

Hunter 234

Chapter 234: Questionable Choices

Jake bent his back as he avoided a wooden spear trying to impale him from behind, and in a spinning motion, cut the Deepdweller that attacked him in two with his scimitar. The kill didn't even make any of the other Deepdwellers hesitate as they came bearing down on him.

He released a wave of arcane mana with a scoff, pushing back the closest Deepdwellers as he once more turned to kill the Fungalmancers. The hulking abomination Fungalmancer attacked him in response, its figure now nearly eight meters tall with its arms even longer than its entire body was high. They looked more like long vines with hands attached to their ends.

Jake dove under the first swipe and cut into the arm with both his blades as he ran alongside it. The Fungalmancer hissed in response and tried to squash him with its other hand, but the hunter was too fast as he jumped and went straight for the head.

Four large vines sprung up from the ground, but Jake had already seen them coming in his sphere and used Shadow Vault to move forward just a little bit faster to dodge them. It was a skill he didn't use that often, and he quickly remembered why as he felt his mana and stamina drain significantly. It used more based on how strong his body was as far as he could tell, and he even took note that the spores in the air needed to be "faded through," only increasing cost further.

But it got the job done, as Jake was free from interference. He stabbed his sword down towards the forehead of the Fungalmancer. Or, well, at least where he expected the forehead to be. It was so mutated with cancerous growth and fungi it was hard to recognize the hulking form as even remotely humanoid.

The sword penetrated straight into the head of the Fungalmancer, sinking in to the hilt without any issue. Jake frowned as it felt wrong, and the movements of the abomination appeared unaffected, forcing Jake to withdraw his blade and jump back.

On the way, he saw the wound close up at a visible rate. Is it natural vitality or life magic of some kind? he questioned himself as he jumped to the side, avoiding another round of attacks. The small army of Deepdwellers was getting a bit annoying, but he would rather just kill the Fungalmancers. Also, it was an enjoyable new experience to fight while at the same time being hounded by a group of weaker enemies. Well, they would die eventually anyway... they bathed in his poison mist even now.

With the hulking monstrosity a bit too annoying to kill, he moved to the three others first. Well, two others, as one had sunk into the ground. Jake did see the guy sitting a good hundred meters below, as he was the one who manipulated all those vines.

The two he could target were the spore-spewer and the one with its hands in the ground - the one who seemed to slowly infuse the ground with life-affinity mana. Was it strengthening them? Some kind of long-term ritual? Well, he would love to find out, so he went for the spore-spewer first.

It had yet to stop spewing them out, and Jake could see why. The entourage of weaker Deepdwellers got stronger by the second as more and more growths appeared on their bodies from the spores. Their plan had likely been for the vine-guy and the big guy to keep Jake occupied while two of them powered up and overwhelmed him with the army.

Sadly for them, they were thoroughly outmatched.

Jake stepped through space and appeared right before the spore-spewer. It was the first time he had used One Step Mile in the fight, taking them all by complete surprise. The Nanoblade was horizontally swept as he cut the Fungalmancer deeply in its abdomen.

Before striking again, he jumped to the side, avoiding an incoming assault of vines, and attacked with the sword. This time he managed to cut off an arm as the Fungalmancer tried to block in vain. The monster spewed out even more spores towards Jake as retaliation, and he felt them invade his entire body and take root on his skin.

He felt the fungi dig into him and begin to consume his blood and the vital energy in his body. It felt unpleasant, and he even felt that the spores carried a slight paralyzing poison – one that naturally didn't have any effect.

Drink up, he smiled as his blood turned toxic. All the spores withered instantly and turned to dust, and the Fungalmancer only had time to flash its nostrils in surprise before Jake landed a finishing blow. His blade burned with dark and arcane mana as he stabbed the monster right in the mouth.

You have slain [Deepdweller Fungalmancer – lvl 126] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

One down

Jake stepped forward and teleported back as he avoided another attack of vines. He turned his attention to the hulking guy as he didn't want to deal with the one infusing energy into the ground. It was guarded by over a dozen Deepdwellers functioning as living walls, but even then, it would be the easier kill. The issue was... he really wanted to see what it was trying to do.

The monstrosity attacked him as he ran for it again, making simple and heavily telegraphed attacks. Each of its blows tore up the ground, and he had to admit that getting hit directly would hurt. If it could hit him.

Once more, he cut into its arm and danced around it, slicing and dicing its body. Each cut was incredibly deep and made pus and blood spew out, yet the hulking Fungalmancer seemed unaffected as the wounds healed at a visible rate. He also noted that the blood and pus that spewed out was coated in spores, meaning even its bodily fluids were now weapons.

Jake did notice how fragile its entire body seemed and frowned a bit at how annoying it was to put down. He decided to get just a tiny bit more serious as he jumped back and summoned a bottle. It contained common-rarity Necrotic Poison that he had made during his practice to make the uncommon-rarity version, which meant it was top-tier. He didn't want to waste his precious uncommon-rarity poison on these Fungalmancers. He had a lot of dungeon to go, after all.

After coating both blades while dodging the Deepdwellers and vine attacks, he moved in to attack the monstrosity once more. All of his sword cuts from before had already healed, but he had a feeling the next wounds wouldn't be fixed as easily.

His blades tore into it, and this time it didn't go as before as it failed to heal. The wounds blackened and decayed as the hulking abomination screamed in pain while the poisoned swords dug into it again and again. Jake could feel the constant fight between his poison and the life energy of the Fungalmancer. It tried to hold on, but Jake went in for the finishing blow.

Dodging yet another round of annoying vines, he stabbed the blades deeply into the abomination and quickly placed both palms on it as Touch of the Malefic Viper activated.

The poison spread from his touch, invading every inch of it and further amplifying the Necrotic Poison. It didn't even have time to move before Jake was done and dodged back again to avoid another vine attack - two dark green handprints remaining behind as it collapsed dead to the ground. Then, with a wave of his hands, the swords flew out of the corpse and into his hands.

With the big guy down, only two remained. The one with its hands on the ground huffed a bit more with its nose holes, and Jake assumed it was stressed or scared. Unfortunately, it was a bit hard to tell as they weren't exactly the most human-looking creatures.

Jake wondered how he should kill the one hiding so deep underground. He didn't have any effective attack that could go down there, except maybe forming beams of arcane mana or something? Could he even do that?

He thought about these things as he elegantly dodged all the Deepdwellers attacking him to keep him busy, not caring that much about them at all. Their weapons of choice were even coated with venom, he had come to learn, making him care even less. The spears and claws were all covered in some mushroom-venom, and while Jake was a bit surprised he hadn't felt it with Sense of the Malefic Viper, he just wrote that up to the venom being parts of their bodies or something.

With little effort, he cut down the Deepdwellers one by one as he waited for the grand finale. He could now feel that the life-affinity in the air had grown to an extreme level, and he felt it was soon time.

Finally, it happened. The Fungalmancer did what he assumed was a cheerful smile as it made one last push.

A green explosion of mana came out of it, washing over all the Deepdwellers and Jake alike. At the same time, he saw the Fungalmancer begin sinking into the ground like its comrade, making him frown for a moment... but he didn't have time to address it here and now.

The green wave wasn't aimed to damage Jake, at least not directly. A bit of mold had grown on his shitty cloak, and he saw the fungi begin to glow green as it absorbed the green energy. The same happened to all the moss-covered Deepwellers that surrounded him as they all pounced... and for the first time today, Jake felt his sense of danger give a noteworthy response.

Oh... I guess I should have seen that coming? Jake thought as the intensity of the green light they all gave off intensified. He barely had time to save the cloak by burning the fungi off with arcane mana and throw it in his storage before the attack came.

Well, shit, in the final moment, he covered his body in scales and summoned a bubble of arcane mana around him as he knelt down and covered his head with his arms.

Fucking mushrooms.

BOOM!

An entire area of several kilometers in diameter exploded in an intense green light that sought to destroy everything and leveled an entire section of the dungeon – Jake smack in the middle.

Sanctdomo had been busier than ever since the World Congress, and like most other cities and factions, they had begun a push to have as many D-grades as possible available for the Treasure Hunt. Of course, Jacob and the rest of the leaders were fully aware that the strongest participants would obtain the best rewards, but that didn't mean numbers were useless. Especially as the system had dropped hints that the event wouldn't just be a pure death game, but one that could be pulled out of when one's life was in danger.

Jacob sat in his small office and went over some reports of possible prospects and had hundreds of pages flying all around him. Mana control had never come easy for him but had gotten a bit easier after reaching D-grade. It had taken many weeks of practice, but in the end, he had finally gotten a good grasp of it.

The papers were of people determined to have the potential to reach D-grade within the next 2 months to attend the Treasure Hunt. He did this every day as he liked to know the names and identities of the future elite of the city, and sometimes he even got lucky and got a revelation when he saw a specific person.

One of the papers caught his eye – a blacksmith. One he recognized. It was one of many he hadn't talked to in a long time, and the last time they spoke, he had been stuck at level 68, and Jacob had advised him to go into teaching.

Jacob smiled. He had failed to break through back then because he was too stuck in his own old-world ways. With 40 years of experience, he had heavily ingrained habits, and he had his own way of doing things and wasn't that open to change. He thought he was already as good as he could get, and that had held him back. Jacob had thus advised him to give up... so that he could start over.

He evolved his profession a week ago, Jacob could see. When he had given up and gone into teaching, he had seen things he had never even considering doing before, and in his attempt to teach better, he had found inspiration and broken through. His mindset had changed, and his barrier overcome. Now, he was open to improvement, no longer set in his old ways, but still with four decades of experience to pull from. He had transformed from someone who likely wouldn't ever level again in his life to an elite prospect with an assured path to D-grade, if not beyond.

That was one part Jacob disliked about being an Augur - he couldn't just tell people what to do if he wanted the best result. The Records from figuring things out and experiencing enlightenment were

worth infinitely more than just being told what one should do. This meant that Jacob sometimes had to be a bit roundabout and couldn't directly tell people... he could only set them on a better path; they would have to walk it independently.

Jacob had done so many times, and he remembered every single one like it was yesterday. It was his calling to lead people towards their most ideal fate, after all.

Of the people he had done it with, some had more sure paths than others, and some he did were borderline pure gambles. One of those examples was a certain space mage he had just seen again for the first time during the World Congress. Neil was his name, and Jacob had sent him and his comrades towards Haven so long ago.

That one had been a bit selfish. As a whole, Jacob and the Holy Church had a strong ambition to establish a teleportation network on Earth quickly so they could unite their many cities and more promptly make diplomatic relations.

Jacob knew Neil was incredibly talented when it came to space magic formations and teleportation back then, so he sent him towards his old friend to make sure he had a space mage in his city. Did Jacob know it would work? No. What could he predict related to Haven? Nothing at all. Jake's mere presence as the City Owner blocked all that.

Yet Jacob had chosen to have faith. Sometimes that was all he could have. Jake himself was a black hole when it came to fate, and he screwed everything he was related to divination-wise. Jacob hadn't even known Neil was in Haven till the World Congress began, though he had heard reports of Haven having a space mage.

In some ways, it was a bit exciting, and in others, absolutely terrifying. Jacob was just glad that Jake was his friend. He knew he was, not due to magic or divination or whatever, but because he trusted his own judgment of character. Sometimes even more than he trusted fate itself.

He still remembered his experience in the tutorial. It had been the most painful and hardest thing he had ever done, and he knew it made him look like the bad guy as he had essentially herded his own comrades towards their deaths while lying to them... but it truly had been the best choice at the time in his mind.

As an Augur, he was to realize fate, and killing William would have gone against that. Jacob realized his choice not to kill him that day had as much to do with him somehow following fate's plan as it had him being merciful. Those two together somehow pushed him over the edge to qualify as an Augur, even if he still wasn't sure if that should really be enough. He had decided to just not think about it...

Back in the tutorial, he had lied to them and given them hope for them to keep pushing themselves. To keep leveling and keep getting race levels for one goal only: reach E-grade before William awakened. And he had succeeded with every single one of them.

The reason for that was simple... that would allow them to "live" longer.

A soul's absolute maximum lifespan was determined by grade due to the qualitative change a race evolution brought. When a soul was sent to the Holyland, it would exist as a Holy Spirit for the maximum lifespan possible of their grade. Him having gotten them to E-grade had bought all of them hundreds of years worth of lifespan.

Yet he could not tell them that is what he did till the last day. So he had to make them hold onto a false hope to keep them progressing. It had made him feel like shit, but the result was truly the best it could

have been. Except perhaps having had Jake interfere... but that fate was not one he had seen or even been aware of then. Perhaps his biggest regret.

While a Holy Spirit did live as a human did – they still had the same form and everything – they did have the fatal flaw of never being able to leave the Holyland. They also could never level. It was just a place to live out their lives.

It was one of the big pulls of the Holy Church. Anyone blessed or even Baptised could go to the Holyland and live out the rest of their maximum lifespan in the Holyland. This was even worth it for those who died a natural death, as the maximum lifespan of a grade was something few races ever reached, save for a few such as the undead – yet another reason the Holy Church didn't like them.

All in all... Jacob tried his best; he truly did. He wanted what was best for everyone and for people to be the best they can be. He didn't like that sometimes the individual would have to suffer for the masses or the masses suffer for one extraordinary individual, so he tried to go for win-wins whenever possible.

But... sometimes that wasn't possible. This was one reason William had to be left alive... he was too important to kill. His fate was too grand to stomp out just to save the lives of a few dozen humans who would likely never reach D-grade, no matter how harsh that sounds.

Things had worked out this time with the smith, but he couldn't expect it to always go well – like with William - he could only do his best and believe in others. Thus was the fate of an Augur of Hope.