

## Hunter 74

### Chapter 74: Practice & Ash

Jake was enjoying his trip towards the next mountain quite a bit, though he had a faint suspicion his current prey didn't.

The raptor struggled and writhed as it was held down by its throat. Its assailant's second hand didn't give it time to muster a response before it brought down a knife-like bone on its temple.

Even with the knife in its brain, it didn't die instantly. However, when the venom from the dagger was secreted into its brain, its vitality quickly gave out as the beast stopped moving.

Another raptor jumped Jake but didn't even get close before he whipped around and punched it hard on the side of its head. It stumbled a bit from the blow, giving Jake ample time to wrap his arm around its neck, holding it in a chokehold.

The highly distraught raptor panicked as it started trying to get him to let go. But Jake easily held onto it, as he used Touch of the Malefic Viper on the beast. It took a few seconds, but the creature soon stopped struggling as he got the sweet kill notification.

Letting go, it fell down to join its brethren. Jake looked at the five dead raptors on the ground around him as he briefly cleaned his dagger and put it into his storage.

It had been far too easy. The raptors Jake had been slightly struggling with only days ago now didn't even present a proper threat.

Then again, his stats did experience explosive growth during the dungeon-run. His status, of course, agreed with that notion.

Status

Name: Jake Thayne

Race: [Human (E) – lvl 47]

Class: [Ambitious Hunter – lvl 46]

Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper – lvl 49]

Health Points (HP): 3715/3780

Mana Points (MP): 4007/4450

Stamina: 1858/2470

## Stats

Strength: 257

Agility: 349

Endurance: 247

Vitality: 378

Toughness: 207

Wisdom: 445

Intelligence: 168

Perception: 613

Willpower: 246

Free points: 0

It was mostly his agility, endurance, and perception showing growth, which was quite natural considering his class mainly provided stats to those three stats. His new equipment only boosted him further, with his pants adding 25 to both agility and endurance.

His perception had experienced the most significant growth by far. He had decided to stick with his tactic of just throwing all his points into the stat.

He feared that perhaps he was spreading himself too thin, and looking at it, nearly all his stats were at a pretty reasonable level. Maybe a too reasonable level.

Becoming a Jake of all trades, yet master of none, was a dangerous path. If you looked at his stats, then a lot of them did little to nothing during an actual fight.

Having less wisdom, intelligence, willpower, and even toughness and vitality in exchange for strength and agility would significantly impact his ability to actually kill stuff.

Then again, Jake wasn't merely a hunter, but also an alchemist. Without the means provided by his profession, he would be a far cry from where he was today.

What this all came down to was Jake being slightly apprehensive about entering the next dungeon right away. He knew that he was on a timer- the Tutorial Panel ever the reminder.

## Tutorial Panel

Duration: 18 days & 15:54:11

He had a bit over two and a half weeks left to clear three dungeons and then deal with whatever this King of the Forest was. The next dungeon, of course, being his immediate objective.

But before that, he wanted to accomplish a few things. One of them a must-have and the other one a would-be-nice-to-have.

First of all, get his Alchemist of the Malefic Viper to level 50. Another skill from that was bound to help him. His Blood of the Malefic Viper had helped him tremendously, and he hoped to get an equally helpful skill.

Second of all, he wanted to try and improve his Advanced Archery skill. He had upgraded it to common-rarity by only spending a few hours with Casper back during the beginning of the tutorial, and by now, he had improved by a lot.

He felt that he was close to upgrading it even before his class evolution, and now only a thin line separated him from finally getting it. What exactly he needed to cross that line he wasn't sure of, which was why he chose to wait a bit before entering the next dungeon.

What he needed wasn't to have the stressful situation of a life and death fight function as a catalyst. Instead, he needed to find that little thing he was missing, and the problem was that he didn't know what that was. The skill could get upgraded within the hour or in years for all he knew.

This is why he was currently taking his sweet time getting to the next volcano-like mountain. He had decided to clear one of the valleys and, at the same time, do some relaxing practicing.

The raptors had been an outlier. They had run at Jake from behind while he was just trying to read a damn book, and he had ended up just smashing them in melee. He had quite honestly seen no reason to bring out a bow and start kiting around.

He also saw quite a lot of value in familiarizing himself with his new Venomfang dagger and correctly practicing his Twin Fang Style some more. Honestly, he barely focused on technique during close combat but simply moved according to his instinct most of the time.

The hours slowly ticked by as he started clearing out the valley closest to the next volcano-mountain-thing. This one was mainly inhabited by the Lucenti Deer and Stags, making Jake suspect that the dungeon would be the same. The valley closest to Badger's Den had been filled with badgers, after all.

As he practiced his archery, he focused on the entire process - the act of drawing an arrow from the quiver, nocking it, pulling back the string, taking aim, and finally releasing it.

He was already very intimate with archery before even entering the tutorial, which had netted him the upgrade of the archery skill. To get the upgrade, he simply had to confirm the knowledge he already held, and the system recognized it.

Compared to back then, Jake had experienced remarkable growth in the art of archery. His most prominent development in the field of speed.

His training before had been formal and competition-based. It focused on the proper forms and techniques – to remain focused on aiming and landing that one shot on the target.

But combat was very different. In a tournament, Jake would have time to aim for sometimes dozens of seconds, have time to focus on his breathing, and then finally release the arrow once he felt like it was the optimal time.

In combat, however, the enemy didn't give you time to relax and take your time. A charging Alpha would force anyone to fast-track the entire process and fire the arrow as fast as possible.

A second area where he had improved was shooting while moving - a field where he still had plenty of room to improve in. Even now, he mostly Shadow Vaulted away, took a stance, fired an arrow, and then Shadow Vaulted away once more.

Instead, it would be far more effective to shoot while moving, especially while airborne as Jake sometimes jumped out of the way of an attack. In other words, he needed to improve his multitasking.

He had great form and technique in general, but he had to change elements of his style away from some of the habits he had formed. The habits were useful in an archery competition, but only a hindrance during mortal combat.

He needed to hammer out his faults and to focus on improving them. He showed skill above what he actually possessed as his instincts were more than happy with helping him during combat.

But with a renewed focus on what he was doing, he started to notice and iron out the small faults he discovered. He often over-compensated with how far he drew back the string or how he sometimes overanalyzed an enemy's movements and ended up missing.

After half a day or so of practice, he finally decided to put down the bow. He hadn't used a single skill the entire time, and the only thing he ever did to spice up the fighting was sometimes to fight a deer or two whenever they got in melee.

The stags were his favorite practice partners. They seemed smarter than badgers and actively tried to dodge his attacks. On top of that, they preferred ranged combat, firing magic attacks from their antlers. It was mainly glowing bolts of light and the odd beam here and there, along with the occasional barrier of light that blocked an arrow.

To make the fights even more interesting, the beasts could even heal themselves and others. And not a slow-acting heal like the Den Mother, but nearly instantly. When there was only a single one of them, it wasn't that bad, but when he ended up against three of them and they repeatedly healed each other, it got a bit... complicated - for the poor stags, that is.

All it did was to extend their suffering. The fight ended up being far longer than it should have been, as the three stags healed each other. Jake even gave them time to heal and practiced aiming at specific areas of the creatures.

His default approach was always to aim for one of the common weak points, such as eyes, nose, mouth, ears... pretty much the face. But the face was also the place the beasts protected the most, especially the stags with their barriers.



Their spells were all cast from their antlers, and surprisingly the antlers were quite close to their faces.

All in all, he had learned a lot about the beasts - knowledge that would surely become useful whenever he entered the dungeon.

As for the spoils of his efforts, he had only found a single lockbox. In it was a common-rarity upgrade token, which he promptly put in his spatial storage. He still had a few swords and daggers that could be upgraded, but he decided to save it if he ever needed it. The famous last words said before forgetting a consumable in your inventory forever.

Having found a lovely tree to sit under, he took out his alchemical supplies. He wanted to get that level 50 skill, so he decided to make the final push. Besides, he needed more Necrotic Poison. The hemotoxin had worked wonders on the badgers, but the stags could cure the poison before it managed to increase his damage much.

Necrotic Poison, on the other hand, was fast-working and did far more immediate damage. Jake did briefly consider trying to make another type of poison but decided against it. He had to recognize that he had limited time left in the tutorial, and he had set the goal for himself to at least see this so-called King of the Forest.

Sitting comfortably, he started concocting the poison. His body relaxed while his mind started working as he focused his mana. He had already taken out all the ingredients and placed them on a cloth beside the bowl. To better practice mana-control, he even used his mana strings to pick up and add the ingredients, becoming more and more adept at using them.

He had considered if his application of mana was correct. He had ended up making strings and threads out of it initially and had kind of stuck to that approach. He could still fire out pulses and use it with his skills, but besides that, he didn't really use it daily. Which kind of made sense as his only combat skills

that used mana was Infused Powershot and Touch of the Malefic Viper. Both of which were far too complex for him to analyze properly.

The hours continued to tick by until he finally heard the satisfying sound of a successful craft, followed by the even more satisfying sound indicating his level-up.

The silent clearing seemed ever so tranquil as the molerats feasted on the vast amounts of meat. Many of the corpses were easy enough to eat, but many of them were still wearing armor, clearly annoying the beasts.

One rat scratched out meat from within a chestplate, while another was eating out of a boot. The last one approached another of the many corpses. It didn't look or smell particularly appetizing, but the food was food.

It was a burned body, charred all over. The only thing uncharred was a shiny breastplate.

Just when the hungry rat tried to take a bite, a sword lying nearby flew over and skewered it to the ground.

Instantly a flurry of movement was kicked up. The molerats panicked as all the metal scattered about in what had once been a battlefield started vibrating. The vibration soon turned to more as they all flew towards the corpse with the shiny armor.

But instead of crashing into him, they were instead absorbed by the corpse. Tens of swords, spears, axes, and arrowheads, everything metal, disappeared into the body, leaving all non-metal parts behind.

The two surviving rats tried running but were both skewered by the same sword that had killed their kin just seconds earlier.

Soon the noise died down as the battlefield returned to silence once more. Several minutes passed without anything happening until suddenly, a small twitch was seen. A single finger on the corpse moved as the ashen shell cracked, revealing healthy skin beneath.