

Hunter 190

Chapter 190: Sensing the Arcane

Jake sat back in his lodge, happy as a clam with how the last day had gone. He had killed the accursed D-grade mega-mushroom, gotten a bunch of valuable alchemy ingredients, and to top it all off, even discovered a hidden dungeon!

Eliminating the fungus was not only a good idea for his own mental health, but based on a bit of surveying he did afterward, it was also a good thing for the city. The damn thing kept growing by the day, and it was only a matter of time before it would make its way to the surface with some of its feelers.

At that point, it would begin assimilating plants and trees aboveground and grow even faster, becoming a massive threat to the entire settlement. Jake could only imagine giant Lifevines one day bursting through the ground and begin tearing apart buildings and draining the citizens with its needle-like vines. That would be a very bad time.

But now that threat was dealt with, so that was nice.

The dungeon was just the cherry on top. Sure, he couldn't enter it, but he already felt the butterflies in his stomach as he anticipated diving in there when he reached D-grade. This is why he dove into leveling his profession the rest of the way with great vigor.

During the fight with the fungus, he felt like he was close to passing some kind of threshold with Sense of the Malefic Viper.

Based on its description, the skill only allowed him to sense what his poison had infected and nothing more. He had been clever and used Mark of the Ambitious Hunter as a way of measuring how much damage he did, but his senses didn't tell him anything on their own.

Against the fungus, that had changed. Jake had focused so deeply on sensing the effects of the toxin that he began also getting a grasp for its effects. Perhaps it was because it touched the soul of his enemy, or maybe he had just gotten better at sensing things.

However, it wasn't enough to get a skill upgrade. No, Jake needed to practice and experiment more. The issue is... he needed something to test on.

He had thought a long time about what to test his poisons on as he didn't have any giant funguses conveniently waiting around anymore. The first enemy he considered was the Cloud Elementals due to how unintelligent they were.

Jake felt bad about effectively torturing something to improve himself. But at the same time, he really wanted to upgrade his Sense of the Malefic Viper. Cloud Elementals thus seemed like the most merciful foe he could try it on; there was just one minor issue with that.

He didn't have any poisons that worked on the elementals. Well, his blood did work a tiny bit, but far from enough.

Something of flesh and blood would, without a doubt, be best. Jake wasn't stupid and knew that many alchemists tested their toxins on live subjects, often dissecting the corpses afterward and/or using tools to measure how the poison was rampaging the test subject.

But... doing that just didn't sit well with him. Could he go out and kidnap a few beasts to inflict with poison? Or even worse, have Miranda bring him a few citizens she didn't like? From a practical standpoint, he could; it just wouldn't feel right to him. He liked to fight enemies, not needlessly torture them. The more intelligent his prey, the more shitty he would feel.

So... he settled on the one flesh and blood lifeform he knew that would consent to willingly be put through torture for him to study the effects poison had on the body: himself.

His way of testing was pretty simple. He would take some of his own poison, coat an arrow, and stick it into his own stomach or chest. He would then focus on suppressing his Palate of the Malefic Viper and feel the effects of the poison as it moved uninhibited through his body.

Jake actually had to praise himself for the method. It allowed him to not only practice Sense of the Malefic Viper but also his Palate. Granted, it would likely be more effective to experiment on something that wasn't himself and the pain he could do without, but besides that, it worked well.

The next three days were spent exclusively in the cellar of the lodge without any disturbances. Jake did feel a bit bad about telling Sylphie that he couldn't play with her for a while, and he would have to move a dinner session with Miranda. She seemed oddly okay with that, so that had gone over easy. Jake felt like he needed to hammer when the iron was hot, and his inspiration from the fungus fight was still fresh in his mind.

Over these days, Jake went through many bottles of Necrotic Poison and Hemotoxin. While Jake had gone through the Trial of Myriad Poisons, he had never truly pondered the effects poison had on his body and how exactly it worked on a deeper level.

During those times, he had focused solely on fighting the poison, not actually understanding it. Breaking something apart was far more simple than learning how it worked, and that was exactly what Jake was currently doing.

After inflicting himself with the poison, he entered a deep state of meditation and just sat there observing its effects, almost like an out-of-body experience. He filtered out all feedback that was not from Sense of the Malefic Viper as he just looked on and learned.

He saw his own body rot and decay, his blood thin and the wounds left by the arrows bleed like never before. But more than that, he saw the toxic energies mix with the energies in his body and how the poison slowly eroded that energy.

Jake couldn't help but sometimes momentarily compare the effects he felt it had from his Sense of the Malefic Viper to how he actually felt in his body. That is when he noticed something was off with how his own toxins worked on his body...

They did damage to his body; that much was clear. However, there was an invisible barrier that stopped the poison from going deeper and doing more damage. Like the two energies simply didn't oppose each other, even if one was aligned to destroying vitality and the other was pure vital energy.

Jake couldn't understand why the poison didn't work as it should. It didn't work like it did when he used it on the fungus either, and he felt like he was missing something important.

He considered many options until a thought suddenly struck him: why could he even feel the effects of the poison to begin with?

He understood why he could feel something was poisoned... the skill did that, but not why he could better feel the poison he himself had inflicted? Why was it just what he inflicted and not just any poison something suffered from?

What separated poison he was the source of from anything else?

With these thoughts, he tried to better feel the poison within his own body as he focused on the barrier that seemed to be the cause of why his own poison didn't hurt him as much as it should. To do this, he activated a part of his Palate to absorb some of the poison.

It went effortlessly, as a big part of the poison was, of course, his own mana, so-

Wait... am I really just a fucking idiot?

It was so goddamn simple. It was so obvious why Jake could better feel his own poison... it included his own mana. It included a part of him. Every single point of mana, health, or stamina Jake ever used contained a part of himself in the sense that it reflected his own Records. Even poison he didn't concoct still held some of his Records just on account of him inflicting it...

Even if it didn't contain any of his mana, it would still contain his will and intent. Pride of the Malefic Viper had made Jake aware that his own intentions held power and could affect the world, so it only made sense that any action he made infused a part of his intent into that action. It was absolutely minuscule... but it existed.

It was like something clicked in his mind as suddenly everything became clearer. He felt the poison within his own body more vividly than ever as he got a notification.

[Sense of the Malefic Viper (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.

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[Sense of the Malefic Viper (Ancient)] – The Malefic Viper's greed for natural treasures is neverending. You are following his path for your senses to see all that which you desire. Your desire for knowing the suffering you bring upon your foes has brought you even further down this path. Gives a passive ability to detect herbs and poisons in different forms and a strong feeling of their properties and affinities. Allows the Alchemist to far more easily detect affinities in the environment and detect areas optimal for cultivating herbs. Massively improves your ability to sense the poison you have inflicted and its effects on any inflicted entities. Adds an increase to the effectiveness of Sense of the Malefic Viper based on Perception. Passively provides 1 Perception per level in Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper. May your gaze scour the multiverse for all that is rightfully yours.

'DING!' Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 94 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

'DING!' Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 95 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

Jake basked in the feeling of his senses expanding... but he felt it wasn't enough. He felt like he had just touched upon something vital as he kept delving deeper into feeling the mana in his body and in the poison.

His perception increased with the upgrade, but he felt like he needed more. He didn't hesitate as he instantly threw all his free points into the stat as his senses sharpened even more, and he could see the mana even better. He raised his hand as a mana bolt began condensing.

The mana bolt crackled with energy as always, but Jake kept pushing more into it. Not just mana, but his will, all the while observing it as closely as possible with not only Sense of the Malefic Viper but also his sphere and natural mana sense.

For the longest time, Jake had wondered what truly separated pure mana from what he had named "destructive" mana. He knew it had something to do with how you shaped it, how you packaged the bolt, and perhaps more importantly... what you intended for it to do.

And today, for the first time, he had passed a threshold that allowed him to sense them.

Small purple or pink wisps of energy existed within the bolt, but not just in the bolt but all the mana he had. He felt it within his body as he focused on it. His Sphere of Perception honed in on a single of the tiny wisps that were still invisible to the eye.

Even with Jake's high perception, he couldn't see them with his eyes. Without his sphere and Sense of the Malefic Viper allowing him to better detect mana affinities, he wouldn't have seen it...

The bolt floating above his hand flickered as he amplified the energy of one of the wisps. He willed for it to grow in power as he pumped in more and more mana. It kept growing in intensity as Jake felt more and more of his mana be consumed, and Jake felt like he was slowly beginning to lose control.

His body moved while his mind remained focused on the bolt. He jumped out of the cellar of his lodge and flew out of the door towards the pond. Every shred of his mind focused on stopping it from exploding. He barely managed to get out of the lodge, and just as he was about to release the bolt that was being overcharged with energy and becoming volatile... it stabilized.

The discharge of mana resembling crackling lightning stopped. The bolt no longer pulsed with energy but was now just floating there, looking like a light pink crystal. Jake saw that he had lost more than 1000 mana to make this single bolt... nearly ten times more than the strongest he had ever made prior.

Jake moved his free hand and touched the crystal-like bolt. His finger poked into it as it remained stable, as he felt the mana just flow around his skin. He waved his hand, and just like that, the bolt dispersed, turning into atmospheric mana.

“What was that?” he asked himself, confused. The bolt felt so different than any he had ever made before. He felt like he understood it more than anything he had ever created and that he could control it far more than any spell or skill he had ever used.

“That is what your pure mana is supposed to look like,” he heard a voice echo out in his mind as he felt the full attention of the Malefic Viper on him. “I normally don’t like giving advice... but for once, I am going to be the wise old master. This one is actually quite important.

“Your mana is pure and unpolluted by any affinities or influences. Mana is by default uncolored and unaffected by anything. You can mix pure mana with any other mana affinity, and all it does is dilute the mana-affinity. Like when you mix purified water into a concoction.

“But what happens when pure mana reaches a level of concentration where it can no longer be called pure? Where the intent within it makes it antithetical to its purity? When you force this mana that otherwise does not hold any pre-determined function to make your will a reality, it stops being able to merge with pure mana like before.

“That is when pure mana ascends to become an affinity in itself. Affinities are partly defined by having inherent intent. As you know, dark mana inherently wants to consume other mana-affinities, light-affinity mana wants to spread itself out as wide as possible, and earth-affinity mana wants to consolidate and condense itself.

“The affinity you just created is one where you define this inherent want. It wants to do what you want it to do. You can call it Jake-affinity if you want to, but we decided to just give it a unified name in the multiverse, even if the effects of this affinity vary widely from person to person. Anyway, Jake, this is the amalgamation of all that silly and extremely suboptimal training with mana you have done. Congratulations, you just discovered your arcane affinity.”

And almost as if prompted, he got a notification.

Title earned: [Prodigious Arcanist]

Jake was a bit surprised, and he swiftly checked out the title, hoping it would make things more transparent. Jake was still a bit confused about what was happening, and the title should explain what this whole arcane-affinity thing was about.

[Prodigious Arcanist] – You have proven yourself a prodigy in the realm of energy manipulation and control. Create your own arcane-affinity before reaching D-grade. Allows you to transform energy into your arcane-affinity far more easily.

It didn't.