

## Hunter 132

### Chapter 132: Big Blue Mushroom

Truly disappointing, Jake thought as he looked at the now-dead Alpha Mantis Scyther. A level 89 beast that was the lord of this biodome reduced to a headless corpse in what couldn't even be called a real fight.

If he had to compare it to something, it would be the Den Mother. And not in a favorable way for the mantis. Despite it being seven levels higher, the Den Mother had been stronger. More importantly, it had a much higher level of intelligence and many more skills in its toolbox.

Focusing on physical stats, the mantis likely had the Den Mother beaten. Without a doubt, himself too. It was also surprising that there even was such a high-level creature down in these caverns. This biodome in itself was a pleasant surprise.

With their leader dead, the mantises were no longer a threat either. Not that they ever had been. Jake made his way towards the center of this biodome. His Sense of the Malefic Viper telling him that something containing a lot of mana was there.

Little was in his way as he ran there, encountering only a few mantises that he quickly cut apart. Soon he found himself before the source of it all - a glowing blue crystal embedded in the ground, surrounded by wild plant life.

Using Identify on it, he got... nothing. No response at all. A phenomenon he had run into many times before. If he wanted to identify a piece of metal, wood, or crystal, it usually didn't work. He didn't have the required skill to do so from what he gathered.

Like how others couldn't use Identify on plants and toxic things. It was why Jake had the skills Herbology and Toxicology from his profession that allowed him such knowledge; the only outliers he had encountered so far were things in dungeons and special items during the tutorial. Those he had been able to identify without a problem.

Now the question was... should, and could, he take the big shiny crystal with him? He could clearly feel it pumping out vast amounts of pure mana to the surrounding area, and it was likely the source of life in this entire biodome. Taking it would possibly result in the whole cavern no longer being the sprawling place of life it was now.

Of course, all of this was dependent on his ability to even move the crystal, to begin with. It was rather large, sticking out of the ground around three meters up, with another three meters under the ground. It reminded him a bit of the Pylon at first, but there were also clear differences.

The Pylon was clearly a creation of the system, while this in front of him was just a somewhat standard giant mana crystal. Also... he was pretty damn sure he had run into this kind of crystal before. He just couldn't quite remember where.

Raising his hand, he lay it upon the crystal and felt that it felt just like a big piece of glass. Or a regular crystal. There was nothing incredible about it except for the mana it so clearly emanated into the biodome.

Activating his necklace, he tried to store the crystal, but he felt like there was some kind of resistance. He kept trying for a while but ended up admitting to himself that moving it wasn't possible. At least not in his storage. His sphere of perception revealing the reason.

Beneath the ground, hundreds of small vines and roots extended into the crystal. Following them, he could see that they belonged to all the plants around him. Most surprising, however, was the fungi. Or perhaps fungus would be more accurate.

Every single one of the giant blue mushrooms was a part of this one plant - all just one entity that spread beneath the ground. From a mycology standpoint, this was very interesting; sadly, Jake didn't care that much for mushrooms to begin with. In fact, he had quite the distaste for the damn things.

And for these to even dare to be blue... it was an offense he couldn't let slide lightly. And he really wanted to bring the big shining mana crystal with him. If not, just to figure out exactly what it was and test things with it.

So he took out his Omnitool and once more turned it into a shovel. Plunging it into the ground, he hit the roots of the mushrooms, and-

OoOOoOOOOooO

A loud booming sound was heard throughout the entire biodome. The ground shook, and Jake was momentarily dumbstruck by what the hell was happening. All he had done was to sever a few roots of the damn fungus.

It had awakened something. An aura spread throughout the entire biodome, suppressing every living mantis still scouring about, making them freeze up in fear. It was the type of aura Jake had only felt once before - the one that came from the suppression of a higher grade.

The ground in front of him exploded as he was pushed away from the crystal, stabilizing himself quickly. The crystal itself rose into the air as countless vines spun around it, shielding it from sight. But it was not only the mushrooms acting up. Everything was. Now every single living plant in the entire dome was giving off the exact same aura.

He felt his skill Big Game Hunter hum to life, his strength and agility both being empowered. Meaning whatever he now faced was a higher level than him, and not to a negligible degree.

Eyes wide open, he used Identify on a random tree-like plant and got a result.

[Indigo Fungus Mycorrhiza – lvl ???]

He had made quite an error. The mantis had never been the lord of this area; the true ruler had been the area itself. And now, finally, he saw it.

The mushrooms had invaded every single plant here. Made them a part of it. It was all one giant living creature, connected through a network of fungi.

Now, with it awake, it jumped into action. Hundreds of tendrils flew out of the ground, and the plants moved in concert. But not towards Jake only. He saw the metal-like tubes he had found interesting earlier penetrate the corpse of a dead mantis he had left nearby. Like a needle, it pierced into it, and in mere moments the corpse turned into an empty husk. Drained of all nutrients.

For a brief moment on his way here, he did wonder why he saw no corpses. Now he understood.

Tendrils flew towards him as the entire area shook. The ground right beneath him exploded once more, but he had seen it coming in his sphere long ago. He considered his options as he jumped away from the four spike-like roots that exploded from where he stood only moments ago.

What he stood before was an actual D-grade being. Above level 100, with unknown abilities. It wasn't like the mantis before. Logically the best plan would be to retreat, as he doubted the entire monstrosity could actually follow him. But...

He couldn't stop smiling. Finally. He had found something worth fighting.

This creature was very different from the King of the Forest. The King had been absolutely dominating at every step. The King possessed intelligence rivaling that of a human. Stats far above one. His only weakness was the tools given by the tutorial and his own arrogance.

The Indigo Fungus, however... he just didn't feel the same pressure. He had gotten stronger, and this... thing, was weaker than the King. But at the same time... he couldn't underestimate it and end up being fucked like he was against the King.

Jake kept dodging as the vines came for him from all sides. Often, he was forced to avoid being enclosed by vines with Shadow Vault or One Step Mile. His Sense of the Malefic Viper also yelled at him at the back of his head.

Of course, he thought, as he felt the poison seep into his body. Many of the mushrooms and other plants were poisonous and now released all their fumes into the air. He heard the shrieks of all the still-living mantises from all around the biodome. Dying slowly.

To Jake, on the other hand, it was almost pleasant. And it did give him an idea.

When fighting a creature roughly the size of ten football fields, the first problem: where the hell do you begin your attack? What to even attack?

The second problem: how to get to whatever weak point it may have?

The third problem: how to outlast such a creature, with its likely absolutely enormous resources?

All of these questions had a single answer. Poison. Because the fungus had one fatal flaw. It was all connected.

His grin only growing, he cleaved through a few vines with his sword and dagger. The attacks were endless. A spear-like root was attacking him to try and pierce him, but this one he didn't dodge. Instead, he caught it beneath his arm, holding it in a good old nelson.

At the same time, he knelt to avoid a blow as he began channeling Touch of the Malefic Viper. He saw his hands radiate a dark green color as dark-green veins began spreading down the root and into the ground.

For the first time, he got a real reaction.

OoOOoOOOOooOoOOOooOO!

He smiled to himself at first, but soon it turned to a frown. He felt his poison quickly being purified by the overwhelming vitality of the fungus. Another sharp tendril also emerged and cut off the root he was currently grasping, effectively ending his attack.

In the end, his attack had done little more than anger the fungus. Anger which materialized in the shape of more than a hundred roots shooting out of the ground all around him.

Before, it clearly hadn't focused on him at all, its attention split between himself and all the other living creatures still roaming about the biodome. Now, however, he had its sole undivided attention.

He was forced to activate Limit Break straight up to 20% right away. The attacks were both stronger and more numerous than before. Even while boosted, he failed to dodge all the attacks as several cuts began emerging on his arms and legs.

Finding time to counterattack was impossible, and he was forced to admit that he had been too arrogant in his approach. While his analysis of the monster's weakness was entirely accurate, he had forgotten one of the most important things... his own relative strength.

Yet, for the next few minutes, he kept trying. And while he did clearly cause some damage here and there, the only thing he achieved was to make the fungus more determined in killing the beast that had invaded it. He chucked poison bottles out and hit several mushrooms or plants, them withering fast as a result. But it was only a drop in the bucket.

Finally, it had enough. Jake felt a massive amount of mana in the air as it used a skill. He saw hundreds of giant mushrooms wither as light exited them only to gather midair floating above the biodome like a new sun.

Before he could grasp its intention, he felt his danger sense explode. His near-precognizant senses activated as he quickly covered his entire body in scales. And just in time as a blue beam hit him right in his midsection.

The entire ball of mana had been transformed into a special attack that blew him back hundreds of meters. The beam seared into his body as his armor was quickly burned through, leaving only his scales to take the brunt of the attack.

Luckily for him, the scales specialized in defending against magical attacks. But that did not mean it could in any way negate it. The scales all chipped and cracked on his chest, while the ones on his back practically shattered the moment he smashed into the cave wall.

Coughing up blood, he tried but failed to dislodge himself from the wall before the follow-up attack arrived. Nine needle-like thorns pierced into his stomach and chest and began sucking.

Fuck, he thought, enraged as he activated Blood of the Malefic Viper. If you want my blood, you better enjoy it.

Something the fungus clearly did not.



The thorns began withering right away as the toxic blood entered them. With a swipe of his arm, Jake broke them all off like rotten wood. Free at last, he dislodged himself from the wall and charged towards where he had entered the biodome from.

His health and stamina were both draining fast as he didn't hold back on using Shadow Vault and One Step Mile. At this point, he had truly realized that this wasn't a fight he could win, but it was one he could survive.

Running, he soon spotted the exit. Only to see roots emerge and cut it off. Simultaneously, a figure rose from the earth just in front of thorns' newly erected wall. A giant creature, made up of roots and mushrooms, clearly strung together from tens or perhaps hundreds of different plants.

It didn't look remotely humanoid, as the only feature that did so was its two arms. It didn't have a head, and it was like only the construct's upper body emerged. Yet it towered over ten meters into the air as he formed yet another barrier between him and his escape.

Jake didn't hesitate as he took out his bow and an arrow. For the first time since returning to Earth, he had to use his signature skill on full power - the one that had carried him through the tutorial time and time again.

Nocking the arrow, he felt the mana and stamina built up as he pulled back the string. The air hummed, and the earth cracked in his wake from the pent-up mana. After only a few seconds, he let it go, yet it was the strongest arrow he had ever released.

Infused Powershot

The arrow flew out at supersonic speed and pierced straight through the giant construct. But it didn't stop there as it went straight through into the wall of thorns, blasting a hole more than large enough for a human to get through.

Before the fungus had a chance to close the hole, he stared down the construct with Gaze of the Primal Hunter, freezing it in place for only a moment. He felt a slight headache from doing so, but it was enough. As the construct was a part of the larger monster, it froze the entire biodome. Just long enough for him to take a step forward.

A step that took him through the hole and out of the biodome, and he didn't stop there as he began sprinting further away from the cursed place. Roots were extending through the tunnel, trying to chase him down behind him.

Luckily the fungus didn't have any intention, or perhaps ability, to follow him for long. After not even a hundred meters, the roots stopped and retracted back to the biodome once more. Jake let himself fall back to the ground as he breathed out in relief.

"Well, that went well," he joked to himself as he took out a health potion to chug down. At the same time, he deactivated Limit Break and felt a sense of weakness wash over him.

Once more, he had been shown that D-grades most certainly weren't to be underestimated. But despite losing, he wasn't discouraged at all. Instead, he felt a sense of relief. He had feared that powerful enemies would only be found in the different Danger Zones. That he wouldn't be able to encounter any real challenges.

Yet, in only a few hours, he had encountered two enemies above his level, one of them even D-grade. It gave him a target to instantly begin working towards, as different plans and hypotheses to take down the giant fungus already began forming in his mind.

For now, however, he would have to recuperate. Recuperate and return to his little camp to continue his practice in alchemy. And this time, he had something to work directly towards.

If fighting the fungus with his current means wasn't enough... if his current poisons weren't toxic enough... he would just have to make something better. A special cocktail for the dear fungus, if you will.

He was already smiling to himself as he envisioned his next encounter with the thing as he entered meditation.