

Hunter 233

Chapter 233: Evil Incarnate

You have entered the dungeon: Undergrowth of the Deepdwellers

Objective: Lay your hand upon the Heart of the Undergrowth

Jake came to and opened his eyes just as the message appeared. He quickly skimmed it and frowned. This was the first time he entered a non-challenge dungeon and it didn't tell him just to go kill a big boss. Instead, he had to touch some Heart? He assumed it was a figurative thing, but with magic, he could totally see some massive beating mushroom or plant heart being a thing.

He found himself within a small damp cave, and outside he could see a vast underground cavern sprawl out before him. Walking out of the small cave, he finally saw the landscape – because it was truly a landscape.

The entire cavern looked to have a width of at least ten kilometers and a length that spanned longer than he could even see. A constant damp mist hung everywhere, making even his insane level of perception unable to see all the way to the other end.

Jake found the biome quite interesting. There were many different kinds of mushrooms and fungi and many other types of plants, including some full-on trees that looked like pine trees. It was very densely grown and reminded Jake a bit about the biodome the Indigo Fungus had created, albeit with far more growth.

Sense of the Malefic Viper helped him feel the many different affinities permeating the atmospheric mana, and he found the life-affinity to be by far the most overpowering. Next up was the water-affinity as the humidity of the entire cavern was at a level where he feared mold growing on his cloak. Besides that, there was plenty of dark-affinity as the cavern didn't have any proper lighting at all.

Besides a few glowing mushrooms or the occasional shifting light in the distance, there was nothing else. Luckily for Jake, he didn't really need natural light to see anymore, and the darkness caused by the dark-affinity wasn't an issue either.

So far, he hadn't seen any living things, and his sphere hadn't picked up any movement, even more than 300 meters in front of him. At least he didn't right away... but soon he saw movement. It was only when he exited the cavern where the door to exit the dungeon still stood that these creatures seemed to be aware he was there.

Yes, there was a door to exit for some reason, even if he had entered through a big metal disc. The system seemed to have taken a liking to old wooden doors, and Jake wasn't going to waste energy trying to find out why.

Focusing on his sphere, he zoned in on the movement and saw what it was. It looked like a crunched-over humanoid figure with long bat-like ears and a mouth full of sharp teeth. It didn't have any eyes but instead had what looked like two oversized nostril holes. It looked pretty bizarre, to be sure.

The entire creature was incredibly skinny and wore a loincloth, and carried a wooden spear. Its movements were fast, and Jake saw the nostrils move as he became certain it knew he was there. Finally, he used Identify on it.

The Deepdweller, as it was called – the dungeon’s name now suddenly making a lot more sense – made a weird movement as it raised its head and opened its mouth.

Jake heard an almost inaudible sound that seemed to spread far and wide from the Deepdweller. He felt the mana spread through the air along with the sound, and it didn’t take a genius to put together what it had done – it was a call for assistance or perhaps a warning call. In either case, it led to even more movement in the distance.

He cracked his neck from side to side as he prepared. His foes did look partly humanoid, but he didn’t feel a very high level of intellect from them. Sure, they could use tools in a very basic way, but so could pre-system chimpanzees when taught. No, more than anything else, he trusted his own intuition – these Deepdwellers were monsters, through and through.

His assessment only proved more true as more began pouring out. Some of them didn’t even wear any clothes at all but were entirely naked. This variant was far bulkier and looked a lot stronger. Instead of the rather human-like hands that the first Deepdweller had, this one had four long sharp claws instead of four fingers. As for its level, it was actually lower than the first one.

[Deepdweller – lvl 104]

Not that it mattered as they were all so damn low level, in Jake’s opinion. So low he wouldn’t even gain any experience by killing them. So he wouldn’t unless he felt he needed to.

Jake walked forwards as he let his aura rip. He didn't bother even making an attempt at stealth. Instead, he would move forward till he met something worth fighting. He hoped that the dungeon wasn't made for a level lower than him but that it got more difficult the further in he went.

From talks with Villy, he knew dungeons could come in many forms. Some of them were super short, like the Badger's Den, and others were practically their own small world. This one at least didn't look that small, and he knew that the larger a dungeon was, the larger level disparity there usually was.

The Deepdwellers didn't react well to Jake ignoring them but hissed as he got closer with the brute running straight for him, its sharp claws raised. It had three more comrades now, two with spears and one who wore an old tattered robe. Only the brute was stupid enough to attack.

"You sure you wanna do that, buddy?" Jake asked as he looked at the Deepdweller.

Gaze of the Apex Hunter activated, and the big Deepdweller froze up for a second, stumbled a few more steps, and fell down to the ground with foam frothing at its mouth – knocked unconscious.

Eh, a bit more effective than I anticipated, but I guess it did the job? Jake thought as he saw the three Deepdwellers, who looked at him, bolt away into the undergrowth. He had decided to call the weird mixed biome of mushrooms, trees, and bushes the undergrowth as that is that the dungeon was called.

Just as he was about to run further in, the big Deepdweller sprung up, looking confused around before it saw Jake. It screeched, and he was prepared to kill it if it was stupid enough to attack again. Instead, it ran directly away from him... in the direction he was heading.

With a chuckle, Jake decided to have some fun as he followed, much to the dismay of the Deepdweller.

It kept making hissing and screeching sounds as he followed it, Jake primarily wondering how it even detected him being on its trail. As it didn't have eyes, he assumed it used some other sensory organ. He had already noted the large ears, which made him assume they had excellent hearing, and the nostrils also indicated a great sense of smell. Besides that, he assumed they had some mana sense as most monsters tended to have that.

Jake had learned such a sense had as much to do with sensing enemies and prey as it had with finding natural treasures. It was a part of the basic toolkit for pretty much all monsters, which was likely also why his stealth skill included hiding from mana sense in one of the earliest upgrades.

Anyway, his friendly trip with the scared shitless Deepdweller didn't end up taking that long. They were both fast, so a dozen kilometers had been crossed in a jiffy. Jake didn't know if it was due to the stupidity of the big Deepdweller or not, but it had decided to lead him straight to a village of sorts.

Quite a few of these Deepdwellers, he noted. He counted around a hundred in the village, and he began identifying them to get a general feel for their levels using his sphere.

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None of them were worth his time... at least he hadn't thought so till he inspected those in the largest tent. There, four Deepdwellers in robes sat around a goddamn mushroom and looked to be in meditation. Not only that, when he Identified them, he saw true horror.

[Deepdweller Fungalmancer – lvl 131]

[Deepdweller Fungalmancer – lvl 125]

[Deepdweller Fungalmancer – lvl 126]

[Deepdweller Fungalmancer – lvl 134]

Jake was a person who didn't believe in objective moralism. He didn't believe anything was inherently good or evil but knew those were definitions created by society. For those who studied social sciences or read a few too many blogs, good and evil would be referred to as social constructs. This is to say, good or evil were 100% subjective terms.

Yet today, he was swayed in that belief.

Mushrooms were – according to him – evil. Villy liked mushrooms, but at least he liked to eat them. But these... Deepdwellers... these monsters. They didn't just eat mushrooms. They didn't only control them as tools... they lived in synergy with them.

The Fungalmancer's cloaks weren't there just to cover their bare skin but cover the many fungi growing all over their bodies. They were living incubators of evil, abominations a mix between Deepdweller and fungus. Jake knew it was his job – nay, responsibility – to purge this objective evil from the world.

Jake would not strike from the darkness this time. No, he would walk in and crush them in his malefic crusade.

Also, it would be a bit hard to sneak in with the panicking Deepdweller storming into the village, making loud screeching sounds, and putting the entire settlement on edge with all its ruckus. The Fungalmancers reacted as they got up from their meditation and began heading outside to see what was going on.

Jake just walked straight in, not caring as the Deepdwellers mobilized themselves. He would have expected more intelligent creatures to set up a perimeter, but these monsters weren't that smart. They just charged out of the village towards Jake. Most of them were of the big clawed variant or the ones with spears, but he did also see a few with slings, wearing cloaks.

It was a bit weird to see D-grades that he still equated with powerful look so primitive. But they were truly D-grade, and he could feel they were strong... just far from strong enough. Before, Jake had wanted to show mercy, but no more. They were mushroom-loving monsters. Also, he reflected that not wanting to kill dungeon creatures didn't make much sense. In the grand scheme of things, it wouldn't matter. All that mattered was if he wanted to kill them or not, and while they wouldn't give him experience, killing them would give him a feeling of having made the world a slightly better place.

A blade appeared in each of his hands - one a scimitar that was already hungry, and the other a thin long blade with a simple sheath. These heathens did not deserve the mercy of his bow. Instead, they would die by the sword.

The first one who reached him was a spear-wielding Deepdweller. It didn't attack right away but seemed hesitant. Jake didn't bother striking it down but instead waited as the second arrival came. This one was one of the big brutes, and it didn't have the same sense of self-preservation.

His scimitar flew up, the edge already covered in a purple sheen of arcane energy. The extended claw aiming for his head was cut in two as the blade dug deep into the flesh of the Deepdweller, nearly cutting it entirely in two.

Not that it mattered as the other blade flew up, mana already coating and extending its edge as he decapitated the D-grade in a swift slash, the Nanoblade cutting through the neck like nothing. The blade was sharp as hell, that's for sure.

The Deepdweller didn't die right away but stumbled a bit, its one remaining claw swiping the air as the headless monster swayed back and forth until it finally fell to the ground, the notification coming a moment later.

You have slain [Deepdweller – lvl 101]

Jake hadn't moved, and after the kill, neither did the Deepdwellers. His swift execution of their comrade made even the bigger versions of the Deepdwellers hesitate as they stayed back.

That was until the true harbingers of evil arrived. The four Fungalmancers walked towards Jake. The Deepdwellers ranged in height from around 150 centimeters to the big ones at around two and a half meters. The Fungalmancers were all far bigger than that, towering over everything else at nearly four meters each.

The biggest of them snarled and made a hissing sound, making all the Deepdwellers freeze up. A few of the closest to Jake reluctantly moved forward as four more Deepdwellers charged towards him.

You have slain [Deepdweller – lvl 105]

You have slain [Deepdweller – lvl 107]

You have slain [Deepdweller – lvl 109]

You have slain [Deepdweller – lvl 105]

“Stop fucking around,” Jake said after swiftly executing the four of them. They were only about as strong as the monkeys individually, aka far too weak to pose any true threat to him. For him to kill a monster below his own level was just too easy. Unless they had some insane variant race or were a Unique Lifeform, he didn’t see himself losing.

He doubted the Fungalmancers understood his taunt, but they did understand his strength and his unabashed killing intent. Seemingly aware they could no longer hold back, they made their move.

All four of them threw off their cloaks as their disgusting bodies were revealed. Small mushrooms were growing straight out of their flesh, mold, and other types of fungi covered nearly every inch, making them look half-rotten.

One of the Fungalmancers placed its palms on the ground and stuck its fingers in as Jake felt the mana in the area come alive. Another one began sinking into the ground, while a third howled as Jake – with his high perception – saw it exhale millions of small spores all over the area. The final Fungalmancer did the most surprising thing as it took out a small crystal and ate it.

The spores released weren't aimed at Jake but all of the Deepdwellers standing hesitantly back. Jake saw it touch their bodies, and it was as if something awakened within them. Mold began growing on their bodies, and Jake felt their auras spike as an extreme level of life-affinity energy was emitted from every last one of them.

As a single entity, they attacked, and all hesitation was now gone. Mindlessly the Deepdwellers tried to stab him with spears or claw him to death, and even the ones who held slings tossed them aside as they attacked with their bare hands.

Jake couldn't help but smirk as he moved. He completely ignored the over a hundred crazed Deepdwellers but headed straight for the Fungalmancers. Wings appeared on his back as the blood within burned with his first wing-flap, taking him towards the Manipulators of Evil – toxic mist in his wake.

He had aimed his blade at the one who had exhaled earlier, but just as the Nanoblade descended, several vines sprung up to defend it, and a hand nearly the size of Jake's entire upper body moved to block.

Several vines were cut, and the Nanoblade got halfway through the hand as he looked at the creature it had come from. He glanced at the Fungalmancer that had eaten the crystal and was now midway through quite the transformation.

Only its one arm had been affected so far, but massive cancerous growths with mold and fungi growing from them popped up all over its body as it grew in size, adding tens of centimeters every second, making it into a hulking abomination. Jake would expect nothing less from a creature that dared call itself a Fungalmancer.

He was actually a bit glad... he could not only purge the world of evil but possibly also get some good fights out of this dungeon.