

Hunter 89

Chapter 89: Dark Attunement

Jake was two levels above the required one for choosing a new skill, but luckily, it didn't seem to have any adverse effect. He had feared that delaying it for too long would lead to complications, but then again, the restrictions about skills-gain in combat were system-imposed, so it would be kind of bullshit if it punished him.

Before checking the skills available, he quickly made a small prayer to finally get some kind of area of effect skill. If he could shoot exploding arrows or maybe emit poisonous mist or something like the Den Mother, he could have easily dominated the Controller and the army of rats.

If he couldn't get that, he could maybe settle for another time-manipulating legendary skill. That wouldn't be too much to ask, right?

Ambitious Hunter class skills available

Opening his system menu, he began going through the skills where five new entries had appeared, aka the maximum.

The first skill he started with was weirdly enough both exciting and boring at the same time

[Dark Bolt (Common)] – The starting point for many aspiring dark casters. Allows the hunter to summon bolts of dark mana to defeat your foes. Those hit suffer a penalty to perception and suffer damage over time as the dark mana ravages their very being. Adds a minor bonus to the effect of intelligence when using Dark Bolt.

Reading the skill, he found it interesting he even had it. It seemed like a caster spell and not a hunter one at all. But then again, he had learned how to condense bolts of dark mana and could do so without a skill, so maybe the system was just offering up a skill to do the same.

If it became an official skill, he could likely use it without any long wind-up. It would also undoubtedly be stronger, if not just for the effectiveness bonus from his intelligence the skill provided.

That was the exciting part, with the massive drawback of the skill itself being how little it appealed to him. Jake was an archer, a hunter, above anything else. He wasn't going to start becoming a mage any time soon. If it was a skill that complimented his hunter skills like Shadow Vault, he could roll - or vault - with it, but this skill was clearly aiming towards an entirely different path than his own.

In other words, he would prefer to choose some other random skill he had unlocked prior. While throwing magic around seemed like a fun thing to do, it wasn't really him. Maybe in the future, he would pick up some more mage-like skills.

Moving on, he read the next skill.

[Tendrils of Darkness (Uncommon)] – Of all the senses, perhaps the one of touch is the most universal. Summon invisible tendrils of darkness that allows you to feel the area around you. The Tendrils are weak to energy attacks, but their ethereal nature makes them immune to physical ones. Range of the tendrils scale with perception. Adds a small bonus to the effect of intelligence and perception when using Tendrils of Darkness.

This one was very similar to the Dark Bolt one. It was just a skill apparently mimicking what he had already done, albeit likely in a far more efficient and effective way. This was likely a skill stemming from his exploration method of placing strings everywhere.

But to Jake, this skill made even less sense than the Dark Bolt. The only reason he had used it was due to the unique circumstances he had found himself in.

He could easily see it being useful for someone without his Sphere of Perception. If one spreads the tendrils out around oneself, it would be tough for anyone to sneak up on you. Of course, his sphere already had that part covered, and quite honestly, he believed his sphere was leagues ahead. Yet the skill was different enough that he doubted it would be a repeat of Moment of the Primal Hunter.

It also kind of carried the same caster-like sentiments of the Dark Bolt, though a bit less. While it did hold some uses for him, he believed that he could teach himself to do those things without a skill. With that in mind, he moved on to the next option.

[Distracting Shot (Uncommon)] – Every arrow is not necessarily meant to strike your foes, but simply to create an opportunity to do so. Shoot an arrow copying your mana signature and aura, distracting those of lower intelligence or those unaware of your current position. Adds a small bonus to the effect of agility and perception when using Distracting Shot.

This skill was at least quite a bit different - nothing about dark mana with this one. Jake didn't know if this was related to him distracting rats earlier in the dungeon, though. Back then, he had just shot some burning arrows after all. And while it had worked out rather well then... the skill didn't really excite him.

It was just dull. If Jake wanted to distract something, he could do it by just firing a regular arrow, and if the enemy were smart enough to know that was a diversion, it would likely not fall for this skill either.

Heck, it directly said that it only worked on stupid things. Sure, it was way better than a burning arrow, and while it likely could be useful, but it didn't really mesh with Jake's current style of combat. He could incorporate it, but it didn't really appeal to him.

So with that in mind, he continued down the list of skills.

[Descending Dark Fang (Rare)] – A fang coated in dark mana descending like the clamping mouth of a snake. Do a downward strike with a melee weapon, significantly increasing penetrative power and damage inflicted. Dark mana makes the wound harder to heal and drains energy until dispelled. Damage improved further if the weapon is benefitting from Twin Fang Style. Adds a small bonus to the effect of agility, strength, and intelligence when using Descending Dark Fang.

The first rare skill finally appeared. It was pretty clear from the name and description that this skill was an upgraded version of the Descending Fang skill he had skipped when he reached level 50. Interestingly enough, he could also still pick the normal Descending Fang along with this one.

Jake had wanted a good melee skill for quite a while. He had to admit that the Descending Fang skill had appealed to him quite a lot, and this upgraded skill even more so. All the benefits added by dark mana appeared to synergize well with the damage over time effects from his poisons and the venom from Venomfang too.

Increasing penetrative power would also make it easier to apply his affliction to ones with strong resilience. If he had met someone or something with a skill like Scales of the Malefic Viper, he would have difficulty dealing proper damage without using Infused Powershot.

Overall the skill seemed like a great addition to his arsenal, finally giving him an excellent melee combat option. He was already pretty competent in that department due to the massive benefits from his bloodline. His high stats were also helping quite a lot.

The fact that his Venomfang, the most potent weapon he had by far, benefitted from the skill even more due to being made of bone only made it all the better. Besides, using Descending Dark FANG with VenomFANG just seemed fitting.

Unless the last skill was a significant surprise, he had pretty much decided on this one already as he checked the final skill... which was a surprise.

[Dark Attunement (Unique)] – You have shown yourself to have exceptional dark-affinity, allowing you to create and manipulate dark mana more easily. Permanently transform a part of your mana-pool to Dark Mana, empowering and reducing the cost of all dark-affinity skills. This mana innately limits the perception of those affected and consumes other types of mana-affinities. Also allows the user to absorb mana of the dark-affinity more easily. Beware that while Attunement opens many paths, just as many are severed.

Jake had to read the skill over a couple of times. In fact, he wasn't sure that calling it a skill was correct. It was something far more than that. It was to choose a path - a decision that would matter far more than anything outside of class or profession selections.

It didn't take a genius to figure out that turning his mana into that of the dark affinity would have lasting consequences as well as perks. He would become a hunter using dark magic. A powerful path for sure, he surmised.

But... he didn't like it. It didn't feel right. He wasn't even sure if it would work properly with all of his skills. Or would it just upgrade things like his Infused Powershot? Would Touch of the Malefic Viper work the same as before?

Perhaps it would immediately make him more powerful, but he feared the sense of permanence in the skill. The commitment to a path, one he could likely never reverse, and even if he could, it would come at a high cost.

The fantasy did have great appeal to a more juvenile part of him- the thought of being a hunter hidden in the dark, killing all before they even knew of his presence. It was a great fantasy, but fantasy is all it would ever be.

This didn't mean he would cut himself off from the use of dark mana. The skill had confirmed that he held a great affinity for it, which had a lot of value in itself.

So, in the end, he skipped it. Perhaps he would embrace an affinity at another time, but for now, he wanted to keep his paths open and his future an open book. Thus he picked the Descending Dark Fang skill.

Skill Gained: [Descending Dark Fang (Rare)]

He felt the influx of instinctive knowledge on how to use the skill as he continued his meditation. He hadn't gotten the area of effect skill he had hoped for, but instead a strong single-target one. On the other hand, the gains from just the skill choices' information carried a lot of value. Overall it had been a fruitful session of meditation and skill selection.

Jake continued his meditation for half an hour more or so before opening his eyes, drank a potion, and reentered meditation once more. As yet another hour passed, he awoke again, drank a potion, and meditated a bit more. Another hour passed as he drank another potion, but this time he didn't reenter meditation.

Getting up on his feet, he felt rather good. His health and stamina were still not full, but his mana pool had been topped up due to the high mana density environment coupled with his own affinity to said mana. He still had some questions about affinities, such as why the dark mana helped regenerate his regular affinity-less mana, but those were questions for another time.

Stretching a bit, he decided to move on further into the dungeon. He did so at a relatively relaxed pace as he took his time. He still needed time for the potion cooldowns and, in concert, his body to heal.

The exit to the reservoir was indeed the barrier the Controller had been standing in front of. After the Controller died, the barrier disappeared, opening the path forward. If he had to guess, then he would say the ratman was a mini-boss of sorts.

The Ratman Swarm Controller had been weak on his own, with his magic somewhat subpar and his physical strength only a tiny bit better. It was clear that the role of the Controller was to, well, control the rats.

Walking through the basin's exit, he found himself in yet another sewer tunnel, but at least this one was a bit more spacious than the others. Any change was a good change in this damn dungeon, according to Jake.

As he walked for a few minutes, he still hadn't encountered anything until something new appeared in his sphere. Contrary to what he had expected, it wasn't another rat or even anything living for that matter - instead, strings of mana extended from one end of the wall to the other.

Jake briefly felt like someone had stolen his shtick, but soon noticed that the strings served an entirely different purpose. The stones on the floor that were covered by a steady stream of water concealed long spear-shaped objects right below where the strings were.

It was a god damn trap. The first proper one Jake had encountered in a dungeon since maybe the Challenge Dungeon. And it was a quite vicious one at that. Those spears were clearly covered in a dense layer of dark mana, meaning getting skewered by them would do far more damage than just a flesh wound.

Quite extreme for what to many will be their first encounter with a trap, Jake thought to himself as he observed it in his sphere. As this was a tutorial, this would indeed likely be the first trap for many, and for most, that first encounter would be lethal.

Of course, Jake had also to consider that the dungeons were made for parties to enter together. If a dedicated healer stood behind with an armored warrior in front, he would have a good chance of surviving. But Jake, in his solitude, didn't even consider that. To him, these dungeons had been solo adventures, after all.

Jake didn't even take out his bow but instead condensed a bolt of dark mana in his hand and threw it into the strings. The moment it hit them, the entire floor exploded upwards in a cloud of smoke as the stones broke and the spears extended.

The power behind them was quite honestly insane. Even with Jake's high stats, he would have been skewered before even having time to react appropriately. While he didn't think it would kill him outright, he sure as hell didn't want to test it.

Jake waiting a few moments but noticed that the spears didn't reenter the ground as he had expected. Cautiously walking up to them, he noticed that the spears were made of a similar material to the staff he had taken from the ratman.

While he could get past the spears around the sides, he instead summoned his Alchemists Flame and got to work. He had time to spare while he regenerated, and while he didn't know what the weird ash he had gained from the staff could be used for, he didn't believe that one could have too many materials of uncommon-rarity.

The process was slow, but he managed to burn down all the spears in less than 15 minutes before continuing onwards. Collecting the ashes, he was starting to get a worthwhile pile in his storage.

Soon, he encountered a few more traps and a few hidden rats sitting and waiting to ambush him. Wow, this dungeon has it all, an encounter with traps AND rats, he scoffed internally.

All of it was passed relatively quickly as he killed the rats and ignored the traps.

Sadly he only encountered two more spear traps, meaning he didn't gain that much ash. The other traps were just other boring things like the walls smashing together, pitfalls, and even a trap that caused the floor to erupt into black flames.

As it was starting to get a bit too annoying, he finally saw the end of the tunnel, and if he was lucky, the end of the damn dungeon.