

Hunter 243

Chapter 243: Schemes Of An Old Man

Jake's skill selection for his class at level 120 had led to many things. A talk about slavery, a new skill for Jake to experiment with, insight into his own progress, and one more significant aspect. The system more or less telling him to start looking into using his arcane-affinity with more than mana.

As he went deeper and deeper into the Undergrowth dungeon, he began doing a bit of practice with it throughout some of his fights. He had quite a few skills that used stamina, and he went with those first instead of trying to free-form stuff. Magic? He wasn't even sure what skill-less manipulation of stamina was called.

That is when he remembered... he already had tried using a mix of stamina and mana before in a skill he had upgraded where he made the energies mix. When he upgraded Splitting Arrow, he did by fusing the two energies to split the arrows. Stamina would function as the physical bodies of the arrows, while the mana would function as the inherent magic of the arrows.

Coupled with the system assistance in upgrading skills once he was on the right track, upgrading it hadn't even taken a day. Yet Jake hadn't kept testing after that. Well, to be perfectly fair, it wasn't like he had many chances to. The World Congress and then his crafting marathon came shortly after the last time he upgraded a skill with stamina. He had just needed a reminder to keep working on it.

Of course, neither of those energies had been arcane-affinity, but his arcane-affinity was closely related to pure mana, after all, so it could serve as a base.

Jake began considering all his skills from one end to the other... and found quite a few he used stamina with. Arcane Powershot was the most obvious one... but how would he integrate his arcane-affinity into the stamina portion of that?

The stamina portion of that skill was the stamina moving inside his body. Enhanced Splitting Arrow, Mark of the Avaricious Arcane Hunter... both used either arcane energy or mixed mana and stamina outside the body. Finally, Shadow Vault also used a mix, but that one was honestly just too weird for Jake to study in the short term.

Anyway, Arcane Powershot used stamina in his upper body with arcane mana outside of it, enhancing the bow and as currents running over his body. He used stamina inside his body and closest to his skin to make sure his own destructive arcane mana didn't harm him while making his entire upper body stronger as he drew the string and charged the arrow.

Meanwhile, the bow was infused with stable arcane-affinity mana. Which made Jake consider more deeply... what kind of effect would his arcane-affinity even create when used with stamina inside his body? Was it even made to be used inside his body, or was it more suited for using it outside?

The Arcane Barrier was, of course, outside of his body. The Arcane Wave was outside, too, even if it did erupt from within him. But... he didn't truly know if the energy it erupted with would all be arcane-affinity. Maybe it was just the mana-part of it that was, as the skill used both mana and stamina.

Jake's arcane-affinity had two parts to it: stability and destruction. Together his affinity was all about stable destruction, with both extremes always carrying a bit of the effect from the other. An explosive arrow needed to be highly destructive but still stable enough not just to blow up right away, while a stable arrow needed to be extremely tough but still able to deal damage outside of just purely piercing enemies. If it were just purely a physical arrow, it wouldn't really be worthy of the arcane-affinity now, would it?

Mobilizing his arcane-affinity outside the body wasn't that complicated, but so far, all he really did it with was using mana... except for his new Mark. The Mark consumed stamina to use when he placed it on targets. Even the arcane energy that exploded within his foes contained no mana at all but was some other kind of arcane-affinity energy. A part of it was clearly stamina with an arcane-affinity... but all it

did was deal damage directly to the health pool of his enemy... and Jake was still unsure if that was something special about his arcane-affinity that it could do that, or if it was just something the Mark made possible through system assistance.

This all led to the ultimate question: was it even possible to use his arcane-affinity to make himself stronger internally? Theoretically, perhaps... but was he really going to risk experimenting?

With normal stamina, Jake had blown off more than one limb with his experimenting... what would happen if he tried to do so with even more potent stamina that had a tendency to go big boom? Sure, he could use the stable version... but would that even be better than normal stamina? No, he would 100% need a mix. Jake felt like now wasn't the time for that quite yet. Instead, he would focus on the arcane-affinity on external attacks for now.

The only issue was... he only really had the Splitting Arrow for that... or maybe his basic weapons skills? No, they weren't really useable. All of this meant that Jake shelved the exploration of stamina mixed with arcane-affinity for now as he instead focused on clearing the Deepdweller dungeon. Hopefully, he could get a skill or some inspiration in the future that could push him further.

He was fully aware that was also one more option for stamina – some kind of aura skill. To mimic the Aspiring Blade of Nature or even the Nest Watcher back in the day, as it seemed to only use physical moves. Once more, he reached the issue that he didn't know how to properly do that. A part of him also believed these auras were just outpouring of energy from inside the body – stamina was also called inner energy for a reason.

Keep things simple... and take the complications as they come, Jake thought as he flapped his wings and flew through the Undergrowth, picking up herbs here and there, hunting down the occasional hunting party, and searching for the next village.

Villages fell before him one by one, and he fought more and more variants as he got closer and closer to what he believed was the end of the dungeon – and the Heart of the Undergrowth.

'DING!' Class: [Avaricious Arcane Hunter] has reached level 125 - Stat points allocated, +10 free points

'DING!' Race: [Human (D)] has reached level 116 - Stat points allocated, +15 free points

'DING!' Class: [Avaricious Arcane Hunter] has reached level 126 - Stat points allocated, +10 free points

Since entering the dungeon, more than two weeks had quickly passed – each fight took a while, after all, and his exploration of both the dungeon and his own skills hadn't exactly helped his speed either. After the last village had been turned into a scorching hole of arcane energy, he finally reached something new. Jake had noticed that the dungeon had begun slowly closing in on itself again and became narrower and narrower as he traveled in after about the 500-kilometer mark.

It was at around 1200 kilometers. It suddenly ended in a large wall - a wall that was 100% artificial. It was constructed, and Jake doubted it had been by the Deepdwellers. No, this was some kind of ancient construct made by some other civilization.

The entire wall was more than a kilometer tall and had a width of more than 5 kilometers, cutting off the entire path further into the Undergrowth. Jake tried to lay his hand upon it, and instantly he knew... there was no fucking way he could break it.

He did have one cheat, though. With his Sphere of Perception, he saw that the entire wall was nearly 100 meters thick, but that still meant he could see a couple of hundred meters of the other side. There, he saw what looked like a massive net of vines.. all looking like they congregated towards one area outside his range.

Jake scouted along the length of the wall until he saw an opening – and a single figure sitting in front of it, appearing to be in meditation.

It was a Deepdweller that was around four meters tall, and it carried no visible weapon. Everything about it besides its size made it look rather normal, as it didn't even appear that bulky, but Jake could feel this was the strongest creature he had yet to see in the entire dungeon.

[Deepdweller Heartwarden – lvl 162]

Jake could now Identify it... and its level was 12 levels above the second-strongest entity he had seen – sidenote, Jake with this successful Identify, concluded he could now only see the level of foes with a level 40% above his own since reaching D-grade.

He smiled. The dungeon had been good experience but had been a bit lacking in the excitement department. Maybe the Heartwarden could give him a good fight.

The old man blocked the sword of the young woman effortlessly as she slid across the ground to strike again. Her sword appeared to split into dozens as phantom blades rained down. Yet with a single swipe, all the blades disappeared, and the young woman was knocked flying away, landing on the ground – her hand holding the sword shaking.

“Your blade is restless. What is bothering you, my child?” Miyamoto asked his great grand-daughter.

Her name was Reika, and she was the youngest of the main family clan, meaning she was his youngest direct descendent, which had resulted in quite a bit of doting from all parts of the family. She did have four older siblings, so not much pressure had ever been put on her, meaning she had always pursued her passions over everything else.

Before he had become immobile, she had always come by to watch him practice with his sword and had chosen to pick it up herself. Her family had disapproved at first as it was not something they believed a young girl should spend her time on, but when she had proven her talent, they all relented. That the old patriarch had also liked that she did it sure wasn't a detriment either.

After the system, the young woman – who had turned 25 just a few days ago – had been one of the outstanding surprises of the clan. She had not been in the same tutorial as Miyamoto himself but had instead entered with many university students as she had been to a meeting with her Ph.D. adviser at the time of the integration. Another thing she had been stubborn about, having chosen to study chemistry and not economy or business management as most of her siblings.

In her tutorial, she had completely taken charge and managed to excel above all expectations, and returned to the clan as the second-strongest member of the entire clan. She had helped claim other Pylons but had not entered the World Congress as Miyamoto saw no reason to tip their hand and make everyone aware that the Noboru Clan had so many powerful members. This was also the reason why they didn't bring any other D-grades than him despite having two others at the time.

“I still don't understand... why send me? I am not a negotiator, much less a diplomat. Even if you wish for someone to learn about his alchemical prowess, I do not see how it wouldn't be preferential only to send a small regiment of non-combatants and diplomats. Sending my companions and me could also possibly be interpreted as an unintended show of force and worsen relations,” Reika tried to argue.

His great-granddaughter was not only a supremely talented swordsman – she was also their most talented alchemist. Miyamoto regretted not bringing her to the World Congress as he wished he had made her meet the Hunter from Haven.

“This will not solely be political, but a chance for you to learn. Your approach to alchemy is one of modern thought, while Lord Thayne of Haven has knowledge of an entirely different path. One of ancientness handed down from an entity above our comprehension. I believe he has much to teach you, not only about alchemy,” Miyamoto explained with a fatherly smile.

Her tutorial had included plenty of ways to attain and progress the alchemy profession. Miyamoto couldn't help but find it coincidental that an entire faculty of natural sciences students found themselves in a tutorial with the alchemy profession freely available. Moreover, the tutorial had been sponsored by an alchemy-related god, which was possibly why it was organized.

Reika had gained this profession and had only two weeks ago – a month after the World Congress - gotten it to 99 and evolved it. With it, she had attained her Perfect Evolution and had since then progressed immensely fast in both her class and profession.

“Are we even certain this man will be open to teaching? From the reports, he seems the reclusive type and not one to openly accept someone coming to spar with him and exchange knowledge, much less teach another for nothing. It seems like a needless gamble,” she said, trying to sound respectful while at the same time adamantly disagreeing. Miyamoto found it endearing, as she was one of the very few clan members who dared argue back.

It wasn't even a discussion that was necessarily relevant right now. The distance to Haven was vast and would take even him over a month to pass, so it would have to wait till after the Treasure Hunt. He knew that she would be accepted as that was one of the terms that the City Lord Miranda had agreed to in order to secure the votes for Herbs and the Treasure Hunt.

The agreement was only to have a delegation or an embassy of sorts from the Noboru Clan. None of it included his great-granddaughter interacting or getting any guaranteed meetings with Lord Thayne, but Miyamoto had a good idea how to get that when the time came.

“A man who strives to stand at the apex does not turn away chances to improve, much less a challenge. If you have the confidence to stand tall before him with your level of skill and power, he will meet you, and he will hear you out,” Miyamoto explained confidently.

“How can you be so certain, patriarch? We know close to nothing about him, and the intelligence team is still working on information on his familial situation and history, a daunting task with the interference from the Court of Shadows. I do not doubt he is as extraordinary as has been claimed, but to know his person is another thing,” Reika disagreed, shaking her head.

Miyamoto saw that she truly struggled to understand his intentions and his certainty. His smile grew as he shook his head and confidently declared:

“You are my great-granddaughter, and you are extraordinary too. Lord Thayne will not be able to resist a challenge and an opportunity to spar with another extraordinary human in the same field he is passionate about.”

“How can you be so sure?” she said, a slight blush on her cheeks from the praise. Her long black hair was barely hiding the flush that even went down her neck. Truly, praise had become too rare a commodity in the clan, but it also meant that each time it happened, the impact was higher.

“Because this old man would be unable to resist.”

Of course, there was one part he didn't need to mention. Something that was perhaps just a small hope an old man had in his heart. Lord Thayne was an extraordinary young man, only a few years older than his great-granddaughter. If something happened and the Thayne family was joined more closely to the clan, it certainly wouldn't be something to complain about.

With the younger brother already taken and the City Lord of Haven not having that kind of relationship with Lord Thayne as the rumors suggested, he could only hope for nature to take its course if an extraordinary young man and woman with similar interests began spending a lot of time together. Even if it led to nothing, a friendship would also be valuable.

Of course... it was all just the schemes of an old man. Hope for what could possibly be. Who knew if any of it was realistic with what upheaval the Treasure Hunt could create, after all?