

Hunter 271

Chapter 271: Memories of (Questionable) Past Deeds

Jake returned to his lodge as if nothing had happened. Barely any time had passed in the real world during his journey through time and space. It had been another great showcase of the higher level of power, even if it all had gone past fast, and to be honest, not much had happened. Besides, it wasn't like just seeing someone summon a huge barrier taught Jake how to. If it did, wouldn't the easiest way to make new powerhouses be just to have them participate in movie marathons.

No, the reason why the Path of the Heretic-Chosen skill was so good was that Jake could directly experience everything from all points of view. He could feel the flow of the energy, and it was even partly adapted to his body. It was a shortcut to an upgrade and pretty much told exactly what he had to understand and do. That didn't mean Jake always got it – he nearly hadn't with Palate – but it was an incredibly useful experience. Shit, even if he had failed to comprehend Palate, he would still have gotten hints or just used a second attempt of the skill to “get it.”

This time around had been far easier. Perhaps it was because it was simply doing things he already did and merging those things to make something better. This new ability was just infusing his presence with will and mana. Super simple stuff that one, that probably came far too easy to Jake.

Looking at the skill upgrade, he had to admit... the description was getting stupidly long. Would all his legendary skills from the Malefic Viper end up being like this?

[Pride of the Malefic Viper (Ancient)] – The arrogance and strong will of the Malefic Viper is known throughout the multiverse. Now, you have learned to take after him, your own pride now a tangible weapon. Allows the Alchemist to far more easily force their will upon the world. Significantly increases the effect of all Words of Power spoken. Your pride increases all resistance to any kind of mind-affecting effects but be warned that it wanes in despair. Passively provides 1 willpower per level in Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper. May your will be truth, your pride eternal.

-->

[Pride of the Malefic Viper (Legendary)] – The arrogance and strong will of the Malefic Viper is known throughout the multiverse, and all of existence is made to quake in fear in his presence. Now, you have learned to take after him, your own pride a tangible weapon as you demand of the world to bend in your presence. Allows the Alchemist to far more easily force their will upon the world. Significantly increases the effect of all Words of Power spoken. By channeling mana, you can make your presence no longer simply a warning but a weapon to target the psyche of your foes directly, and during this time, forcing your will upon the world in any area affected by your presence becomes even easier than before. Your pride increases all resistance to any kind of mind-affecting effects but be warned that it wanes in despair. All effects of the mental attack increase based on the target's vulnerability, the nature of your mental attack, and the disparity in Willpower between you and your foe. Passively provides 3 Willpower per level in Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper. May your will be truth, your pride eternal.

' DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 121 - Stat points allocated, +10 free points

'DING!' Race: [Human (D)] has reached level 125 - Stat points allocated, +15 free points

*' DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 122 - Stat points allocated, +10 free points

Jake had to admit that the two levels also came as a slight surprise, a welcome one. Upgrading skills had always earned him experience points, but this one just felt too easy.

Another thing that surprised him was that Pride had been the skill in question to be upgraded. Jake hadn't even thought that an option. He was sure Sense or maybe even Blood or Sagacity would be the

next ones to upgrade. Perhaps even Touch if he kept transmuting stuff? Pride hadn't even been on the radar.

As for what the improved skill could now be used for? Well, it was a mental attack, pure and simple. But not only that, the part about forcing his will upon the world affected by his presence was perhaps even more valuable. All it effectively meant was that Jake could do magic faster outside of his body. At least that's how he read it.

Something to test for sure.

In fact, he had a lot to test. How much mana would it cost? How effective was it? The skill also didn't directly mention any stat-scaling, but considering how it basically just made Willpower more effective, that kind of made sense. Well, it did say when it came to the mental attack specifically, but not any of the other parts.

He really wanted to go test shit, but he was interrupted before he had the chance.

Jake felt Villy's presence descend, and he could already feel the curiosity of the god he had just seen a flashback of.

"So, how did it go?" Villy asked, with an emotion Jake couldn't quite place. "Anything interesting? Did you get an upgrade?"

"Wow, one at a time. Yeah, it went well, yes it was interesting, and I upgraded Pride to legendary-rarity. Something about infusing my presence with mana, making it stronger, and doing mental attacks and stuff. Oh, and easier application of my will within my presence during this infusion," Jake explained.

"Ah, I see. I guess that's good to get, though it isn't exactly anything new now, is it? You also seem to be using your bloodlust and presence as a weapon quite effectively already," Villy answered.

Jake frowned, a bit surprised. No, he didn't?

"No, I don't?"

"Yeah, you 100% do. All the time. When that space mage attacked your little lodge is perhaps the most prominent time. It isn't the most effective weapon, but you sure do use it to throw your opponent off and intimidate them. It's pretty normal to do, and it makes sense Pride got upgraded. It wouldn't have surprised me if you got it before Palate either, with or without the Path of the Heretic-Chosen skill."

"That's not an attack, though; that's just something that happens. I see others do it too. Everyone gives off a passive presence. The Sword Saint's felt sharp and intimidating; Jacob's felt warm and inviting. Everyone just has them," Jake countered.

"True, to some extent. The Augur's is due to a skill, though, so you can't really count that one. As for that Sword Saint? He is a little monster just like you, so that's why he has one so prominent," the Viper answered.

"Huh..." Jake mumbled, scratching his chin. Was it really just something he did? "So, it's a bit of a waste besides the stats? Not that I complain about free upgrades."

“No, far from a waste. Jake, skills that boost stuff you already do are great, especially if they don’t take a skill slot. Why do you think mine do so many different things? Also, it employs some concepts your crude intimidation doesn’t. But, trust me, it’s a good one, and that presence-skill helped a lot throughout my years as a wee little dragon.”

“Speaking of you as a wee little dragon,” Jake begun as he snickered. “Saw your fight with some people who called themselves council members. Early B-grade, crystal planet. I heard your speech to scare them... not gonna lie, kinda cringe.”

“Oh... that time...,”

the Viper said, sounding a bit reprehensive. “Yeah... not many of my proudest moments in those times. Sure, I grew in power rapidly, but it’s a moment of my life I don’t really look back at fondly anymore. I had some issues at the time, I guess.”

“Issues besides being a bit of a dick and killing anything you come across?” Jake asked. “Actually, why even do that? What purpose was there behind destroying that crystal planet?”

“Purpose... there was one, but it wasn’t a good one. As I said, I didn’t do it for reasons I am now proud of. Really. I guess some context is in order. Remember that mural that depicted when I first entered B-grade and became a dragon?” the Viper asked rhetorically before continuing.

“I hadn’t just been sitting there for a bit. Towards the end of C-grade, I managed to effectively destroy my planet. I consumed all the natural treasures, killed all creatures I came across until all that remained were the occasional weak elemental spawning. Not a single trace of biological life remained, and I was alone.”

“Why didn’t you just leave?” Jake asked curiously. “You were C-grade. Peak C-grade. I am sure you would be able to survive traveling through space as there was nothing left in your old world.”

“You are privy to the knowledge that was even a viable option. I was not. I had only ever known that world. I thought I had killed all other life in existence. I thought I would die there alone on a planet I myself had destroyed. I thought that was the fate I had created for myself. So I sat on that mountain, not just for a couple of years. I sat alone for millennia, simply staring into space, wondering if something would come. A new challenge would appear. New life would grow. Perhaps an elemental would finally become able to rival me? But no, nothing ever happened.”

Jake frowned as he heard the Viper speak, and he could hear these weren't at all comfortable memories for him to share. It was the kind of knowledge he didn't spread throughout the Order, and Jake doubted many knew. So he chose not to interrupt but just have the Viper speak and offload.

“During those years, I didn't experience many positive emotions. Loneliness, self-pity, and sadness, but more than anything, anger. Anger at the world for rewarding my path so far, only to so cruelly cut me off and leave me with nothing on a broken planet to slowly wither away. Angry at the system for even appearing and taking away my choice of dying as an unknowing snake. Angry at even being forced to exist as a sapient creature. I hated the world and wished to see it destroyed... and in a twist of irony, the system awarded that. A skill upgraded, a level gained, an evolution granted and unlocked. With that race also came a skill that made me aware of other life in the world. It gave me the courage to leave... courage to cause destruction elsewhere.

“My race name? Calamitous Banespike Dragon. The power was overwhelming. My path was set for me, but like your class has restrictions, so did my race. My entire existence. However, it was not as much restrictions as it was simply an amplification of that hatred. Every act of destruction fueled me with power and levels; every planet left a broken shell was my gain. This was my path, and at the time, I embraced it. Every movement I made, every plan or strategy I concocted was with the goal of causing more destruction. Even my alchemy fell to the wayside as I couldn't sit still long enough to practice. I simply felt like I couldn't coexist with the rest of the world, and rather than die; I would rather see everything else destroyed.”

The Viper finished his long explanation. There was more emotion in his voice these last few minutes than nearly all the time Jake had spent with the Viper collectively. The god had chosen to be open with

Jake... perhaps he felt like his Chosen would find out a lot of these things in due time. Or perhaps... because he didn't want to be judged as harshly. Or maybe because he wanted exactly that, considering Jake was Jake.

"That sounds like an utterly moronic mindset, even for a depressed dragon throwing a tantrum," Jake curtly said, shaking his head. "What was the end goal? To destroy everything again like the first time? To end up sitting in an empty universe of nothingness? Sounds like a zero out of ten plan. Also, was the experience even that good from destroying an entire planet? Seems like absolute overkill and just causing unnecessary destruction and suffering."

There didn't come in response for a few seconds before the Viper answered back.

"True. I also came to realize the path I was on didn't make sense in the long run. And if it was worth it to destroy a planet? For me back then, a single smidge of experience or a brief moment of enjoyment was enough reason to cause any amount of suffering or destruction. When nothing matters, why care about proportions? I simply destroyed and consumed like any other common beast, and the system awarded me every step of the way. Yet it also rewarded me when I stopped and began fixing my fucked up state of mind," Villy patiently responded, not at all vexed by Jake's words. In fact...

"Also, Jake, calling a god that can destroy you at a moment's notice a moronic depressed dragon throwing a tantrum could totally get you killed. Even if it is the truth. Either way, I appreciate the honesty."

"Beating around the bush never suited me well. Anyway, what put you back on the right track so-to-say? Some wondrous moment of enlightenment? Some majestic encounter with a fated person? Oh, don't tell me you came across a natural treasure that opened your eyes to the beauty of the world?" Jake chuckled jokingly.

"You may be closer than you think. Also, not telling. You can try if that skill of yours makes you see it. Though so far, it hasn't picked moments of extreme importance, just moments where the skill was deployed with an extremely high level of effectiveness. While mental attacks with the presence are good, there are equally as many encounters where it did jack shit, so be warned."

"Damn. Even if I don't, I'm just gonna make you tell me someday," Jake smiled as he leaned back and looked up towards the sky. "By the way, when can I leave the 93rd universe? And when can people come in?"

"Well, you can leave once you figure out a way to do so. Nothing stops you besides it being hard as fuck to get back, which is the primary reason no faction has had people leave yet. As for non-natives, I'm not sure when they can come and go. It tends to open up rather slowly, with those weaker able to enter earlier than others. Probably not overly long, though. The main challenge is still transportation as it is highly dependent on what you are capable of doing on your end," the Viper explained, seemingly more than happy to completely change the subject.

"Wait, so I could technically leave now?" Jake asked, surprised.

"Yep, I could likely have that space mage of yours fix up a magic circle to allow a quick one-way ticket to the first universe pretty fast. Of course, you won't be able to go back, and you will miss the Treasure Hunt and all subsequent events due to being stuck here, so I wouldn't recommend it. Let's talk about it after all those fun system events and when we have a nice two-way connection ready," Villy said, half-joking, half-warning Jake to not even consider going yet.

"Relax, man; I don't wanna miss the Treasure Hunt for the world. I'll come by when the time is right and not earlier," Jake reassured his divine mate.

The mood had turned a lot better with the unrelated talks, but Villy still brought it back to the main topic.

“So... you still had a use of that Path skill remaining, right?”

“Yep, I got one use left.”

“Better get it done then.”

“Nah, I can’t.”

“... and why not?”

“Doesn’t work. I poked it already; the skill doesn’t respond.”

“You poked it?”

“Super hard too. Still no response.”

“Huh.”

“Yep.”

“Well, see you then, and thanks for the chat,” Villy said as he figuratively waved goodbye.

“See ya around; I’ll get to choosing skills then. Thanks as always, and take care.”

Jake just smiled as he moved on to something equally as important.

Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper profession skills available