

Hunter 50

Chapter 50: Friendship

Shadows danced on the cave wall as the flame flickered back and forth heating a bowl with green liquid within it, taking on a stable form. With a smile, Jake took a deep breath of the aroma as a notification appeared.

*You have successfully crafted [Stamina Potion (Inferior)] – A new kind of creation has been made.
Bonus experience earned*

'DING!' Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 45 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 34 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

Jake had finally managed to craft a stamina potion. It was a bit weird that he felt so much happiness from making something of inferior-rarity considering him pumping out common-rarity poisons like it was nothing. But it was still very satisfying nevertheless.

Looking at his creation, he was quite pleased.

[Stamina Potion (Inferior)] – Restores 485 stamina when consumed.

He couldn't help but think back on the first mana potion he had crafted. It would only restore 87 mana, which was so bad. He still had the potion saved away within his spatial storage, as a memento. He somehow had managed not to consume it during his initial grind, and for sentimental reasons, he kept it around. It reminded him of how far he had come.

Putting the potion into his storage, he took out a bed instead. It was a bit paradoxical how physical exertion seemed not to affect Jake's exhaustion level, but reading about alchemy and doing alchemy seemed to tire him out so quickly.

He felt like getting some well-deserved rest and recuperate his resource and mental energy in the meanwhile.

Sitting on the lonely bed in the middle of the small cavern, he distributed his free points. He had decided to start investing in perception once more as he was beginning to feel comfortable with his level of strength and agility. Besides, he was closing in on his class evolution, which was sure to help his more combat-related stats immensely.

Opening his status screen, he nodded to himself at the progress. It wasn't overly much, but he was slowly and surely improving. His main goal, of course, was to evolve his class as fast as possible.

Status

Name: Jake Thayne

Race: [Human (E) – lvl 34]

Class: [Archer – lvl 23]

Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper – lvl 45]

Health Points (HP): 3182/3220

Mana Points (MP): 2587/3900

Stamina: 516/1150

Stats

Strength: 124

Agility: 145

Endurance: 115

Vitality: 322

Toughness: 166

Wisdom: 390

Intelligence: 126

Perception: 277

Willpower: 195

Free points: 0

Titles: [Bloodline Patriarch], [Forerunner of the New World],[Holder of a Primordial's True Blessing],
[Dungeoneer I], [Dungeon Pioneer I]

Class Skills: [Basic One-Handed Weapon (Inferior)], [Basic Stealth (Inferior)], [Advanced Archery
(Common)], [Archers Eye (Common)], [Powershot (Uncommon)], [Basic Twin Fang Style (Uncommon)],
[Basic Shadow Vault of Umbra (Uncommon)]

Profession Skills: [Herbology (Common)], [Brew Potion (Common)], [Concoct Poison (Common)], [Alchemist's Purification (Common)], [Alchemical Flame (Common)], [Toxicology (Uncommon)], [Cultivate Toxin (Uncommon)], [Malefic Viper's Poison (Rare)], [Palate of the Malefic Viper (Rare)], [Touch of the Malefic Viper (Rare)], [Sense of the Malefic Viper (Rare)], [Blood of the Malefic Viper (Epic)]

Blessing: [True Blessing of the Malefic Viper (Blessing - True)]

Race Skills: [Endless Tongues of the Myriad Races (Unique)], [Identify (Common)], [Meditate (Common)], [Shroud of the Primordial (Divine)]

Bloodline: [Bloodline of the Primal Hunter (Bloodline Ability - Unique)]

It was good to see that his physical stats were no longer straight-up horrendous.

Many of his improvements also didn't show up on the status screen at all. His control of mana had seen vast improvements over the last few days, and he believed that he soon would be able to use it more actively.

Now he only infused his weapon to make it not break upon use, and the occasional levitation work. Of course, this was outside of alchemy. But he knew that mana could do so much more.

The warrior with the green aura was a great example of this. The aura Jake felt from the man reminded him more of stamina than mana. Yet the effect it had achieved was roughly the same as what Jake guessed a mana-based skill would do.

Of course, Jake knew that a skill had to be the driving force behind it. But if it were anything like his Alchemical Flame or just general mixing skills from his alchemy profession, trained mana control would be tremendously helpful.

The aura around the man didn't appear controlled at all. It was active at all times and based on how short the man could fight in top-condition, Jake guessed it was draining a hell of a lot of energy. If it were instead Jake, he would have been able to control it more, likely making the skill better in every way.

It was hard not to get a bit giddy at the thought of getting something like the warrior had used. Especially if he could get one that used mana, finally giving him the ability to make use of his large mana pool during combat.

But all of that was for later. For now, Jake was too tired to even practice.

Closing the status menu once more, he laid back on the bed as he rested - his first real sleep since exiting the challenge dungeon. While meditation did wonders, possibly even allowing one never to require sleep at all, Jake still liked sleeping. Besides, he trusted his instincts and danger sense to warn him of any would-be assassins or beasts.

As he slept, he also dreamt for the first time in a while. He dreamt of his old life before the system. His job and his family, which was pretty much all he had, really. The dream felt oddly lucid and only made Jake... sad. He couldn't help but feel how wasted it all was, how he had just gone through the motions, day after day with no goal in mind.

Due to the nature of his job, he didn't really lack money. He was relatively frugal, to begin with, so he always had enough money to buy anything he ever really wanted. The only real ambition he ever had was to be a professional athlete in archery before that ended.

But in this new world, he had meaning. Every level was a new goal, every skill or evolution a huge milestone. He never really had an existential crisis before the system; he just worked and spent his free time doing whatever he found entertaining.

Plus, he felt something oddly compelling about the prospects of a never-ending journey. Before the system, everyone had a rough idea of how their life would go. Be born, get educated, work, retire, die. It was simple, and the focus was on how you made the best of the time you had.

The system, however, did away with that entirely. Taking the concept of finite life and throwing it straight in the garbage. Jake could feel it even now, and the Malefic Viper's existence had proven that immortality was a possibility. One could imagine the chances of it happening were low, but the potential was there.

With no certainty, it gave new meaning to everything. Every level-up, not just some temporary benefit like some extra money in your bank account but a permanent upgrade to who you are. An advantage that could potentially stay with you forever. Even if the realm of immortality were never reached, one's lifespan would still be significantly increased.

This brings us back to Jake's dream. Because he did have something that he wanted except seeking more challenges and more levels, he wanted to find his family and help certain people in the tutorial.

Jake felt overwhelmed with a sudden feeling of loss. He had been alone for most of the tutorial and had had little time to think in general. Always focusing on something. But now, in his lucid dream, he didn't have anything else than his own thoughts.

He was naturally planning on trying to locate his family members the second he got out of here. But he also realized that needless worrying would do him little during his own tutorial. No... instead, he should focus on what he could do now. Get stronger and try to help his colleagues. Help his only friends...especially Jacob. He had done so much for Jake already, the least he could do was not to leave him to die... if he even still lived. Jake also feared what him being blamed for all those murders would mean for his colleagues. He had to do something.

Slowly his consciousness started fading away as he slipped out of his lucid state and simply became a spectator to the imaginations of his own mind. He dreamt of events he had gone to, the bonds he had made but was also reminded of the bonds he had lost or severed with his own hands.

Slowly even the dream faded away, or perhaps he simply became unaware of it.

The Hall Master had never been as panicked as she was at this moment. Wandering back and forth in her chambers, lost as to what her next step should be.

Her meeting with her great Patron had not been as she expected. Despite her endless imaginations of their encounter, the way the actual meeting went had never occurred even in her wildest dreams. The great Malefic Viper had not been as she believed he would but instead seemed too... relaxed. If not for his aura, at the risk of sounding blasphemous, she wouldn't have thought for him to even be a god. Much less the Malefic Viper.

And now she had to prepare for the great assembly. All of the different hall branches would send their important members to the headquarter, and a great meeting would be held. It was both a meeting and a celebration of the return of their Patron.

But instead of being in a celebratory mood, the Hall Master was instead wrought with worry. Disregarding her fears of disappointing the Malefic Viper and the Lord Protector, now she was also deathly afraid of the branch-leaders' reaction when the Malefic Viper would make his appearance.

Yet, at the same time, she felt a tremendous amount of excitement. The return of the Viper was sure to mark the start of massive changes. The return to glory, if you may. The Order had once in its history been one of the most glorious organizations of the entire multiverse after all, and she dreamed that they would one day return to being one. Something that was now possible.

With all of those wonderful prospects, she still had one colossal headache, however. One relating to a particular mortal the Viper had spoken of only a few days ago...

"A friend?" The Lord Protector asked, with a perplexed look on his face.

"Well yeah, you know... a buddy - a mate. You would like him for sure Snappy," the Malefic Viper said with a smile as he patted the Lord Protector on his back.

The Hall Master had been dumbfounded. What did the Patron mean by a friend? Friendship indicated a certain degree of equality between two parties. The implications of that...

"Master, please, you have to explain more. Who is this mortal to be deemed worthy for you to refer to him as a friend?" The Lord Protector asked, clearly skeptical of the quite ludicrous sentiment. The Hall Master could only agree that the prospect of a mortal referring to a god as a friend indeed seemed preposterous. The only mortals that could ever truly do so were the strongest of demigods.

The Malefic Viper was silent for a while before he turned to the Hall Master. "Tell me, kid, do you fear me?"

Without any hesitation, she answered. "Of course, my lord, anything less would be preposterous!"

"And you, Snappy?"

"To not fear the powerful is an act of foolishness," He answered stoically.

"Well, Jake didn't. Oh, his name is Jake, by the way! Anyway! He didn't have a single shred of fear, just a lot of confusion and curiosity," The Viper said, still smiling.

"He knew I wouldn't hurt him... but more importantly, he knew I couldn't. Heck, I even tried scaring him a bit by attacking, but he didn't even flinch!"

"How is that possible?" The Lord Protector asked.

"How do you think a mortal, who hasn't even been initiated to the system for a month yet, does that?" The Viper asked, clearly directing the question to both herself and the Lord Protector.

"Bloodline," she answered promptly.

“Bingo!” The Malefic Viper said as he clapped. “and while I don’t understand the specifics of it, it sure as heck gave me a strong feeling. Sent shivers down my spine, I tell ya!”

“So recognizing the mortal’s bloodline makes him worthy of being bestowed your friendship?” the Lord Protector asked, still a bit confused. For a mortal to appear with a powerful bloodline wasn’t exactly new. The Viper and Lord Protector both had met many like that before. Even members of their Order had been born with such bloodlines.

“First of all, Snappy, while I am far from an expert, I don’t think that is how friendship works,” the Viper said. “Secondly, no, he’s my buddy because he’s a swell guy. Either way, he made me think about some important things, and ultimately decide to leave my realm and stop wallowing anymore. So no complaining.”

With that, the Viper didn’t speak of his new... ‘friend’ any longer. Instead, the talk turned to the grand ceremony that they would hold to announce the Malefic Viper's return. Announce it to not just the Order but the entire multiverse.

A few more bombs were dropped, like how the Viper casually mentioned granting the mortal a True Blessing, but the Hall Master had honestly stopped trying to comprehend the logic behind her great Patron at that point. In the end, who was she to question the thoughts of a Primordial?

Which is what led back to her, wandering back and forth in her chamber, contemplating.

This Jake posed many challenges. But at the same time, many opportunities. While she, as Hall Master, had unrequited loyalty towards her Patron, she wasn’t blind to politics and hierarchy. There was a reason why she had managed to climb to the top and have the highest title amongst mortals in the entire Order. At least she had been the highest...

Now, she had been knocked down to second place. No amount of politics could trump the chosen of the Malefic One himself.

A good relationship with this mortal was thus a must. Any relationship becoming relevant was all contingent on him surviving the tutorial, though. Afterward, they would also need to contact him, but with a True Blessing connecting himself and the Patron, that shouldn't be an issue.

All of that had to wait for now. The other leaders were starting to arrive, and she could no longer have the elders handle all the hassle.

Exiting the chamber, she went to the banquet hall that had been in constant use for the last few days, welcoming all new arrivals. Food from all across the multiverse was gathered, prepared, and cooked by high-level cooks. It wasn't like anyone of their level needed it; instead, they ate it for the powerful temporary buffs it provided. Also, of course, because it was delicious.

This gathering wasn't for the young talents, but the old leaders. The excitement was visible as she went across the hall, greeting one person after another.

Suddenly, however, she heard a voice she would never forget.

"You should have seen the thing, the colors indescribable, and the taste euphoric!" the man said, as he laughed with the others, making large gestures with his arms while standing in a crowd of three reptilian servants.

The Hall Master didn't share in the merry mood as she stood frozen, staring at the man. The scaled man. Their Patron, the Malefic Viper.

None of the people around him had any idea about his identity, and his ability to conceal his true aura was naturally at a level above reproach.

With a sigh, she walked towards them. This really wasn't going as she had expected.