

## Hunter 21

### Chapter 21: An impactful choice

The next hallway was quite a bit longer than the previous one and suspiciously lacking in mushrooms. This meant that the narrow passage was covered entirely in darkness. Not that it mattered much to Jake with his sphere.

As he walked, he remembered that he had his skills back. He took out the dagger he had gotten during the second challenge room and identified it.

[Dagger of Bloodletting (Common)] – A dagger created by an ancient long-dead cult, made for sacrificial purposes. Enchantments: Any cuts made with this blade bleed more, for longer, and are harder to heal.

The enchant explained why it bled so damn much when he cut himself. He put the dagger away as he proceeded down the hallway.

After walking for a couple of minutes, he turned a corner and saw a light source in the distance. But this was not the blue light he had gotten used to, but 'normal' light—the orange/whitish kind. Well, technically, light is a combination of all colors on the color spectrum. What matters is that it was light with colors outside of blue.

He sped up his walk and exited the hallway to find himself in a new room.

It was not what he expected. It looked like an old library or perhaps an office. There were bookshelves all along the walls, filled with old leather-bound books. A chair and a desk with a few writing utensils were positioned in the middle of the room.

There was also an old wooden door at the wall directly across from where he entered. As hadn't seen any system messages yet, he walked up to one of the bookshelves and tried to take out a book but was met with an invisible barrier of some sort.

He tried with a couple of the other bookshelves with the same result. He also attempted to move some paper and the small cup filled with pencils and pens on the desk. Both of which he couldn't touch either due to the same kind of barrier. Finding nothing else of interest, he went through the only door in the room.

He was met with a small, relatively normal-looking hallway with five doors in it, two on each side of the corridor, and one at the end. The first door he opened led into a room that had a bed in it. The rest of the room was absolute barebones, with only a small wooden table and chair as well as a dresser and a closet. He was unable to open the dresser and closet, met with yet another invisible barrier.

Leaving the room, he closed the door after him and opened the next one. This one could only be described as a medieval bathroom, that for some reason, had a modern shower and toilet placed in it. He walked into the room and tried flushing the toilet, which surprisingly worked. So, an ancient forgotten temple in a dungeon with running water. Got it.

The third room he entered was at the end of the hall, and what he found himself in wasn't exactly what you could call a 'room'. It was more like a hellscape in the form of a cave. Mushrooms. Everywhere. Not just the blue, glowing kind, but also other less evil-looking ones.

The cave was not closed off either and had another exit beside the wooden door. Jake walked out of the aforementioned exit and found himself in a small walled-off garden. Flowers were growing everywhere, weird-looking grass and bushes aplenty, many of which he had seen before outside in the tutorial forest. There was even a small pond with different aquatic plants.

He called the garden walled-off, but the wall that did so seemed to extend up into eternity. Hanging above the garden was a miniature version of the artificial sun he had seen outside in the forest, emitting both warmth and light. He was briefly confused, as Jake recalled it being late in the evening when he entered the challenge dungeon, and according to the timer counting down, only a couple of hours had passed since then.

Shaking his head at the weird garden, he went back through the cave and into the fourth room. This one was like an old laboratory. Not the modern kind, but the 1600's mad scientist kind. It looked like a dream come true for an insane chemist.

There were mortars and pestles, alembics, and a slew of other tools and materials. In the room were also open barrels with what seemed like water. Off to the side were closed cabinets that couldn't be opened either due to a barrier.

As he made his way out of the room towards the next, he wondered what exactly the system wanted him to do. No challenge had been represented, and no way forward had made itself known. This place seemed more like a living quarter than any kind of testing facility. Maybe the challenge is to find the challenge?

Opening the fifth door, he found himself within another hall like the ones he had done the challenges earlier. In the middle of the room was a pedestal. He moved to it and found a hand-imprint on top of it. He looked at his hand and quickly connected the dots.

He put his hand on the imprint, and instantly his danger-sense flared as a black spike shot up, penetrating through it before he could react. He yelled out in pain and stumbled backward, as the room started rumbling.

A new platform had begun rising in front of the pedestal. Jake, however, barely registered this as he looked at the hole in his hand and saw small, subtle black lines spread through the veins in his hand. He suppressed his panic, rushing towards the newly risen platform. It didn't take a genius to figure out he had gotten poisoned.

On it was a book. The book was massive, far more massive than any book Jake had ever seen before. On the cover was the depiction of a small snake. The very same snake he had seen on the symbols and mural. He tried opening the book, as the system finally did something.

Dungeon Challenge: Become an Alchemist of the Malefic Viper and cure yourself of the poison running through your veins before it flares up and kills you. The poison will remain dormant for 30 days, not affecting the challenger in any way during the period.

Rejecting the profession will result in the challenger being fully restored and returned to the tutorial area. All rewards will be retained, and all items returned.

Cured yourself of poison 0/1

Time remaining: 30 Days.

Become an Alchemist of the Malefic Viper?

Y/N

He was taken aback by the message. A profession? The N/A on his status page had annoyed him for a long time, but he didn't expect to get one offered this way. It was the first option to obtain a profession he had seen since being introduced to the system, and he doubted it was an ordinary one. Alchemy though? Not something he had any experience in at all outside of games.

He was rather good at the modern equivalent, chemistry, back in school, but he had never done it at any higher level. He also severely doubted that knowledge of chemical compounds would have a lot of use with magic being a thing and all.

The time limit was 30 days also. Looking at his just-impaled hand, it was rather obvious where the poison came from. The wound had already scabbed over due to his high vitality, and he didn't feel any different.

Jake also had the option of just quitting now and going back to the forest. It was the safe option for sure. He would be healed, walking away with a new dagger and a bonus to willpower. Oh, and a bunch of shitty blue mushrooms, along with ten slightly nicer silver mushrooms.

It wasn't even like he had spent a lot of time getting everything.

But he was nothing if not someone who welcomed a challenge. He wanted a profession, and if this profession had any connection to that heaven-shattering dragon, it had to be powerful. Fantasy books and games had long conditioned him to unquestionably believe dragons to be apex creatures after all.

Without further hesitation, he accepted the challenge.

\*You have obtained the Alchemist of the Malefic Viper profession\*

And with that message, everything went dark momentarily. Jake's head felt like it was split open as information surged into his mind, far more so than when he'd gotten his archer class.

It was only for a few seconds, but it felt like hours before it finally stopped, leaving him with a massive headache and a considerable amount of system messages. He took a few more seconds to gather his thoughts; the headache also fading away. When he felt better, he finally opened up the description of his new profession.

Alchemist of the Malefic Viper – The Alchemist of the Malefic Viper can combine natural treasures of the world, and make potions, pills, transmute one material to another, with a slew of other mystical means to be discovered. This rare type of alchemist specializes in the concoction of poisons. From a craft classically bringing restoration and improvement, the Alchemist of the Malefic Viper brings pain, deterioration, and death. Stat bonuses per level: +2 Vit +2 Wis +1 Will +1 Tough +2 Free Points.

The description of an alchemist was a lot like he had imagined. He had assumed the ability to make potions based on his experience playing certain online games during university. Transmutation was also a very classical trope of alchemists. Perhaps I'll even make the Philosopher's Stone one day, he joked to himself.

But this is where the familiarities ended; the latter part of the description a bit different. This variant of the alchemist profession focused on poison. The entire description was ominous, but then again, it was clearly modeled or at least heavily inspired by a snake. To be more accurate, a small mushroom-eating snake, he assumed it to be the Malefic Viper.

The profession also provided more stat bonuses than his archer class, giving two more stats per level overall. None directly impacting combat, however, and he was slightly sad to see no bonus to perception. But what's done is done, he had accepted it, and there was no going back.

He knew that the decision to pick the profession wasn't a minor one. Likely as significant as his class choice. If not more so as this one was clearly not some basic profession handed out left and right. Finally... Jake had to admit that the thought of doing alchemy was kind of cool.

With that, he moved on to the next part: Skills. With a quick skim, he saw that he had gained five and started going through them one by one.

\*Gained skill\*: [Herbology (Common)] – Grants knowledge of herbs found throughout the multiverse. The most numerous source of natural treasures comes in the form of herbs found throughout existence. The knowledge of plants and their effects is, therefore, essential to any alchemist. An alchemist must know what he works with in order to create his products after all. Grants the ability to recognize herbs at a glance, and correctly identify their properties.

A relatively self-explanatory skill, and one of the reasons for the sudden influx of information he got upon receiving the profession. He now knew of a lot of different plants he previously had no idea existed. The thought was scary that the system could directly implant knowledge in one's head.

The way the knowledge worked was weird. It was not immediate knowledge, like how he knew how to use his bow from previous training. It was the kind of knowledge that felt like it gradually appeared if he thought of something relevant to the skill. Like if he thought of needing a plant that had healing properties, a considerable number of potential herbs suddenly came to mind.

Shaking his head at the frankly disturbing phenomenon, he moved on.

\*Gained skill\*: [Brew Potion (Common)] – Potion-brewing is the bread and butter of most alchemists. A potion can be the savior in a time of need, or that extra boost to defeat your opponent. Allows for the brewing of potions with common-rarity and below. Must have suitable materials and equipment in order to create potions. Adds a minor increase to the effectiveness of created potions based on wisdom.

\*Gained skill\*: [Concoct Poison (Common)] – While most focus on the aspect of giving life through their craft, others prefer to take it away. Allows for the concoction of common-rarity poisons and below. Must have suitable materials and equipment in order to create poisons. Adds a minor increase to the effectiveness of created poisons based on wisdom.

These two skills were incredibly similar in design, but very different when it came to the results. It also didn't come with a lot of implanted knowledge. He had some new understandings of how to use the tools he found in the laboratory earlier, but they in no way felt familiar. It was more like he had watched a tutorial video online, introducing him to the very basics of making potions and poisons.

Thinking back on his talks with Casper, who had gotten the Basic Archery skill without any previous experience ever using a bow, he had told Jake about something similar. He knew how to hold a bow and fire an arrow, but nothing further than that. Despite him and Jake both having the same skill, and at the same rarity, Jake was vastly superior in his ability to use it.

He got an upgrade in rarity for the skill after recalling his training, but the rank-up did not come with any knowledge.

The only difference between skills seemed to be the rarity. With no skill levels existing, Jake had a theory that skills' effectiveness was purely up to the wielder of said skills. Perhaps some kind of line existed where skills would get a rarity upgrade based on how good you were, but he doubted it would be that simple. Take the archery skill as an example.



Jake was a somewhat experienced archer. Theoretically, his knowledge of how to wield a bow was close to the level of an athlete. Maybe even higher as he had put a lot of time into looking things up himself as he didn't have a trainer to do such things for him. And yet he only had archery at common-rarity. Something else must be required to upgrade to higher ranks. Maybe it just took time, or perhaps some qualitative threshold had to be reached.

In other words, a skill granted basic instinctual proficiency in using it, but anything more than that would have to be learned. And if you wanted the skill to get better, you would have to work on improving it. That is at least what Jake believed, based on the evidence so far.

Having no way to either confirm or disprove his hypothesis, he moved on to the last two skills.

**\*Gained skill\*:** [Toxicology (Uncommon)] – The knowledge of all that is toxic. Be able to recognize poisonous substances at a glance and correctly identify their properties. To concoct the deadliest toxins, one must know what to mix after all.

This one was exactly the same as the Herbology skill, just with toxic materials and uncommon instead of common-rarity. It was not limited to herbs, however. As an example, if he thought about the water that nearly killed him earlier, he now knew that said water was some kind of toxic liquid with necrotic properties. He didn't know the details of the water, just the basics of what it was.

Moving on to the last skill, he was pleasantly surprised to see the Rare rarity tag.

**\*Gained skill\*:** [Malefic Viper's Poison (Rare)] – The Malefic Viper stalks its prey and needs only to strike once as venom devours its prey. Increases the potency of all crafted poisons. Grants the ability to craft a poison with a rarity above that of your Concoct Poison skill if certain conditions are met. The poison may

at most be upgraded to the rarity of the Malefic Viper's Poison skill (Common --> Rare). Allows poison not to lose efficiency for a short amount of time after being applied to a weapon.

This skill was the namesake of the entire profession he assumed. More potent poisons and a chance to craft poisons with a higher rarity both seemed okay, though he had nothing to compare it to. The last effect was especially interesting to him, however.

This skill opened the possibility to use his profession more actively in combat. What's more dangerous than an arrow to the face? A poisoned arrow to the face.

He had one more notification remaining, which was another pleasant surprise.

\*Skill Upgraded\*: [Identify (Inferior --> Common)] - Identification skill, known by all but the smallest of children of the myriad races. The skill allows you to attempt to identify any object or creature you are focusing on.

The only difference in the skills description was the 'basic' being removed, so it now just called it an 'identification skill'. Not much to see there, really. But Jake was still kind of excited to see what he could now Identify. Perhaps he could even identify other humans?

He guessed the upgrade either had something to do with having both a profession and a class or maybe it was due to the two skills, Herbology and Toxicology, giving him more knowledge. Looking back, both of those skills included a sentence about being able to identify herbs and toxins.

Closing all his windows, he looked down at his hand that was still healing. After scanning the room once more, finding nothing of interest, he turned around and headed straight for the garden-area to test his new skills.