

Hunter 159

Chapter 159: Under Pressure

Jake stood on top of the massive corpse of the Thunder Roc. He felt the gazes of hundreds of beasts upon him. They had all observed the battle before and looked at the human with a mix of confusion and fear.

The innate suppression of rank was something they all knew. Of course, the power difference was genuine, but the deterrence was as much instinctual as it was based on pure power disparity. So to see an E-grade like them slay a D-grade juggernaut seemed impossible. Even more unbelievable was how quickly and easily the human had done so.

All of their fear was transferred to the man who just stood there.

Jake sighed as he dropped his Limit Break from 20% and let the weakness overtake him. He had learned long ago that while the weakness sucked, he could circumvent it by reactivating Limit Break at 20% again. It would make the next period more severe, but it was a way to avoid getting ganged up on when he dropped it.

But he had a strong feeling none of the beasts would dare approach him even in his weakened state - all except one that came, albeit still far more cautiously than before.

Hawkie flew over and flew around the corpse for a bit. Jake threw it a glance, indicating for it just to land on the corpse already. It seemed hesitant to do so, even with the beast dead.

Jake just sighed and instead just looked at his notification.

You have slain [Thunder Roc – lvl 102] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

'DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 92 - Stat points allocated, +4 free points

'DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 93 - Stat points allocated, +4 free points

'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 82 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

Two levels for that? he asked himself internally. It felt unearned as he rolled his shoulders a bit, feeling the stiffness that remained from the electricity.

He had lost more than a third of his health pool just from the constant bombardment of thunder that occasionally hit. The entire fight could have turned on a dime if he made the slightest mistake... but Jake didn't make any mistakes. He tended not to make significant mistakes in combat, as if he did, he would have died a long time ago.

Hawkie had at this point stopped just floating above and had built up the courage to land on the giant Roc.

Jake just looked at it and smiled, but that smile quickly turned to a frown when he saw what it did next. It gave him a quick look before it began channeling wind around its beak. It formed a drill of sorts as it began digging into the giant Roc's body, much to the surprise of Jake.

He had never liked to desecrate the bodies of those he killed if he didn't have a reason to. The Den Mother he had done so with because he felt the poison gland within, but others he had just left be. He didn't know how to properly handle the ingredients left behind anyway.

Hawkie kept digging as the blood and guts flew up from the hole it made. The body had significantly weakened after its death; if not, Hawkie wouldn't be able to drill into it as it did now. It took the bird a few minutes before it came out of the bloody hole with a weird stone in its mouth.

Jake looked at it as he saw Hawkie place it in front of him.

[Thunder Roc Beastcore (D-grade)] – A Beastcore left behind by a D-grade Thunder Roc, containing remnants of its Records within. Can be used as an alchemical ingredient for many types of creations but is most often found in Elixirs.

“Well, what's this?” he asked both himself and Hawkie. The bird looked at him like he was an idiot for not already knowing, while Jake closed his eyes for a moment, looking inwards.

Knowledge appeared in his mind as he dove into what was provided by Sagacity of the Malefic Viper. A flood of information came forth as he opened his eyes once more.

“Neat.”

He put the core in his spatial storage as he considered what to do with it.

Beastcores were an item that any beast at D-grade or above had a chance to generate upon death. When beasts, or any creature for that matter, died, a part of their Records would often remain in the body.

If Jake, for example, died, his eyes would be infused with the Records of Gaze of the Apex Hunter, turning them into high-rarity items. Maybe even Ancient or Legendary-rarity ones. This didn't mean he could pluck out his eyes now and be left with valuable items.

He would have to die for his Records to transfer. The same was true for the Thunder Roc. Instead of entering a specific part of its body, its Records condensed into a Beastcore for Jake to use. Thinking back, this Records transfer was likely where most, if not all, drops from creatures he killed came from.

Records from the creature condensed an item – his Mask of the Fallen King being a prime example. Instead of the King forming a 'core' upon death, it instead created the mask from the Records. The fact that it made a legendary item upon death was proof of how strong the King had been.

Did I fuck up by not just taking all the corpses?

Jake wondered, but on second thought, he likely hadn't. Cloud Elementals turned into those small bead things that Hawkie collected, the dungeon bosses had all turned into or created items he used to kill the King or other dungeon bosses, and none of the other things he killed were worth looting.

With Hawkie in tow, Jake flew up and returned to their usual cloud island. Not a single beast in their surroundings dared to get in their way.

BANG

The bullet flew through the air before hitting the spider-like beast. One of its legs got hit, making it stumble slightly, but it was far from enough to make the D-grade beast fall.

It fired out a web from its backside that fell like a blanket over the entire area the bullet had come from. Upon making contact with the concrete building, it began being devoured by the acidic web.

Sadly for the spider, the sniper was long gone, as another stream of bullets hit it. It stumbled once more, and before it could get up, a figure emerged from one of the shadows nearby, zoomed past him, and cut its side with a sharp dagger.

It hissed in pain as the wound began burning with the power of a strong curse, the same proving true for the bullet in its leg. The fight had been going on for the better part of three hours, and the beast was getting tired.

It was only about the size of a car, but it was an unusually fast and powerful beast. Yet it had been whittled down by bullets and sneak attacks over the last few days, making it never able to rest and fully recover. All of the attacks that managed to pierce its natural defense were imbued with curses.

The shadows it had called its home was now a danger it wanted to avoid. And the worst of its attackers appeared to its beady eyes once more.

A human wearing a robe, black streams of lightning crackling all around him – a metal staff in his hand that already had an attack charged up in the orbs floating around him. It hissed again and charged the accursed human, but after only taking a few steps, the ground below it erupted into a dark explosion.

Blinded, it failed to avoid the lightning strike, sending it tumbling back nearly a hundred meters, impacting a wall. The attack itself had done little damage, but it was the sheer quantity of it all. It couldn't even get up before another sniper-shot hit it.

This torture continued for another two hours before finally, with a flash of thunder from the sky, the beast fell dead to the ground.

Dozens of figures emerged from the surrounding buildings' shadows and gathered around the corpse - the cloaked man with the metal staff the first to arrive.

"Good job, everyone, it was a tough cookie, but we made it," Caleb Thayne said as the other figures nodded.

"117, seems like we found a mid-tier Pylon defender. It would have been easier if we got one of the low-tier ones to beat," Matteo said, looking annoyed at the corpse.

"Well, at least it wasn't a high or peak-tier challenge, or it would have taken way longer. If we could even do it. Good thing it couldn't heal," Nadia said, as she wiped her rifle with a cloth as if it was her child.

"Either way, time to claim the Pylon," Caleb said with a light smile as he went over to the Pylon that had spawned only a few meters from the corpse of the spider. "Go get the others while I figure this thing out."

A few of the cloaked figures nodded as they left to find the rest of their group. Only the elite had participated in this battle, yet they still lost tens of people to the spider. It was lucky that it was out of mana and could only shoot its web towards the end. Its magic had taken far too many lives.

Caleb could drain its mana with his dark lightning, so once it was empty, he could keep it empty. As long as they never allowed it to rest, they could eventually whittle it down. Which they had. They had prepared the arena and kited it around into mines, ambushes, pitfalls, and so on.

In the beginning, it had quite a few other spiders with it, but over the last week, they had hunted them down one by one.

Caleb pressed his hand on the Pylon. "6th, huh. Still in the top 10, so not that bad."

He smiled a bit to himself as he claimed it and changed his profession. The new one gave 16 free points per level, still a rare variant of City Lord for being one of the first 10 to claim one. Umbra should be OK with this.

As the de-facto leader of the Court of Shadows on Earth, Caleb felt quite a lot of pressure on him. They were already closing in on six digits in their entire group, so it was high time that they claimed a Pylon and began establishing themselves.

Once the first 100 Pylons were claimed, things would start for real. Caleb had claimed the 6th one, meaning quite a few more needed to be claimed for the next stage to begin. But from now, it would likely get faster as humanity grew in power. And we'll be ready.

As he was getting accustomed to his new profession, he was brought back to reality by the rest of the people coming. A massive wave of individuals all marched towards the broken-down city on the horizon. All of them had retreated to a safe distance while the Blades of the Court fought the D-grade.

In front of the group were four people he recognized as he smiled- a woman holding a newborn baby and a middle-aged couple that looked younger than they had before the tutorial. Everyone gave way for them, showing respect to the family of the Judge.

Within the Court of Shadows, Judge was a role most often only held by S-grades, and they were the leaders of their Court. But Earth didn't have any S-grades, so Caleb would have to make do. Yet even if he had been named Judge, or more accurately Judge-elect in another multiverse, it would not be contested.

Blessed by Umbra, Holder of the Legacy of Tenculis and a supremely talented caster. All of that, completely ignoring his relations to another notorious figure of the 93rd Universe.

Caleb and his wife, Maja, were both perfectly aware of Jake. Caleb was told by Umbra, and he had told his wife, but for now, all they had told his parents was that Jake lived and was doing well. The implications of what Jake had done were just too complicated to properly communicate.

When Caleb learned of Jake... that he was a Progenitor that had usurped fate, slain a powerful D-grade, and was likely the strongest human on Earth, his reaction had been... a shrug.

It was a bit weird to say, but Caleb wasn't surprised. His brother had always been strange but also competent. Yet even more so than that. If Caleb were asked who he knew would do best in surviving in the post-apocalypse, it would be Jake. A desolate island in the middle of the ocean? Jake. A pit of monsters? Jake.

He remembered once when he was a child; his family had gone to the zoo. Jake was only seven back then, and Caleb had been five. It was the first time going for both of them as there wasn't a zoo close to their town, and they had always been more fond of things like amusement parks.

It had been a nice trip, but Caleb remembered one part of that day far more distinctly than anything else. They had gone to see the wolves for feeding time, an event the two boys had been looking forward to a lot.

Jake and he had stood at the small barrier, looking down at the pack of wolves that were awaiting their daily feeding. Yet when Jake appeared, they all turned towards him. All just... looking at him. Jake just stared back, a young, excited child.

The speaker came out and talked about the wolves, but the animals just kept staring up at Jake. Jake, at this point, had noticed them as he just stared back with puzzlement. The speaker finished up her small info dump on wolves, and with a device, the meat was deposited into the enclosure.

The wolves noted the food but didn't stop looking at Jake. One of them turned a bit to sniff it before it looked back up at Jake, almost expectantly.

Caleb clearly remembered Jake, almost as if on instinct, nodded to the wolves. With approval, they dove into their meal, the poor speaker finally talking again after the wolves stopped acting weird.

He doubted Jake even remembered it, but Caleb had never forgotten. Because that was the day, he finally understood a feeling he had experienced growing up himself. A weird feeling had always been at the back of his mind, his instincts whispering to him that he was in the presence of something... dangerous. His parents had never noticed, but Caleb couldn't help it. Through the years, Jake became more... muted, and his presence became far more controlled.

Not that Caleb in any way blamed or ever even feared Jake. He knew it had helped shape him always to be baptized by that feeling. When he felt the pressure from accepting the Legacy of Tenlucis, he had barely registered it.

The reason why the Legacy of Tenlucis was so dangerous was because of the concept it relied on. Tenlucis had been a god of darkness and lightning, living with the belief that the power of the dark heaven was above all, even himself. Through his own delusions, he had managed to create a path where he always moved under the pressure of the heavens, continually being mentally strained but also forcing him forward.

It had pushed him to the top, but it had also made him... unstable. Which was why he entered one of the places in the Multiverse that even Primordials avoided. And there, he had died. But at least he had the decency to leave a few legacies behind.

Caleb had now accepted that Legacy after Umbra directed him towards it when he got his profession upgrade. The reason was simple... because Caleb had stood tall before her. Before the overwhelming aura of a god standing at the pinnacle of power, he hadn't felt even the slightest bit fearful or intimidated.

Because he had grown up in the presence of a far more dangerous monster.