

Hunter 249

Chapter 249: Priorities

The third round wasn't like the ones prior. There were no flashy attacks or advanced tactics deployed, no powerful skills used, or anything in that vein. Instead, it was just two opponents duking it out with sloppy blows in a battle of pure endurance and grit.

Jake dodged the wild swings of the golem as he swung his scimitar to try and land hits in return. His blade left shallow cuts on the golem's body while it seemed to want to take him out in a single smash. He was fine with how little happened because he was just waiting as they slowly fought.

He kept dodging back when he could and fired arrows after the golem. It was a bit awkward as he had to hold the bow with arcane strings or his leg, but he made it work. He had switched to the stable version to deal even more damage, even if they didn't hit as hard when he only had one arm. He had noticed that the arrows could leave clearly visible marks on the body of the golem. When he hit it on the shoulder, he even noted how its swing looked slightly off as if he had done some internal damage.

After several minutes of this, Jake felt it. The cooldown's over.

He retreated as he took out a health potion. An hour had now passed, and he chugged it down greedily as the warm flow went through his body. He could faintly direct the energy as he focused on healing his internals. Jake quickly felt a lot better within seconds. Well, besides the whole missing an arm part.

The potion had turned the fight from an "I'll probably win" to "I'll definitely win" real fast. The golem was running on fumes, and every one of its movements was more sloppy than the one prior. With Jake now filled with renewed energy, he pressed his advantage.

Jake dove in with the goal of disarming his opponent by getting the Pillar away from it. Okay, he had already literally disarmed it once, and while he likely could rip out the other arm, he wasn't going to risk it. Not when he could rip off something far more important.

He baited the golem into swinging the Pillar in a downward smash, and as it hit the ground, he grabbed it with his hand and kicked the golem. Simultaneously he activated the Arcane Charge within the golem, making its entire body flash for a moment. The flash was so large it looked like a flashbang had gone off, and Jake hoped it would make the golem let go. Unfortunately, that didn't work, and the golem didn't even react to the Arcane Charge, even if it did do a lot of damage. Instead, it held on and just sent electricity into the Pillar. His Arcane Charge hurt like fuck when it activated, but if you're a golem without the ability to feel pain, it apparently didn't bother you much, much to Jake's annoyance.

The electricity it pushed into the Pillar was far less powerful than before, and Jake easily powered through as he kicked again, this time with a lot more force as he even made his foot explode in a blast of arcane mana upon impact. That managed to do the trick as the golem let go and was pushed back, staggering as it fell to the ground.

Jake used the staff to smash the golem in the side while it was still lying down, denting its already damaged arm even more. He didn't hit it a second time, instead stepping forward, storing the Pillar, and grabbed the golem's neck.

He pressed down with his hand as it began glowing green. The golem retaliated by punching his arm, but Jake just leaned in closer to take the hits on his back and shoulder. They hurt a bit, but the golem was now far too weak. It tried to electrocute him one last time, and its eyes even glowed as if it tried to fire an eye-beam, but nothing worked.

In the end, the golem's arm fell powerlessly to the ground as Jake tore his hand upwards, ripping the head of the golem off.

You have slain [Altmar Census Golem – lvl 150] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level

'DING!' Class: [Avaricious Arcane Hunter] has reached level 128 - Stat points allocated, +10 free points

'DING!' Class: [Avaricious Arcane Hunter] has reached level 129 - Stat points allocated, +10 free points

'DING!' Race: [Human (D)] has reached level 118 - Stat points allocated, +15 free points

Jake didn't even have time to go through his notifications before the dungeon reacted. He felt air shift as space mana and the concept of space filled the air, and it seemed to have only one purpose: teleport away the corpse of the Altmar Census Golem.

Oh no you fucking don't!

He tried to put it into his inventory, but it failed. Instead, he released a wave of disruptive mana as he thought fast, but that only slowed down the teleportation. In a final gambit, he created an arcane barrier around himself and the corpse he was currently sitting on top of. He even used the steam-like energy coming off him from Limit Break as he tried to make it stronger, remembering his last skill-selection

For a moment, Jake felt like he was in his entirely own world. Cut off from everything. Light dimmed, he felt like gravity got less powerful, but more importantly, he felt the space-affinity in the air weaken. It still activated, but what teleported wasn't the entire golem.

The legs and both arms teleported away, leaving the torso and head of the golem behind. Jake finally was able to put what remained of the golem into his inventory as he fell back on the black stone ground, breathing heavily. With everything done... he could deactivate Limit Break.

Weakness washed over him the moment he did so. He felt like his entire body weighed a ton, so he just closed his eyes and entered meditation as he checked his system message from clearing the dungeon.

Objective: Defeat the Altmar Census Golem (Completed)

Bonus reward for clearing the dungeon solo. Bonus reward for completing additional objectives. Bonus Pioneer reward.

Dungeon shutting down in: 23:59:32

It turned out he had plenty of time, so for now, he just relaxed. He rested as he replayed the fight in his head and went over his fuck-ups. In retrospect, that divebomb move was a terrible idea, but at the time, it seemed smart and kind of cool.

Also... he was pretty sure he just made some kind of Arcane Barrier resembling the offered skill not to have his loot stolen by the dirty dungeon. Well, he doubted it was the dungeon itself, but likely something more related to the Altmar part of this entire scenario.

The Arcane Barrier he had conjured integrated a bit of stamina, as Jake pretty much just mobilized every kind of energy he could. The only time he had ever seen stamina outside of his body was in that mist-like form that covered his skin during Arcane Powershot and when Limit Break was active. Something to experiment with, he thought, considered ways to use it in the future.

But for now, he rested, but not before smiling as he spoke.

“I hope you enjoyed the show, mysterious observer.”

“Challenger has defeated the Census Golem. Automatic retrieval system activated, a-“

The Dungeon Monitor paused for a moment as he frowned.

“Challenger has managed to block parts of the teleportation and claimed parts of the golem, including all core components. Inconsequential based on predicted existing relations of the challenger. Challenger has now chosen to rest upon the defeat of the golem and has deactivated all boosting skills. I sh-“

Once more, he had to cut himself off as he practically gaped.

“Challenger is aware of the observations of the Dungeon Monitor despite system-assisted surveillance tools being used. Unknown method of observation... possible divine interference, perhaps? No conclusion for now. Moving on to final assessments before the challenger makes his way here.”

The monitor looked to the active teleportation platform not far away from him and the three system-created lockboxes not far from it. A wooden door had also appeared in the surveillance room, looking quite out of place. The projection's eyes lingered a bit on one of the lockboxes as a smile crept onto the monitor's lips.

"Final conclusion: challenger is reckless but inventive and highly adaptive. Stats put him firmly in the upper echelon for someone his level, but his application of these stats is even more impressive. All kinds of energy control are at an extreme level. High probability of arcane-affinity. High probability of high-level divine blessing. Too many unknowns to give a proper evaluation, but based on current knowledge, I shall heighten the category of the challenger to N. Will confirm upon lockbox opening.

"Class appears to be an archer-archetype making use of magic liberally. No confirmed profession yet. Will ask during the exit interview. Providing additional observations and personal theorizing during the wait for the challenger's arrival..."

Jake yawned as he sat up, stretching one arm while holding back a desire to scratch where his other one was currently growing out. It always felt weird to have it be all wriggly as it regrew. He did notice that it went a bit faster than when he was in E-grade. He couldn't wait to be a few grades higher and be able to pop out limbs like green dudes from a planet once blown up by someone with a name related to the refrigeration industry.

Now he only had one issue: how to leave the giant cube? Well, it wasn't really that big of an issue, as there really only could be one place for the exit to be. The giant obelisk-thing the golem had come out of still stood in the middle of the cube. Looking as ominous as ever. It gave off a certain aura, but there was also something else mixed in. His Sense of the Malefic Viper made him aware that there was space-affinity mana in the direction of the obelisk. Likely a teleportation circle.

He ran over to it, keeping a relaxed speed as his body still wasn't back to full power after the prolonged use of Limit Break. He felt like he had done a way too long session at the gym the day before and was just sore all over.

It still didn't take him long to reach the obelisk, and once Jake got close, he truly inspected it for the first time with his sphere. The exterior was just blank black metal, but the inside was entirely different. Jake saw humanoid figures within... a lot of them. Altmar Golems. He wasn't sure they were the same kind as the Census Golem he had fought, as they didn't all look exactly like it. Some of them sure got close, though.

Needless to say, Jake would be a dead little hunter if he had to fight hundreds of golems as strong as the Census Golem. Luckily it didn't seem to even be an option as none of them gave off any response to his Identify, meaning they were just empty shells.

Shaking his head, Jake began running up the vertical length of the obelisk as he inspected its interior. It truly was some kind of golem-storage facility and even had a lot of technical devices within. Repair equipment, perhaps? All of it seemed weird to have in a dungeon, but he assumed there was a reason.

On the top of the obelisk was a magic circle, space-affinity mana coming from it. Seeing no other way out, he walked onto it and felt himself be teleported.

A few seconds later, he found himself back at the giant dynamo-thing. It was still spinning as fast as before, but the moment he appeared, it did something. A beam of light fired upwards from it, searing away the stone of the cave. It kept firing off energy for a few more seconds before it stopped.

Jake just stood there, unsure what that was all about. There was now a big hole above the dynamo, so had it just opened a new path? It seemed like a weird way to do it. Very energy-inefficient.

“Please come up, challenger,” Jake heard a voice say from above. It seemed to echo through the entire chamber, the voice distinctly male.

Seeing no reason not to, he summoned his wings and took a leisurely flight up the big hole. The dynamo sure had done a number on the dungeon ceiling with how long the tunnel was. Then again, this was all a part of the designed “dungeon scenario,” so it wasn’t that out of place. It was basically just a big set piece.

He emerged out into a room filled with screens and weird devices. In the middle of it stood what Jake could only describe as a very realistic-looking hologram. He was certain it was a hologram because it only registered a silhouette of mana in his sphere, and it was slightly see-through. The hologram depicted a man with long ears, wearing a simple robe. It was definitely an elf. But he also saw something even more important.

“Welcome challenger, I must say your performance was exemplary, and I would like to congratulate you. I am the Dungeon Monitor of this place and one of the primary designers of this entire dungeon. I would like to ask of you if you could possibly answer some questions?” the hologram said. How a hologram could talk, Jake didn’t know. Magic holograms and all their secrets.

As for answering questions?

“Can it wait?” he asked, already walking towards his target.

“Pardon?” the hologram asked, looking a bit confused at how Jake was barely paying it any attention.

“Loot first,” the human answered as he identified the three boxes. He had priorities, after all.

The first was a flat but rather large box with the rare-rarity tag. Nice.

The next in line was about the same size, but this one was epic-rarity. Great.

And the last box was small but more intricate-looking than any lockbox Jake had ever seen before. It was ancient-rarity. Awesome.

He began with the lowest-rarity box first. Funnily enough, he saw the hologram look a bit disappointed as if it wanted him to open the smallest and best box first... but it would have to wait.

Jake opened the box, and inside he found an entire white bundle of cloth. It looked a bit like silk but was far too rough for that. At a closer inspection, Jake saw what looked to be almost scale-like metal fragments within the cloth. Using Identify, he saw that it was a cloak.

[Altmar Prismatic Cloak (Rare)] – A cloak made out of a strange mix of fabric and metal created by the master craftsmen of the Altmar Empire. This cloak is incredibly resilient to both slashing attacks and will distribute a portion of all kinetic attacks taken throughout the fabric. This type of cloak is usually worn by elite units focusing on stealthily eliminating their foes. The cloak passively aids in making you harder to detect, and when infused with mana, this effect will increase manyfold, allowing the user to become nearly undetectable. If the cloak is damaged, it can repair itself at incredible speeds and make it tougher defensively at the loss of its stealth-functionality for a period of time. Enchantments: Prismatic Veil. Prismatic Reconstruction.

Requirements: lvl 110+ in any humanoid race.

He really wanted to go test the cloak now and put it on, but seeing the hologram just stand there staring at him made it awkward. So he just put it in his inventory and moved on to the next lockbox as the hologram spoke.

“Ah, those cloaks are quite popular in the Empire. The cloth is made by some of our greatest young talented tailors and is a beautiful display of the fusion between technology and more traditional weaving techniques. It’s even popular among those who don’t need the stealth component as it offers great protection against nearly all physical attacks if needed. Additionally, they are also considered quite fashionable, and you can freely change the pattern and colors on the cloak after some practice, and-”

It turned out he didn’t even need to test out the cloak to learn more about it as he apparently had an exposition-hologram readily available.