

## Hunter 68

Chapter 68: Dungeon = Alchemy

By now, it was officially confirmed. The system loved long and annoying, pointless tunnels forcing you to walk for way longer than was reasonable.

He had been walking for thirty minutes by now. The light behind him was no longer visible, while he didn't see anything in front of him either. It was subtle, but the tunnel curved slightly, making it quite natural that he couldn't see either end.

The big cavern where he had fought the Alpha had been relatively well-lit by crystals covering the ceiling, but for some reason, the system hadn't bothered lighting the tunnels in any way.

Then again, the tunnels were made to look like the badgers had dug them out. Or maybe they had actually been dug out by them. Jake seriously doubted that with the rest of the dungeon being so obviously pre-designed, but who knows.

Luckily though, Jake had his own source of light. His Alchemical Flame, while a transparent flame, did give off quite a bit of light.

He didn't need the light for knowing where to go as he had his sphere, but because of what Jake was doing as he walked. A book was in one of his hands, illuminated by the flickering flame. The title read: Blood & Poison: Intermediate Hemotoxins I. Not exactly a bestseller, but Jake still found it incredibly interesting.

While the hemotoxic poisons had proved very useful against the Alpha, he still found it lacking, which was why he had decided to create a better version for his fight with the Den Mother.

The dungeon didn't have any time limit, so he saw no reason to rush through it recklessly. Then again, he wasn't going to dally around for no reason. Leveling his alchemy was, in Jake's opinion, just as important as his class, and crafting the hemotoxic poison was yet another worthwhile challenge. He was also getting close to his next skill from his profession, and he had a feeling the next one was going to be juicy.

Life and death battles weren't necessary to scratch his competitive itch and his instinct to challenge himself. The complex concoction-techniques and high requirements for precise mana control also did that.

So far, Jake had only ever created two poisons above inferior-grade. One was his necrotic poison, while the other was the rare amalgamation he had used to pass the challenge dungeon.

The necrotic poison he could make mainly due to his Palate of the Malefic Viper, combined with him eating far more blue mushrooms than he would ever admit to. As eating them gave him insight into their nature, he quickly got extremely familiar with them. And even with that, it still took him quite a while before he crafted his first one.

The amalgamation of poison couldn't really be considered a proper concoction. It had been unstable and would lose its effectiveness within a short time after being crafted, and even then, the effects were questionable at best. On top of that, Jake had used ten rare mushrooms for that one creation, not exactly being frugal with his ingredient-spending. Needless to say, it wasn't a feat he could easily replicate.

Which left him with his current challenge of making the hemotoxin he was currently aiming for. He had the ingredients for it already, still having them stored in his necklace.

He had gotten used to the spatial storage by now, but occasionally he was reminded of how impressive it actually was. The herbs stayed fresh within the necklace, just like they had in the garden found in the challenge dungeon. It was like walking around with a portable greenhouse frozen in temporal suspension.

Within that metaphorical greenhouse, he had also located the plant which he intended to use.

[Bloodthorn Stalk (Common)] – A relatively common herb found in areas with an abundance of vitality-based creatures. It has a sweet smell, often attracting unwitting animals. A significant amount of tainted vital energy is found within, agitating the blood of any living entity it touches.

This stalk was, as the description said, not very rare. It grew by absorbing the blood of living beings who touched it. This was mainly done to animals thinking it was a beneficial herb and then attempting to eat it, only for the stalk to stay firmly rooted in the ground, scratching the inside of the beast's mouth and absorbing its blood.

The ground below these plants was often red, making many believe that the herb grew in blood-soaked soil. However, it was later discovered that the earth became red due to the Bloodthorn Stalk concentrating the vital energy into it to attract even more prey.

It was quite the insidious plant that had killed and maimed countless living things. Jake had even noticed the stalks starting to turn a bit withered moments after taking them out, forcing him to make a quick run back and pick up a few badger-corpses to feed the poor murder-stalks.

When he was back there, he also considered if he could use anything from the beasts' corpses to make any poisons. Sadly, his Sense of the Malefic Viper made it clear that their venom stopped working after their deaths. If Jake had to guess, it was due to the lack of internal energy. So he had just to use their corpses to feed the stalks.

On an important side note, they actually tasted pretty good. The herb had a lovely smell, with a lot of liquid within. The thorns were peeled off before he started his feasting, of course.

He ate plenty of them, as he familiarized himself with the herb before he would begin his practice. Interestingly enough, the stalks didn't restore any mana when he ate them but instead released a tiny amount of vital energy.

Thinking back, he hadn't really eaten anything worthwhile for a very long time. It wasn't that he no longer needed substance, but that he managed to keep himself fed only through herbs. He had a habit of eating a few of those he found as he roamed about.

Wait... am I a vegan now? he suddenly thought randomly. Well, a pretty shitty vegan, considering that he killed beasts all the time... but hey, he didn't eat them. Though he really should. Honestly, one can only blame the badgers for not looking appetizing.

As his thought wandered far from the book in his hand, he finally saw the other end of the long tunnel with his sphere. Picking up the pace slightly, he found himself in another cavern, about the same size as before.

Scanning the cave with his gaze, there were far fewer badgers, him seeing only five in total. The problem was the kind of badgers, however. Four of them were the same big badger, with the weird spiky hair.

[Alpha Venomfang Badger – lvl ??]

The only thing that soothed him slightly was the fact that they were all spread out. They all seemed to be very territorial, only staying within their designated area.

At the end of the room was a hill with yet another badger lying upon it. This one was quite different from any of the others.

It didn't have any spikes, but its hairs all seemed fine and smooth. It had white lines running across its sides in intricate patterns, looking quite beautiful, really. Its size was slightly larger than the Alphas. But more importantly,... it gave off a feeling that made Jake instantly aware that this beast was the real leader of this pack.

[Den Mother – lvl ??]

The beast was clearly stronger... but still not evolved yet. It was a great relief, as he had feared the creature to have been D-grade, something Jake had absolutely no confidence in facing.

All of the Alphas also felt only slightly stronger than the one had already killed. It was very slight, but it was there.

Had he been thrown out of the main cavern or something? Jake wondered. It was imperative to figure out the intricate lore of the badger cave, after all.

He had taken down one Alpha, and he had confidence in doing so with these ones. Sure, they were slightly stronger, but he had also gained quite a lot.

No, the problem was his current state. Ripped robe, punctured bracers, and all resources relatively low.

His first order of business was to get that in order, with the second being practicing his alchemy and killing the alphas. He knew it wasn't a 1-day project to finish the hemotoxin poison, so he decided to switch between alchemy and fighting, picking off the badgers one by one. If all went well, his poison should be ready for his clash with the Den Mother.

With no reason to sit around, he started getting to work on restoring his equipment and finishing his preparations for his first crafting attempt. He read the recipes, ate the herbs, and fixed his things over the next couple of hours.

With everything ready, he got started on the arduous process of crafting an entirely new poison. The differences between inferior-rarity and common-rarity weren't huge, but they were far from insignificant. The complexity required in the control of mana and the handling of the ingredients was at another level.

Purified Water, Aged Green Moss, Bloodthorn Stalk, as well as a good whiff of his own blood empowered with Blood of the Malefic Viper, and he was good to go. The first part went as expected, as he extracted the energy from the moss and integrated it with the water and his blood.

This part was the same as with necrotic poisons, making him experienced in it already, hence finishing that part without any issues. Next, he started applying the sweet nectar found within the Bloodthorn Stalks. You didn't need the stalk itself, but only the juices found within.

The highly concentrated liquid entered the mixing bowl with nothing unexpected happening. The juices and the rest of the mix acted like magnets with the same poles, pushing the other party away. But of course, Jake needed them to mix, and not just mix, but merge and bring out synergistic effects.

As he tried nudging them closer together, the small barrier that separated them unexpectedly broke apart, and the energies smashed together before Jake could even react. The entire concoction seemed to erupt as all the liquid flew into the air, splashing all over his clothes.

He managed to close his eyes and avoid getting anything into them, but his newly restored cloak wasn't so lucky. The acidic properties of his blood still lingered in the brew, making his cloak once more full of holes as small patches of it had eroded.

That went well, Jake thought to himself as he started restoring his cloak once more. He also had his skin hit, but his resistance and high toughness left him with nothing more than a few red marks.

What Jake had just experienced was a great example of why alchemists specializing in toxins had high vitality and toughness. The mixing process was far more dangerous than a regular potion, and even if the same thing had happened during the brewing of one, the eruption would only have left Jake covered in harmless liquids.

Of course, this was discounting that many alchemists who made poisons had to sometimes test and experiment with their toxins. And the best way to learn of the effect of poison was to experience it yourself. Jake hadn't done this yet, but then again, he hadn't really made that many different sorts of toxins. Though his one original creation had nearly killed him.

After his initial failure, he made a few more attempts, finding little but steady progress. No level was awarded for his efforts, still putting him at 47, but he wasn't discouraged. He drank one final health potion, topping up his health as he entered meditation to restore his stamina and mana.

Those two were relatively easy to restore. Mana continually regenerated, while stamina was restored whenever he meditated or slept. Health was another story. It did regenerate naturally, but at a rate far slower than the other two. He had lost quite a bit of health against the Alpha Venomfang Badger, and if he wanted to have that regenerate naturally, it would likely take days. He doubted even a week would be able to fill it.

Which was why he used health potions to top it off. Without those, his progress would be far slower as he would be forced to take far too long breaks. This was also the reason why healers were so essential to have when leveling.

Exiting meditation a few hours later, he checked his status menu, putting all his free points into perception. He had already done that with quite a lot of them before he had gotten Mark of the Ambitious Hunter, but now that he had that, it only confirmed his choice.

Looking over the status, he was very satisfied.

Status

Name: Jake Thayne

Race: [Human (E) – lvl 43]

Class: [Ambitious Hunter – lvl 40]

Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper – lvl 47]

Health Points (HP): 3540/3540

Mana Points (MP): 3427/4210

Stamina: 1501/1890

Stats

Strength: 231

Agility: 284

Endurance: 189

Vitality: 354

Toughness: 190

Wisdom: 421

Intelligence: 150

Perception: 493

Willpower: 224

Free points: 0

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

Class Skills: [Basic One-Handed Weapons (Inferior)], [Basic Stealth (Inferior)], [Advanced Archery  
(Common)], [Hunter's Sight (Uncommon)], [Basic Twin Fang Style (Uncommon)], [Basic Shadow Vault of

Umbra (Uncommon)), [Splitting Arrow (Uncommon)] [Big Game Hunter (Rare)], [Infused Powershot (Rare)], [Mark of the Ambitious Hunter (Rare)]

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)]

The most significant growth was in his perception. He had gained nearly 150 points since he entered the dungeon with all the levels and his investment of free points. In reality, he had only invested 120 points or so, but the 25% bonus from his bloodline and title resulted in quite the increase.

And he could feel the increase. It was in minor things, like when he focused on an object, he could more easily make out small details, and when he focused on his hearing, he could hear even the smallest thing. It wasn't like perception just straight-up boosted one's senses, as it would be horrendously annoying if you had to listen to the sound of your own heart constantly. He had to focus on it, which means that it didn't help as much if he was distracted.

Where he could easily see the growth was with his sphere. With every point invested, it slightly increased in its area of effect and clarity. It wasn't by much, but it was there.

As for his danger sense and other things related to his bloodline... he had no idea if they even interacted with the stat to begin with. Then again, his bloodline was an intrinsic part of him. Would he even notice if they improved? Or would it not just feel utterly natural to him? As it, in a sense, was natural.

Closing his status menu once more, he briefly considered checking the tutorial panel but decided against it. Distractions would do him no good. In this dungeon, it was just him and a bunch of overgrown badgers, the rest of the survivors be damned.

He identified the first prey, taking out his bow, as he prepared an arrow with his old, weak hemotoxic poison. He had been sitting still for long enough, and it was time to do some light exercise with a bit of mortal combat.