

Hunter 75

Chapter 75: Scales of the Malefic Viper

'DING!' Profession: [Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 50 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 48 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

Briefly basking in the ever-satisfying feeling of level-ups for a while, he decided to get into the meat of things without unnecessary delays.

Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper profession skills available

It had sure been a while since he last unlocked any skills for his profession. Which did make him a bit excited to see what would present itself.

Skimming the list, he noticed all the usual ones, but also quite a few new ones. Four, to be exact. The first of which was a quite interesting common-rarity skill.

[Spectral Hand (Common)] – Sometimes, all you need is an extra hand. Summon a hand of mana able to interact with and hold physical objects. The hand is weak and lacking in dexterity, making it unsuitable for strenuous activities. Adds a minor bonus to the effect of wisdom when using Spectral Hand.

While he couldn't be totally sure, he was ninety-nine percent sure he unlocked this one due to his practice with mana. He was already using his strings to add ingredients, effectively acting as hands, and Jake believed this was the system recognizing those efforts.

Not that he had any interest in picking it. He could already do what it did, albeit a lot worse. He was sure one of the other skills would prove far more valuable than a common-rarity third hand. Besides... he felt like he would eventually learn to conjure a hand of mana even without using a skill, but just through pure mana manipulation.

Moving on down the list, he got to the uncommon skills, of which only two new ones had appeared.

The first of which was a skill that he had seen mentioned in many of the alchemy books, so it wasn't exactly a surprise.

[Distill Powder (Uncommon)] - Poison can come in many forms and is far from limited to a liquid. Allows the Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper to distill a concocted poison, making a powder that holds similar effects. If the powder is burned, release the poisonous product into the air. The effect and nature of the poison are dependent on the poison distilled. Adds a small bonus to the effect of wisdom when using Distill Powder.

This one was a bit tempting, mainly due to giving him a far more solid area of effect attack. It would be a way to do continual damage to more enemies at once. If he had been able to release a cloud of poisonous gas into the dungeon, it would have, without a doubt, done untold damage.

On the other hand,... the thought of the skill just rubbed him the wrong way on so many levels. He had gotten over using poisons on beasts, but he feared what the road could lead to if he started using more and more extreme means. He was pretty sure chemical warfare was outlawed for a reason.

Yet, he couldn't deny how effective poison was. It would make him stronger if he could burn Necrotic Poison and just release a cloud of death upon others.

Skipping over the skill, for now, he moved on to the next one.

[Brew Flask (Uncommon)] – For when you need that little extra push to win the battle. Allows the Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper to craft flasks which provide temporary bonuses. The nature, magnitude, and duration of the flasks vary based on the material used. Adds a minor increase to the effectiveness of created flasks based on wisdom.

This skill was far more fitting for an alchemist- the kind that isn't a walking war crime.

He had already read many different kinds of creations an alchemist could make, and flasks were one of the most common products along with potions. Potions carried short, temporary effects, and most of them only lasted for a few seconds.

Flasks, on the other hand, could last hours or even days. They could give a vast array of bonuses, such as bonus health and mana, increased stats, or other buffs. It could be compared to equipping a new item for the duration of the flask.

The skill was extremely tempting, but it came with one issue: Time. Jake didn't have that long left in the tutorial, and he quite frankly didn't feel like he had time left over to get into crafting something entirely new that very likely had its own entire methodology behind it. He also doubted that his first creations would give any worthwhile effects compared to the effort required to craft them.

And even if they did, it wasn't even a sure thing that he would manage to craft one before the tutorial ended. Not even if he focused all his time on it. It would also get in the way of his quest to kill the King of the Forest. It was also assuming he already had the required ingredients or could find them.

He was far better at making poisons anyway. He was an Alchemist of the Malefic Viper and not an Alchemist of Tasty Flasks, after all. Besides, his profession and all his skill-set were just more suited for poisons.

It was still a skill he would pick up later if he ever got the chance. It had many pros, but the lack of time and immediate usefulness eliminated it for now. The final skill option only further cemented his decision.

[Scales of the Malefic Viper (Ancient)] – The Malefic Viper's scales are the first, and often the only required, line of defense. Allows the Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper to turn parts of his skin into scales, vastly increasing the effect of toughness and adding a certain damage threshold. All damage below the threshold is nullified. The scales are exceptionally resistant to magic, allowing the alchemist to handle toxic substances better. Passively provides 1 toughness per level in any profession related to the Malefic Viper. May you continue down your path, o chosen of the Malefic One.

Reading the description, he had to double-check it to make sure he hadn't read it wrong. Especially the rarity of the skill. Ancient. Discounting Shroud of the Primordial, this was the highest he had ever encountered.

Jake still wasn't sure about the different rarities, but he was pretty sure Ancient was above Epic, but below Divine. But by how much it was above or below those two, he didn't know.

The skill itself was more than he had hoped for from a defensive skill. He had hoped for something like a mana barrier, maybe even a parry or blocking move or something from his class, but this went way above his wildest wishes.

It even provided him more stats, another first from a skill. Well, permanent stats. His Big Game Hunter did give stats during actual combat with high-level enemies, but it was only temporary. This one, however, would be a permanent addition. Almost as if his profession now provided more per level.

Which made him think... does it work retroactively?

If it did, the skill would instantly provide him with 50 toughness. 55, in fact, if you counted his title giving an extra 10%. If the percentage bonus also worked, of course. It worked with stats gained from titles, so shouldn't it work with stats from skills?

Not that it ultimately mattered, as he would pick the skill anyway. He needed a defensive skill, and this one was just far too good ever to pass up.

Picking the skill, he instantly felt a warm flow go through his body - a quite intense warm flow.

***Gained Skill*:** [Scales of the Malefic Viper (Ancient)] – The Malefic Viper's scales are the first, and often the only required, line of defense. Allows the Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper to turn parts of his skin into scales, vastly increasing the effect of toughness and adding a certain damage threshold. All damage below the threshold is nullified. The scales are exceptionally resistant to magic, allowing the alchemist to handle toxic substances better. Passively provides 1 toughness per level in any profession related to the Malefic Viper. May you continue down your path, o chosen of the Malefic One.

The warm flow going through his body was more significant than any level-up he had experienced so far. His skin itched all over as it strengthened, and he had to hold himself back from scratching himself.

A few minutes later, the discomfort disappeared, and everything returned to normal. Well, a new normal. Checking his stats, Jake saw that it had grown by not just 50 points, but 55.

Without waiting, he lifted his arm and activated the skill. His skin's texture was instantly replaced with dark green scales that seemed to reflect the false sun above. They were nearly identical to the ones he had seen growing all over the Malefic Viper while in his humanoid form.

He tried poking them with his fingers and felt the tough surface. Weirdly enough, it didn't feel much different than when he touched his skin directly. It was an odd feeling, like if he just had a lot of calluses there or something.

Taking out his Venomfang, he tried cutting himself. The blade managed to cut through the scales quite easily, leaving a small wound on his arm. Maybe testing with his new rare dagger wasn't the best... but he did feel some resistance.

After he removed the dagger, he waited a bit to see if the scales would regenerate, which they, to his disappointment, didn't. Instead, they disappeared after only a few minutes, as his skin returned to... well, skin.

It hadn't consumed much mana, but then again, he hadn't transformed a huge area. Which, of course, led Jake to a realization. He finally had a skill that used mana that he could use actively in combat. Maybe his vast mana pool and high wisdom would prove more useful now.

He spent the next few minutes doing various tests until he decided to put his new skill to a real test. The description said it was strong against magic, and he happened to have an army of angry stags with light beams nearby.

Gathering all his alchemist equipment into his storage, he made his way further into the valley.

It didn't take him long to encounter a small group with 3 deer and a single stag. The deer were not that exciting, as they mainly engaged in melee and acted as guards for the stags.

Taking out his bow, he fired an Infused Powershot and instantly killed the first deer. The next two didn't even make it to him before they were riddled through with Splitting Arrow. And a bit of necrotic poison, for good measure.

The stag had tried to heal its companions in vain, but they died too fast for it to do anything. Instead, it turned its attention to Jake as it fired off a beam of light.

Jake happily received it as he raised his now scaled arms in front of his body. A bit of the beam went through and hit his chest, causing burns, but the part of it that hit his scales did absolutely nothing. It was as if the beam just disappeared whenever it encountered the scales, and Jake only felt a bit of warmth there.

He let the beast fire a few more beams at him as he blocked attack after attack. The stag was level 54, and yet it was utterly unable to cause him any real damage with the beams whenever they hit his scales.

Finally, after seven beams, the stag decided to mix things up as it started charging its beam. The stag would have no time to do this in normal conditions, but its enemy was just standing there and taking its blows, making it take the chance.

After a handful of seconds, the beam was released. The beam was far more intense than the others, and Jake panicked slightly when his sense of danger warned him. Instinctively he covered his entire upper body with scales as he was somewhat pushed backward.

As the beam dispersed, Jake was surprised. Surprised by how little it had done. He felt a bit hot and a tingling sensation, but otherwise, he was completely uninjured. He had only lost a few health points even after taking the attack.

By now, the stag was well and truly scared. The human had just taken everything it could muster and yet stood there completely fine. And to make it all worse, the man was now covered in scales.

The beast didn't release any more beams but instead made a final gambit as it charged towards him.

Jake happily met its charge as it took the opportunity to test his new scales' physical defense. With his entire upper body still covered, he decided just to let the beast hit him with all it had... which could have gone better.

The stag lowered its antlers, and with only a few meters between them, it suddenly sped up and took Jake by surprise as it hit him square in the chest.

The impact sent him backward like a rocket as he smashed into a tree. It may have seemed dramatic from an outside perspective, but the damage done wasn't that bad, his danger sense making him aware of that fact before he was even hit.

Getting up, Jake easily dodged the follow-up charge as the stag impaled the tree.

Not bothering to waste any more time, he took out his dagger and finished off the beast in only a few venom-doused strikes.

Looking himself over, he saw several scales on his chest with small indentures and cracks. Clearly, their ability to soak magical attacks was far above their physical resistance. Not to say that their physical defense was weak in any way.

One had to remember that Jake was currently going with the pants-only style, having a bare chest, meaning that the scales were the only obstruction between his bare skin and a row of pointy antlers.

He did still have his cloak too, but he was honestly getting tired of it being ripped and torn during every fight, ultimately just getting in the way. Clearly, the item was meant for lower-leveled individuals.

And on the point of equipment, he decided to keep going further into the valley. His bare chest, common-rarity starter bow, and shitty cloak meant that he had plenty of upgrades still to find. Even his bracers were getting quite old, providing far fewer stats than his newer loot with their measly 5 agility and 3 strength.

The hours went by as he did several more tests for his new scales. In conclusion, they were brilliant - pretty much an overpowered defense against magic, and decent physical resistance.

On the con list, was without a doubt, the mana consumption. To cover his entire upper body had drained more than a thousand mana, and when the scales got damaged, he had to pour in even more mana. Less than to summon new ones, but it was still costly.

When the scales were summoned, he could maintain them relatively cheaply, but they still drained far too much to have them up for long periods. He doubted he could keep the scales active for more than a few hours on his entire body, even with his full mana pool.

Without mana to keep them up, the scales would last for around three minutes. After that, they would disappear as if having never been there. Jake did find that his skin was still pristine beneath, even if the scales had been damaged, which was nice.

His final test had been with poison, but he discovered that he didn't have anything potent enough to do a proper test. Perhaps the gland from the Den Mother would be good enough, but he felt like it was a waste of an excellent future ingredient.

Half a day later, he was finally done scouring the valley as he looked disappointed at his bounty - two more common-rarity tokens, as well as another pair of stupid uncommon steel boots that provided strength and toughness. They were worse than his current boots in every way.

Besides, they looked uncomfortable as hell.

He had gotten a level, though, reaching 47 in his Ambitious Hunter class, so the time wasn't wasted entirely, but it was far less efficient than the dungeon. He had briefly considered grinding to level 50 in

his class before entering the next dungeon but decided against it. It would take far too long, and besides, he felt like he could handle the next dungeon.

Feeling ready, he looked up towards the second smallest volcano-like mountain. The location of the second dungeon and Beast Lord if his assumptions were correct. And, hopefully, also the location of a damn shirt.