure mana, he didn't have any good bait, but for earth-mana? He had barrels full.

[Soilwater (Common)] – Water infused with strong earth-affinity mana, making it purer and hold certain magical properties. Can be used as an ingredient in many alchemical recipes or simply consumed in its raw form to restore mana for those possessing the earth-affinity.

Jake would gladly dump half a barrel around each Injector to make the mushroom drink it all up along with the fungicide.

And then... then he would wait. Either the fungus would die without even discovering how or it would notice its poisoning and go berserk, at which point Jake would jump into action and begin bombarding it with arrows and magic.

It was simple, but if Jake wanted to take down the damn blue mushroom-fuck while still in E-grade, he didn't think there would be a better time. Sure, he would get stronger if he upgraded his Touch or Sense first... but he had also been sitting still for too long.

While he had practiced a bit with Hawkie, it wasn't enough.

Jake began his final preparations. Each of the Injectors had a small compartment for one of Jake's poison bottles to be placed into, and he found that they fit in perfectly. When the timer would go off, the bottle

would be crushed, and the liquid pushed down into the ground - a bit simple but nevertheless effective device.

When he was done preparing all eleven Injectors, he put them into his spatial storage before turning to Lillian.

"I'm heading down. Say hi to Miranda for me, and see you next time," he said.

"Be careful," Lillian said, already aware that Jake was going to fight the creature that dwelled below. She had only heard rumors about it from Jake, so she wasn't sure how strong it was... just that he had returned battered and with tattered armor every time he went down there.

Jake just smiled as he raised his hand in a wave, making his mask visible again, and his eyes sharpened.

He had fought the mushroom twice and had to escape for his life both times. But as one says... third time's the charm.

The caterpillar crawled across the large leaf, munching on the small pieces of moss growing on it. Its sharp teeth were ripping it out after loosening it with an acid that didn't cause any damage to the leaf below. It just sat there munching when suddenly the leaf ruffled, and it was thrown off.

It landed on the ground unhurt and made a threatening sound towards the direction of the two larger insects fighting. But its instincts made it aware it wasn't a fight it should get involved in, so it cowardly crawled in the other direction, looking for more mana-rich food.

Dragging itself away, it searched the ground until encountering the most peculiar plant. It was roughly one meter tall and looked very odd as it was perfectly cylinder-shaped. A bit confused, the insect tried biting the plant but found the “bark” too tough.

Annoyed, it scurried away until suddenly the plant made a move itself. Without any warning, it suddenly slammed its upper portion into the ground before coming inert again. Even more confused than before, the caterpillar hurried away, as it got a feeling something terrible was about to happen.

Jake sneakily made his way out of the biodome as he did everything he could to not engage in any fights or scare any insects too much. He wanted to avoid waking up the mushroom as much as possible. While he had gotten a bit stronger since last, it was far from enough actually to fight the monstrous fungus. He still got chills when he imagined the speed of those vines and the final blast of mana.

He carefully placed down each Injector and embedded them in the ground with a good push. At the same time, he made small holes at the bottom of a barrel he placed right beside each Injector. It wasn't as fine-tuned as the Injectors, but Jake believed not enough energy would have time to seep into the ground and be detected before the fungicide injector also went off.

Was the plan perfect? Of course not. If it were, it would be too dull, wouldn't it?

Jake's sneaky adventure into the biodome only took a few minutes, with each Injector set to go off five minutes after being placed. Activating the five-minute timer took nothing more than injecting a bit of mana.

When the last Injector was placed and the final barrel dumped right next to it, he quickly ran out of the biodome while still trying to stay undetected. If the mushroom woke up, it sure as hell wouldn't be happy, and being in the middle of it rampaging sounded like a horrible idea.

Once outside in safety, he knelt down to make himself appear smaller and made sure the cloak covered his entire body with its camouflage active. While he was outside, he knew it still had ranged attacks that could potentially reach him, so he wanted to be as invisible as he could.

Closing his eyes, he focused on the feedback from Sense of the Malefic Viper. He felt his concocted fungicide vividly in his mind.

Time ticked by, until around forty seconds later, the first Injector activated. Jake felt the poison be released from its bottle and be forcefully pushed into the ground. Fifteen seconds later, the second triggered, eighteen seconds after the third, and so it continued until all eleven had delivered their payload. Not a single one of them failed to do their job.

Jake smiled as he thanked Arnold internally and decided to give the man a bonus after he returned.

Minutes passed by with nothing happening. The Soilwater and fungicide were mixing as it slowly seeped deeper and deeper into the ground. Perhaps it was due to the soilwater, but it sank way faster than water normally could, and soon it hit something – a part of the fungus.

It didn't make any large sounds or movements, but Jake subtly felt it absorb a bit of the nutritious mana, inadvertently ingesting the fungicide along with it.

Jake crossed his fingers that the fungus wouldn't notice anything was amiss. A dozen or so seconds passed as he felt the fungicide go deeper through the roots of the fungus before it reached the actual body. It was swiftly absorbed along with the mana from the Soilwater, with the fungus not having any immediate adverse reactions.

Instead, it sent more roots to absorb the energy. Not long after, it noticed another potent source of energy and began drinking from there too.

Within half an hour, it had absorbed all the Soilwater and fungicide. Jake felt it slowly burn away at the fungus' vitality below the ground as it spread throughout the entire creature. He felt like he had poisoned the whole biodome.

With bated breath, he waited. Waited as the poison got more and more ingrained in the fungus. Not just in its body, but even in its soul.

After over two hours, Jake was beginning to believe that the fungus would never notice. He felt it weaken with the fungicide still as powerful as ever. But just when he thought he would be able to win without a fight, he saw one of the giant blue mushrooms above-ground suddenly wilt...

And then...

OoOOoOOOOooO!

All hell broke loose.