

## Hunter 245

### Chapter 245: Assessment

Why the hell would he leave a dungeon when he had spent so much time gathering those goddamn mushrooms? He had yet to use more than a handful of them, and he still had more than a dozen of the Infused variant.

When Jake chose to remain in the dungeon, the entire door lit up as the runes sprang to life. He felt some energy enter his body, and he tried to remove his hand but failed. It was like a pulse went through his entire being before entering the door again.

Finally, he could let go, and he retracted his hand as the door began opening.

Jake was shocked at what had happened... it felt like the damn door had scanned him or something. Whatever it did, it appeared wholly unrelated to the Deepdwellers. He looked through the opening of the gate and saw it led into a new chamber. He also saw it in his sphere, but so far, nothing was visible in that either, so Jake decided to just venture further in.

His danger sense was entirely silent still. He frowned as he was confused about what the hell all of this was leading towards.

When he exited the tunnel and reached the other side of the hall, he found himself in an absolutely massive chamber. Before he had even fought the Heartwarden, he had noticed how there were vines in the chamber and that they were all gathering towards one point... and he finally saw what that point was.



In the center of the chamber was what looked like an inert metal sphere with several metal rings around it, all held up by vines that had overgrown on it. The metal itself was completely unscathed, even if it did look like the vines had tried to break through the exterior of the sphere.

Jake could instantly see why... because the inside of that sphere was completely solid. Not with metal but pure fucking energy. He could only see inside with his sphere, and even his Sense of the Malefic Viper didn't react at all, meaning the sphere completely isolated whatever energy was within.

He inspected the rest of the chamber, and he spotted quite a few things, the first of which was a wooden door in a small cave off to the side of the chamber, not leading to anywhere. It didn't take a genius to know it was an exit to the dungeon, and Jake stepped over to investigate. Putting his hand on it, he confirmed it was indeed a way to exit.

Did that mean if he left and re-entered, he would be put back in this chamber? If nothing else, that would confirm dungeons could have different "checkpoints" of sorts. Then again, maybe it truly was just an exit like so many other dungeons, as this chamber would be the last thing to explore.

He at least hadn't seen any other exits or entrances to the chamber than the gate he had entered through.

Another thing he noticed in his sphere was a slew of stone slabs with magic circles on them like those outside. All of them were covered in vines, making Jake believe the Deepdwellers had cleared the ones outside.

I guess this is what the mushrooms are for, he thought as he began clearing out the vines. He summoned his bow and fired a few exploding arcane arrows to make all the slabs visible. He could have gone and placed the mushrooms then and there to see what would happen, but instead, he chugged a potion and sat down on his ass, and meditated.



Why would he face whatever was about to come on low resources? The Heartwarden hadn't been that dangerous, but it had still taken plenty of resources. Hence he meditated.

...

Jake got up, fully refueled and ready to face whatever was to come! He was a few potion bottles poorer but in excellent health and in good spirit as he began going around the chamber, placing mushrooms.

He hummed as he did so, excited to see what would happen. As the magic circles lit up, Jake began to see a pattern. All of them had a single line leading into the middle of the chamber, directly below the metal sphere floating above.

It turned out that there was exactly one mushroom for every circle in the dungeon. The last two were sadly not Infused, but Jake still hoped it would be good enough for whatever was to come.

As he placed the last mushroom... everything hummed to life.

A beam of energy fired up from all the magic circles, especially the area right below the sphere, with their destination being that the sphere itself. It greedily absorbed the energy for a while until all the magic circles ran out of power and became inert once more – all the mushrooms now ash.



Everything was just silent for a moment as Jake feared that the two last mushrooms not being infused had made everything fail. He was about to admonish himself as he heard a sound above. It sounded almost like a dynamo starting...

It turns out it did so because it was.

The rings of metal above the sphere above began spinning to life, breaking the vines holding onto them. The rings spun faster and faster until not even Jake could keep up with how fast they went. Somehow they didn't send out any wind. Even if it were just looked at like a fan, the sheer speed would have ripped the entire hall apart, Jake included.

Jake just stood there, confused about what the fuck was happening, his entire body tense. The amount of energy that dynamo was giving off was not something that should be in a goddamn D-grade dungeon. The amount of energy was way above that... perhaps even above C-grade. A part of him considered bailing, but his instincts had yet to warn him, making him believe that this dynamo was not any danger to him.

Finally, something happened.

The sphere hanging above projected a blue screen into mid-air with text Jake could actually read.

Welcome, Human of the

The Altmar Empire welcomes you to this assessment. This assessment is an official part of the dungeon and will count towards final system rewards. The assessment will be combat-related.



All challengers will be split into groups based on their levels. If all challengers belong to the same group, they may enter together.

Group 1: 100-125

Group 2: 126-135

Group 3: 136-145

Group 4: 146-155

Group 5: 156-200

Challengers detected: 1

Challenger level detected: 117. Assigned to Group 1. Solo challenger detected. The difficulty will be adjusted accordingly. True Talent Assessment Program initiated.

Please proceed to the teleportation circle for assessment. Rewards will follow upon successful completion of the assessment, dependent on performance.



Before he could react, the dynamo shot out one of its rings, and it landed right below the floating sphere. It formed a magic circle in less than a fraction of a second, once more showing a level of power that did not belong in a D-grade dungeon. The teleportation circle to the assessment Jake assumed.

Jake didn't move immediately but frowned instead, as he just had a lot thrown at him at once.

First of all, the screen before him was not by the system, that was for sure. It was made by the Altmar Empire, as far as Jake could tell. It had a lot of weird text in it, like assuring him it was still a part of the dungeon and how doing this assessment of theirs would count towards system rewards. What was all this grouping nonsense? This was the first time Jake had seen a dungeon that had challenge dungeon-like mechanics within. Well, he hadn't done that many before, but it still seemed out of place.

The whole thing about his assessment made him frown even more. How did they know his level? Did the door scan him? Had they somehow bypassed Shroud of the Primordial to read it?

Shit, he had so many damn questions.

Wasn't the Altmar Empire some big elven faction? How the hell were they in a dungeon? Moreover, why the hell did this thing recognize such? Was this dungeon not a natural one like Villy had said it would be? Who else could have made it... how the hell had an elven empire managed to make a dungeon in a new universe? Jake hated to ask so often, but he had to know.

"What an interesting coincidence. Those elves are always up to something, I tell ya. Just do it normally; you are still in a natural dungeon. Act like all of it is the flavor text for now, and just do your best," Villy



answered promptly before cutting off the connection again, clearly amused on his end by Jake's confusion.

Villy didn't help Jake much... but thinking about it, didn't he also have a cauldron offered by the Altmar Empire? Were they just suppliers of cauldrons and dungeons to the system or what? It really didn't make any sense to him what the fuck was happening, so he did the most natural thing to him.

He completely ignored it and went straight for the teleportation circle.

Several kilometers above the dynamo within the Deepdweller Undergrowth, a chamber suddenly lit up. Screens lining the walls began showing images of the chamber below, and many different devices came to life. It happened as the dynamo also hummed to life, and power was restored.

In the center of it all, a hologram-like projection appeared. It was that of a humanoid elven figure. It instantly made a motion, and a small device lowered itself from the ceiling as it began recording everything happening in the room and on the screens.

For a moment, the projection looked like it needed to ground itself after that first - almost pre-programmed - motion to summon the recording device. It looked confused. The projection observed the room until it finally shook its head before it began its work as it spoke in a male voice.

"Deepdweller Dungeon Monitor number 322 reporting. Activation of generator successful. All readings confirming this is a natural dungeon. The Universe the dungeon is located in is... hm, an error. Unknown newly integrated Universe or pocket dimension outside of the 92 main ones. Take special note if this is a code 498 scenario. Moving on to the challengers.



“Only a single challenger present appears to have cleared the dungeon solo based on scans. Assigned to Group 1, level 117, human. True Talent Assessment Program has been initiated. It appears we have a good seed here. Potential divine or factional relations yet to be confirmed. Challenger does not wear any discernable equipment that would indicate faction. All additional readings failed, indicating a skill able to block a full scan, meaning only the dungeon-bound analysis tool succeeded. Blocking skill must be powerful. A smart choice in case you listen in the future, human. Caution is a wis-“

The projection cut itself off as it watched the screen and quickly moved on.

“Challenger unhesitantly entered the teleportation circle for the assessment. May indicate a type 7 personality. Further analysis is required. Beginning vocal transcript of the assessment.”

Jake was teleported through the magic circle and had to admit it felt quite different from the system transferring him. It was actually the first time he had experienced being teleported by non-system means. It was not an instant thing like when he was brought somewhere by the system, and he could actually feel himself move through space.

Not feel it well enough to actually get an understanding of how he was moved or any insight into the concept of space, but it was still an interesting sensation. Even if he couldn't learn anything about how to use the concept, he did get a feeling he could resist it.

Well, not this teleportation circle in particular, as it was too strong. But it appeared that moving people through space like this was resistible to some degree. Good to know, as it would suck if Neil one day got mad at him and teleported Jake a hundred thousand kilometers away from Haven.

Getting home would be a pain.



Just as his considerations of the potential consequences of pissing off space mages appeared in his mind, so did his feet appear on the ground. The first thing he did was observe his surroundings, which were not as expected.

The ground beneath his feet was the borderline indestructible stone that the wall was made of, and he stood on what looked like an open field based on his first assessment with his sphere. Well, besides a perfectly rectangular all-black pillar a few kilometers ahead of him.

Moreover, when he looked to the sides, he did see what looked like walls far off in the distance. Hundreds of kilometers in each direction. When he looked up, he saw a ceiling far above too. It looked he was now within a massive cube of indestructible stone with a large ominous pillar.

This seemed like a perfectly safe and normal situation.

Spoiler warning: it wasn't.

Jake observed the pillar a few kilometers away. He considered getting closer to have it be within his sphere, but his danger sense stopped him. A faint sense of danger from the pillar made him aware that it would be the source of conflict.

Which turned out to be entirely accurate as he saw movement on top of the pillar. A humanoid figure was raised up out of the pillar as it stood atop it. It was human-sized, around 2 meters tall. It was entirely silver, and the body looked entirely human besides having nothing down there, and while it had a regular face, it didn't have any ears or hair.



He used Identify on it to confirm what it was.

[Altmar Census Golem – lvl 150]

Right after identifying it, another message appeared – this one from the system itself, showing that this fight indeed was a natural part of the dungeon.

New Dungeon Objective: Defeat the Altmar Census Golem

Jake kept his eyes on the figure as it just stood there, waiting. He knew this was the foe he had to defeat, yet he didn't move right away. Because even now, his danger sense made him acutely aware that the moment he made a move to attack, things would get dangerous.

This golem was no pushover... far from it.

He began preparing. His enemy was entirely metal... so he had no poison to use but his blood that could serve as an all-purpose toxin – albeit a still far less effective one against anything non-biological. Once Jake was done preparing everything, he took out his bow.

His hands were shaking as he took out an arrow and drew the string - his eyes sharp and his demeanor serious.



Jake was not shaking from fear or anxiety. No, it was something far different. Something that stemmed from his desire – no, avarice - for a good challenge:

It was pure anticipation.