

Hunter 31

Chapter 31: Professional evolution

Jake awoke once more after only an hour of sleep. Resources refilled, he stretched and did some light shadow-boxing to get the blood flowing. The concept of tiredness and physical exhaustion being such a rarity was still not something he was used to.

His race's evolution reduced this need further, as it also did much to limit mental exhaustion. He still burned himself out nearly daily, but then again, he was always working. He either read about alchemy, did alchemy, prepared for alchemy, or thought out how to better do alchemy. His only distractions were small research trips on other topics such as general knowledge of the system and looking for more information on bloodlines.

The plan for today was to get another level and evolve his profession. He dearly hoped that his preparations were sufficient and that his potential upgrades would be worth it. As long as one met the required Records needed to evolve, one would have options available, but the quality of said options could vary wildly.

For now, it was time for some more alchemy. Jake had no interest in attempting to make another concoction of Necrotic Poison, as he quite honestly didn't have confidence in producing it efficiently quite yet.

Instead, he just started churning out some of the inferior-rarity poisons, mixed in with a batch of potions here and there.

The mixing itself went easy enough, the progress he had made in his endeavor to craft the Necrotic Poison showing. He hadn't made any lower rarity poison for the last few days as Jake focused exclusively on completing his goal, but also because he feared it would level him to 25 before he managed to succeed.

The hours slowly went by as he mixed, and with little fanfare or excitement, he got the awaited notification.

Profession Evolution Requirements Met

Through struggle and perseverance, you have learned the craft of alchemy. Your path has been isolated, a lonesome journey to reach your level. Your actions have shown unparalleled raw talent and ability in the art of concocting poisons, yet also true skills when brewing potions.

Begin Evolution now?

Y/N

WARNING: Postponing evolution for too long may have adverse effects, and no further profession-experience can be earned before the evolution is completed.

The message was a bit interesting, pointing out details of how he had operated during the dungeon. A bit sad to have his isolation pointed out like that, but he had always been the introverted type, so it wasn't that bad in all honesty. The last part of it, save for the obligatory warning, was especially interesting as it directly pertained to him performing well, which he very much hoped would result in something good. Also, who doesn't like positive reinforcement now and then?

Accepting the evolution, nothing happened for a few seconds before new notifications appeared.

5 Possible Evolutions Available

He cracked a smile as he saw that message. 5 was the maximum number of available evolutions the system would ever show according to the books, and no one complained about more options. He also knew that these options would also only be the best ones he could get. The system having likely already filtered out lesser versions.

He decided to do the same as he did with new skills and go through them one by one.

Experienced Alchemist of the Malefic Viper – An Experienced Alchemist of the Malefic Viper has learned the basics of Alchemy. Allows one to combine the 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 production of poisons, contrary to the craft of potions. Your path has been ordinary so far, slowly building experience to one day reach greater heights. Have no fear, for the path to power is no sprint but a marathon. Stat bonuses per level: +4 Vit, +3 Wis +2 Will +2 Tough, +3 Free Points.

This option seemed to be the linear evolution of his Alchemist of the Malefic Viper profession. The stats were the same, only better, awarding 14 stats instead of 8 every level. According to the books, an option like this was the most normal by far, hence, what the vast majority ended up with. It was relatively easy to unlock, and the Records earned through simply leveling the profession often being enough. In other words, if you unlocked the ability to evolve, an option like this would be available.

But in the end, he hoped for something better. Moving on to the next one, it got a bit more interesting... but not really.

Gardener of the Malefic Viper – The Gardener of the Malefic Viper has learned the art of alchemy yet prefers to find themselves tending to the gardens. The Gardener of the Malefic Viper possesses greatly improved abilities when cultivating poisons and growing herbs, helping the whole garden flourish in prosperity. While it is not the gardener's preferred path, he can still use his precious ingredients to create deadly poisons and even restorative potions if needed. Stat bonuses per level: +3 Wis, +3 Vit, +3 Tough, +3 Free Points.

He quickly eliminated this option as he would prefer the prior one. The stats provided were only 12 total, so stat-wise, it was worse too. It did still demonstrate some of the other paths available to him. This one was another very commonly found evolutions to the profession he theorized.

Of course, it focused on the tending of plants, mainly poisonous ones, just like the flavor text said. While Jake recognized the value of the Cultivate Toxin skill and the importance of the gardening-profession, it wasn't really his cup of tea.

Moving on to the next, Jake got a bit dumbfounded.

Toxic Chef – Toxic Chef seeks not to find the deadliest poison but the one best supplementing his menu. Allows one to create dishes with toxic ingredients, providing a wide variety of benefits. This type of cook combines toxic materials not to create weapons but food. While the cook can still create regular foods, they prefer to use unusual ingredients of a toxic nature in their creation. Stat bonuses per level: +3 Vit, +3 Tough +2 Will +1 Wis, +1 Free Points. WARNING: Skills pertaining to Alchemist of the Malefic Viper may be lost or changed upon becoming a Toxic Chef.

Yeah, not going to happen, but what the hell? Jake thought as he finished reading it all. Just because he had been eating and even 'cooking' poisonous mushrooms and moss as his sole source of food for the last two-plus weeks, the damn system had decided he was qualified to be a goddamn chef.

The stats did reflect his poor cooking skills with how little the profession gave. 10 total stats, only two more than his Alchemist of the Malefic Viper. It also didn't seem to be a variant class of any kind, but just a regular insane poison chef profession.

Picking it would also be a complete divergence of his original profession, and as the warning mentioned, would lead him to lose skills. Unless he suffered from severe mental damage or was really into cooking, it would be pure stupidity to pick it. Swiftly, he moved on, still a bit grumpy by even having been given the option.

Hermit Alchemist – The Hermit Alchemist is no stranger to alchemy yet has never interacted with his peers. This alchemist prefers to work in solitude and abhors interruptions, progressing their craft always on their lonesome. Allows one to combine the natural treasures of the world, and make potions, pills, transmute one material to another, with a slew of other mystical means to be discovered. Through this isolated training of your craft, you have learned to focus on your work over everything else. Your continued path shall thus not be defined by the will of others, but the path you discover on your own. Stat bonuses per level: +5 Will, +5 Wis, +3 Int, +5 Free Points. WARNING: Skills pertaining to Alchemist of the Malefic Viper may be lost or changed upon becoming a Hermit Alchemist.

Now we were getting somewhere. The fact that it awarded 18 stats per level was higher than everything else before it by a mile. This was another kind of variant Jake had seen mentioned in one of the books, and while relatively well-known, often had demanding requirements. It required a particular mind-set and personality trait to be present in the person having it, making it impossible to gain for most.

It also often resulted in penalties to experience gain if around people for too long, and many of the crafting skills often required one to craft alone, making all joint crafting projects impossible or heavily penalized. Hermit classes also often had a massive negative experience multiplier when hunting in parties, though that shouldn't matter much considering it was a profession. Hermits were, in essence, very strong, but with a lot of trade-offs.

There was also the fact that it was no direct evolution in the line of the Malefic Viper. Which meant that Jake would lose or have some of his skills changed. And while he hated a lot about eating mushrooms to gain knowledge, he recognized how powerful it was. The Palate skill was just busted.

The prospects of the profession did most certainly appeal to him, though. He always preferred to work alone, and he doubted any of the negative side-effects would really affect him much. Ultimately, it didn't matter much, as he saw the last option.

Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper – A Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper has come far from when first concocting his first poison. You have displayed speed and skills at the pinnacle. Allows the alchemist to combine the 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 production of poisons, contrary to the craft of potions. Your proven talent as an artisan of death stands above all peers, signaling the coming of another harbinger of decay following in the footsteps of the Malefic Viper. Only his chosen may walk this path. Stat bonuses per level: +4 Vit, +4 Wis, +3 Will +2 Tough +2 Int, +5 Free Points.

He couldn't hold himself back from cracking a big smile as he read the entire description. It was at a massive 20 stats per level, far above any of the other options. On top of that, it was a relatively straightforward upgrade to his profession, staying in the same lane.

If he had to point out anything negative, it was the ominous tone of the entire thing.

He firmly believed that he got this option from managing to craft the common-rarity poison before his evolution. Getting a return on your hard work was always satisfying. He wasn't quite sure about the whole prodigy thing, but recognition was kind of cool.

He hadn't seen this type of upgrade mentioned in any of the books, but then again, the more powerful it is, the rarer. In fact, Jake had a suspicion that most who got this profession just claimed to be an Experienced Alchemist of the Malefic Viper or another more common variant instead. He assumed other 'steps' between Experienced and Prodigious existed depending on how good the system judged one to be.

With this clearly being the best option in his mind, he picked it. Hermit Alchemist did seem kind of up his alley, but he didn't want to lose any of his current skills.

As he confirmed his choice, he prepared himself for an influx of information, but instead, he felt his vision shift. The surroundings started to blend together as if he was entering some Picasso painting, and everything went murky and indiscernible. Even his Sphere of Perception got thrown all off, telling him that everything was moving all at once.

Everything finally started to calm down, and the first thing he noticed was how dark it suddenly was. Due to his vastly improved perception, he could still see a bit, though. And what he saw was just a vast plane of nothingness. He stood on what seemed like black rocks, and kneeling down to feel it, he found its texture smooth like polished granite.

Another thing he quickly noticed was the light mist or fog in his surroundings. Oddly enough, the mist stopped a few millimeters from his skin, and when he breathed in, he felt nothing different.

Just as he was starting to wonder why the system had brought him here, he felt something. Turning to the side, he knew something was observing him. Before he could try to identify what it was, a man appeared before him.

Though calling him a man was a hard sell. Extremely fine black scales with a slight dark-green tinge lined his entire body. At first glance, it looked like skin, but it clearly wasn't. He didn't seem to wear anything

except a tattered black robe. Yet the very first thing Jake noticed was the eyes. They shone with dim green light, a pair of piercing vertical slits reminiscent of a snake gazing back at him, only slightly obstructed by his unkempt long black hair.

“Now, what do we have here?” the scaled man said with a raspy voice.

Jake didn’t know who or what this being was, but he felt not the slightest tinge of threat or fear. That didn’t mean his instincts were silent, though. Every fiber of his being told him that whatever this being was... it wasn’t something he could even consider fighting.

By the method the figure had appeared before him; Jake had no doubt that the scaled man was unimaginably stronger than himself. The only reason why he kept his cool was how silent his danger sense was. In fact, he had never felt safer in his life than this very moment.

“Your guess is as good as mine. One moment I was evolving my profession; the next, I appeared here,” Jake answered as he tried to identify the man.

[?]

“Oh... that is... interesting,” the man said, as his eyes shone an even brighter color as he observed Jake. “Ah, I see...”

He nodded as he looked at Jake, seemingly not interested in sharing his thoughts.

"So..." Jake started, prompting the scaled man to explain.

"Just the system doing what it does," he answered with a shrug. "It transported you here, right?"

"It did," Jake answered, seeing no reason to hide anything. Moreso, he suspected that the being in front of him already knew.

"And you have obtained a profession related to the Malefic Viper?"

Jake nodded once more.

"Well, I am the Malefic Viper; nice to meet you and all that crap," he said, waving dismissively.

"Now fuck off."