

Hunter 79

Chapter 79: Moment of Curiosity

Jake dismissed his bow as the stag fell to the ground, never to move again. The fights with the beasts had only gotten more comfortable as he got accustomed to all their tactics and fighting styles. In the end, they were just beasts, making their strategies repetitive and straightforward. It had started getting a bit boring as they stopped being real challenges.

But at least the experience was good. Only four ponds cleared out, and Jake had reached his first goal.

'DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 50 - Stat points allocated, +4 free points

'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 50 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

He waited for a few moments after the notifications. After a few seconds, it became disappointingly clear that he wouldn't get anything for getting his race to level 50. He had kind of hoped to get some amazing bonus or something. At least a skill or something. His only consolation was that his class, of course, didn't disappoint.

Ambitious Hunter class skills available

Yet again, he decided to take the slow approach and go through the skills one by one. He quickly dove into the tall grass once more as he hid far away from any potential enemies. The pattern of other deer coming to investigate the pond he had just cleared was sure to repeat itself.

When he found a safe spot, he sat down and entered meditation as he went through the skills. He was low on both stamina and mana anyway.

He had a total of five new skills to pick from. The maximum he could be offered. The first one not being overly exciting, though.

[Stealth Attack (Common)] – The most decisive blow is the one not seen coming before it is too late. Increase the power of the first attack made to an otherwise unaware foe. Works with both ranged and melee attacks. Adds a minor bonus to the effectiveness of agility and strength when using Stealth Attack.

He was ninety-nine percent sure this one came from him advancing his stealth. He could see the usefulness of the skill, but the common-rarity tag just put him off. He was sure that he could get better at some point. If he advanced stealth more, chances were new skills would follow suit.

So he skipped it as he swiftly moved on to yet another common-rarity skill.

[Grappling Shot (Common)] – Getting to the right vantage point or merely climbing whatever impedes you is invaluable to any hunter when hunting his prey. Shoot an arrow with a string of mana attached. The arrow will easily stick to any surface it encounters without doing any notable damage to said surface. Adds a minor bonus to the effectiveness of agility and wisdom when using Grappling Shot.

This one was at least a bit more interesting. Jake assumed he unlocked it through his small rock-climbing session and by his constant use of mana strings. But while the way he had unlocked it was interesting, the skill itself was not.

Discounting any fantasies of cosplaying as a vigilante in a bat costume, he didn't see many practical uses. If he really needed to climb something badly, he could just use the same tactic he used before.

The only other exciting thing he could find about the skill was that it scaled with wisdom and agility like his Shadow Vault of Umbra. Not that it had any effect on his decision to skip it over. His next option at least looked quite a bit better.

[Descending Fang (Uncommon)] – A fang descending like the clamping mouth of a snake. Do a downward strike with a melee weapon, significantly increasing penetrative power and damage inflicted. Damage improved further if the weapon is benefitting from Twin Fang Style. Adds a small bonus to the effectiveness of agility and strength when using Descending Fang.

This was the first true melee skill he had been offered that he would have to use actively. The skill was also clearly linked to Twin Fang Style and was likely also influenced by his liberal use of Venomfang.

The skill itself was without a doubt useful. Jake's favorite move was to stab, to begin with, and it also made applying the venom far more effective. Besides, it was far more suitable for stabbing than cutting with the dagger formed like a sharpened fang. Hence the name Venomfang.

To say the skill didn't tempt him would be a lie. It fit right into his style, and it would prove incredibly useful. He decided to reserve judgment, though, until he had also checked out the last two skills. The first of which was also incredibly interesting.

[Conjure Spectral Weaponry (Uncommon)] – One does not need to carry a weapon if they can manifest one at any time. Summon a replication of any weapon used prior composed solely of mana. Only the form of the weapon is replicated, and it does not retain any enchants or material integrity. The

summoned arms' power and durability are based on wisdom and the mana expended during their creation.

This one likely had similar roots to the Grappling Shot skill. Jake's mana practice, to be more exact. He also had the option to learn Spectral Hand in his profession, so it was pretty clear that his improvements were recognized.

As for the skill itself? It was useful for sure, but Jake nevertheless felt unsure. There were many unanswered questions, such as how well the conjured weapons would hold up to his current gear and other details, such as how long it took to summon things.

His quiver took a few seconds per arrow, and if the speed of conjuration from the skill were anything close to that, it would prove pretty useless in combat. It took him practically no time to dismiss and summon things from his spatial storage, making that far more effective.

And, of course, there was the last point. Jake felt like he could do what the skill did without it. He could learn how to make a bow or a dagger from mana. Not that he felt anywhere close to able to do that, but his mana strings' tangibility and strength got more robust by the day.

Which left the last skill - one that felt very familiar.

[Bestial Survival Instincts (Rare)] – The Ambitious Hunter has learned from the beasts he hunts and can now imitate their superhuman senses. Has a small chance to feel a distinct sense of danger from any attack, and improved reaction time for a brief duration after triggering the effect. Adds a small bonus to the chance and the accuracy of the extra sense based on perception.

The skill seemed just to explain what his bloodline ability already did, though in more detail and from the description, just straight-up worse. It only had a chance to activate, and it improved his reaction time? His bloodline already did both of those things far better.

But if he took the skill in isolation, ignoring his bloodline, it would surely be useful for someone that wasn't him. His danger sense helped him immensely in combat and helped him gauge how strong a blow would be before it hit him, as well as warn him of any attacks he hadn't seen coming.

Thinking back, he remembered many of the beasts he was hunting to have some kind of danger sense. But none of the humans he had fought had it. Perhaps it was just something many creatures got, but humans had to pick special skills for. Or maybe it came with levels as one's combat instincts were honed.

The best example of a beast with the skill had to be the Alpha Badgers and the Den Mother. Both of those showed near precognition-level power to react, though he would still call it far less reliable than his own. It seemed to not really differentiate between harmless attacks and lethal ones, like how the Alpha dodged a random glass bottle tossed at it.

Yet despite all these cons, Jake got curious. How exactly would the skill work for him? Would it improve his already existing abilities? Double-down on the same, and just give him massive headaches from two danger senses activating at the same time? Maybe just do nothing?

Jake couldn't help but be attracted to the skill, like it resonated with him somehow. His intuition didn't really give him any details as to what would happen either. He did, however, get the feeling that it wouldn't bring him any harm to get it.

He went through the list once more and hovered a bit on one of the skills he had passed over at level 40. There was still the one rare skill that offered him better mental defenses. It was attractive for sure... but it just didn't excite him that much.

There was also the active camouflage... but at the point he began thinking about taking that, the thought of what would happen from picking Bestial Survival Instincts had already overwhelmed him.

In the end, curiosity got the better of him. Well, here goes nothing.

***Gained Skill*: [Bestial Survival Instincts (Rare)]** – The Ambitious Hunter has learned from the beasts he hunts and can now imitate their superhuman senses. Has a small chance to feel a distinct sense of danger from any attack, and improved reaction time for a brief duration after triggering the effect. Adds a small bonus to the chance and the accuracy of the extra sense based on perception.

The second he gained the skill, he initially didn't feel much except for the cold sensation of instinctual knowledge of how the skill worked enter him - just like with every other skill. The feeling, however, quickly changed as he felt a warmth spring up. He began to have a vague sense of annoyance at the new skill, an annoyance that soon turned to disdain.

Distinctly he heard the sound of his heartbeat.

THUMP!

The sound felt all-encompassing. The sound didn't come from his physical heart, but something deeper within.

THUMP!

The warmth got more intense as he felt like his blood was heating up, but it didn't feel uncomfortable in the least, but more like something within him had stirred. Like the intrusion of this new skill upon the domain of his bloodline had awoken it. Angered it and him. He felt angry, as if he wanted to just rip the skill right out of his status menu.

THUMP!

The feeling kept increasing as the heartbeat continued. Time itself seemed to stand still as the system message appeared.

Synergy Detected

Due to your bloodline, the skill [Bestial Survival Instincts (Rare)] is evolving.

***Skill Upgraded*:** [Bestial Survival Instincts (Rare)] --> [Extreme Bestial Survival Instincts (Epic)]

He read the message as the warm flow increased, but he didn't feel any better at all as even more instinctual knowledge began to enter his brain. His heartbeat showed no intentions of stopping either.

Due to your bloodline, the skill [Extreme Bestial Survival Instincts (Epic)] is evolving.

Skill Upgraded: [Extreme Bestial Survival Instincts (Epic)] --> [Supreme Bestial Survival Instincts (Ancient)]

Once more knowledge came, and once more, he found it wanting. It was weak, a downgrade. Not good enough.

Due to your bloodline, the skill [Supreme Bestial Survival Instincts (Ancient)] is evolving. Maximum rarity reached. Evolution unsuccessful.

Jake finally felt the warmth slow down as the skill seemed to cap out. The knowledge entered his head throughout the entire process as he got a far better understanding of the skill and its full evolutionary path.

A logical part of him knew that it was a great skill, but that part of him wasn't what was in the forefront. No, that part of him that was his more impulsive and instinctual side, wasn't satisfied. It was still so weak. Inferior to what he already had, what he already was. A lesser part of himself that he had no need for, that was better off culled.

THUMP!

A heartbeat that reverberated through his entire soul, sending out a pulse of energy. The warmth returned with a fury, unwilling to give any room for the new skill. His bloodline had been challenged; its territory entered without permission. And like a primal beast, it refused to give any leeway - a fact the system quickly recognized.

Synergy detected

Congratulation! Your [Supreme Bestial Survival Instincts (Ancient)] has successfully transformed.

Skill transformed: [Supreme Bestial Survival Instincts (Ancient)] --> [Moment of the Primal Hunter (Legendary)]

Congratulation! You have successfully created a new Legendary skill. A great accomplishment for any being, but even more so one still so early on their path.

Title: [Legendary Prodigy] earned.

Jake instantly knew that now it was truly over; his bloodline had won.

No, that wasn't right. He had won. Jake's face was grimacing with a toothy smile as blood trickled down his neck from biting himself in a fury before. A brilliant smile of victory - his fists closed, blood hitting the ground from him clenching his fists so hard.

He felt like he had just wrestled a mighty beast to the ground. Like he had continuously dominated it despite all its struggle.

The windfall from his moment of curiosity was immense. The warm flow disappeared a few moments later. He felt more powerful than ever before, and it didn't take him long to locate the source as his new title.

[Legendary Prodigy] – A true talent standing at the pinnacle of his generation. Young, yet showing promise above even the elders of yore. Due to your immense accomplishment of creating a legendary skill while still below D-grade, you have proven yourself a true legendary prodigy. +10 all stats +10% all stats.

The title was as good as his Holder of a Primordial's True Blessing. A title he had gotten from being blessed by a literal god.

An extra +10 in all stats was... immense, granting him a total of 90 stat points right off that bat. This was, of course, ignoring the 10% to all stats. As with the other titles, it worked additively, putting the percentage increase on top of the bonuses he already had. Not that it made the bonus any less massive. That 10% represented an increase of a few hundred total stats - a bonus that would only grow as he did.

Jake couldn't help but briefly feel like the title wasn't earned. It had been luck and pure coincidence.

But then again, could he genuinely claim that? It was due to himself that he got the bonus. It was what he was that made it possible. His bloodline was a part of him; it would be like blaming himself for being good at archery because he had functional arms. Besides... it wasn't the first time he had been called a prodigy.

As for the skill itself... Jake wouldn't dare to complain.

[Moment of the Primal Hunter (Legendary)] – Instincts ascended to touch upon the concept of time itself. Through your supernatural instinct for survival, you seize the moment of crisis and turn it into one of opportunity. Momentarily slows down time if a blow would otherwise deal substantial damage to the hunter. The hunter is unaffected by the slowdown and can move uninhibited for the duration. Has an internal cooldown between each activation. Effect and internal cooldown of the skill are based on perception.

He honestly had no idea what to think about it. From the description, he couldn't imagine it being weak, but at the same time, he had no idea exactly how powerful it would be. He knew that the rarity of skill alone wouldn't instantly make it the best, but often also had a lot to do with the skill's complexity... and from the looks of it, this one was pretty complex, right?

The skill said that it "touched upon the concept of time itself" ... did that mean it literally controlled time? That it wasn't just his instincts going into overdrive or something like that?

He had felt the momentary slowdown when a blow approached. It was something familiar; the brain goes into overdrive when one is in danger. A usual concept, even before the system. An idea that he had apparently brought to an entirely new level.

Separated by the endless void, two gods both looked on at this, one chuckling and the other sighing, a smile still on his lips despite his despondent mood - the first cheering as the strings of fate got jumbled up once more, the second shaking his head as yet another complication appeared.