

Hunter 85

Chapter 85: Into the dark

The first thing that struck him was the smell - an all-encompassing stench that seemed to mask any other scent. Jake was happy that perception didn't just straight-up make his sense of smell more potent, or he may have just fallen over and died there and then. At least he would have wished that he was dead.

The second thing he noticed was that the unnatural darkness persisted even within the dungeon. Jake couldn't see a single thing, no matter what he tried or did. It was clearly magical, though he couldn't find any immediate explanation.

The notification upon entering did help inform him why the smell was there, at least.

You have entered the dungeon: The Forgotten Sewers

Objective: Defeat the Nest Watcher

He didn't even bother questioning how he had gone from a mountain to a sewer. Dungeons obviously didn't exist physically in the world outside but were some kind of alternate space. A bit like his spatial storage, just on a far grander scale.

He had already gone to an old temple during the challenge dungeon, so a sewer wasn't that far off. What did surprise him, however, was how modern the notion of a sewer like this was. It also didn't seem to have much to do with beasts at all.

There wasn't any noticeable movement in this sphere either. The only thing of note was the dripping water from the ceiling and small water streams running across the floor in places.

While Jake couldn't see anything with his eyes, he could still see plenty through his Sphere of Perception. It was, however, affected. When it was at its max range at nearly 30 meters, everything felt murky. The air itself looked almost liquid, obscuring everything.

It was mana - extremely dense mana. And the mana wasn't the pure kind Jake was used to, but altered in some way. If he had to make an educated guess, he would say that it was dark-affinity mana, or maybe shadow-affinity mana or something like that.

What mattered was the effect of it. It obscured sight completely, making anyone in it blind.

Jake decided to try creating some light as he took out some wood from his spatial storage. His Alchemical Flame didn't produce much light but heat it made plenty of, allowing him to set fire to the wooden stick quickly.

The wood caught fire as a flame sprung forth. But that was where the expected stopped.

It clearly burned, and he could see the flame. The light, however, was as if contained within the flame itself. Like a dark barrier blocked any light from reaching beyond the flickering fire.

He tried putting his hand into the fire, and it only got eerier. It was like a vacuum of light appeared wherever his hand was. He didn't see his hand, but merely a black hand-shaped object enter. It was as if the concept of light itself wasn't allowed to exist.

Was that the gimmick of this dungeon? That one had to do it in absolute blindness?

While it wasn't optimal, Jake would be able to manage with his sphere. But he had to do something about the murkiness. He closed his eyes, more out of habit than function, focusing on the sphere. He had done so many times before, either extending the range slightly or, as he did currently, limiting the range.

30 meters quickly became 25...21...18...16...13....11...10. When it reached around 10 meters, Jake stopped as everything was now far clearer. Like putting on on prescription glasses, everything had turned from a blurry outline to nearly perfect once more.

He could now finally begin to inspect the details around him. While he couldn't see them, he could easily guess from their shapes what everything was. He also became aware that it wasn't because his sphere couldn't see through the darkness, but because it could see too much of it. The mana was so dense it started flowing together, but with his sphere reduced in size, he could far more easily distinguish the physical objects from the dense mana.

The walls were made of bricks, the floor beneath him made up of cracked and dirty tiles, while the ceiling above was arched. Overall, he would call it a very stereotypical sewer.

He started walking forward as he got more used to the new environment. Weirdly enough, he actually liked the darkness. It felt comfortable, like a warm summer breeze. He didn't like the whole not-seeing part and the horrible stench, but otherwise, it could be worse.

After walking less than ten meters, his sphere picked up something ahead - a crossroad. There was a hallway leading to both the right and to the left. He could also just continue onward, but this did make him stop and think.

Oh god, is this a damn maze? Jake cursed internally as he stood in the middle of the crossroad. Why the hell did it have to be a maze?

All the damn hallways were identical, with not a single sign of enemies or any markings anywhere. So, Jake did what any reasonable person would do when in a maze and went left. Not because of anything particular; he just kind of had to pick left.

He had decided to with the age-old method of just always turning left and following the left wall until he found the exit. If the dungeon had an exit. While it wasn't the fastest method, it was far safer than just walking around randomly.

Besides, it wasn't like he had to slowly walk all the time. Picking up the pace, he started running through the sewer as he stuck to the left wall. It didn't even take him a minute and a few hundred meters before he encountered a change.

On the wall was a pipe of some sorts. It was rather large, easily big enough for Jake to walk through if he lowered his head a bit, that is. The thing about it that made him stop, however, was what lay within it.

A four-legged figure was within the pipe, less than a meter from the entrance. It was unfurred with two big front teeth sticking out of its mouth. The rest of its face was just two big holes for its nose. It didn't have eyes or ears from what Jake could observe.

As he inspected the unmoving beast in his sphere, he got the thought to try and Identify it. The skill didn't specify that one needed to use one's eyes to Identify something. It was just the most natural thing, and he had never needed to not just look at whatever he identified.

He tried focusing on the beast as he mentally tried using the skill. It didn't work at first, but it was like a switch flipped, and suddenly the skill reacted.

[Molerat Creeper – lvl 76]

The first thing he was a bit taken aback by was the level. It was as high as the White Does and nearly as high as the Den Mother had been.

Of course, he had also to consider other factors. The molerat was alone, and the level wasn't everything to consider when determining how strong a beast is. It was still pretty high, though.

More annoyingly, though, was the layout of the maze. Jake had no conceivable way to attack the beast from range - in front of the pipe was a wall only a few meters away, and there was only one way forward or going back from where he came.

It was pretty clear from the molerat posture that it was sitting in ambush as the nose rose up and down slightly. It had likely already detected Jake long before he noticed it and was now just waiting for him to get closer.

Jake thought for a bit before he pulled out his bow. The beast didn't have any ears from what he could see, but maybe it could still hear somehow. He raised his bow and, as silently as possible, nocked an arrow. He carefully pulled back the string as he fired a weak arrow, aiming for the wall in front of the pipe.

The arrow flew out and hit the stone, making a very audible *clink* echo through the entire tunnel. Jake gritted his teeth at the noise while the mole rat only seemed to slightly raise its nose a bit more.

Both blind and deaf... Jake noted mentally. Likely their only way of perceiving anything was through smell. Of course, it was also entirely possible that they had some kind of extrasensory ability.

Jake decided to take the risk and started walking forward as if he hadn't noticed the rat. He walked at the wall opposite of the pipe as he got right in front of it. His already poisoned dagger and sword ready.

The instant he did, the beast lunged forward. Of course, Jake was ready as he instantly stepped backward, making it smash into the wall. It clearly hadn't expected him to do that as it seemed to hurt itself quite a bit.

His next action didn't leave it much room to maneuver as he attacked it with his dagger and sword. It didn't even manage to collect itself before it got several deep cuts. It jumped backward, losing half of its snout in the process.

However, it was Jake's time to be surprised as the beast was attacking him again. What surprised him was the precision of its attack and how it aimed straight for his neck. It clearly couldn't see anything, and yet it managed to go for his jugular somehow.

With its snout cut off, he also doubted it could smell anything. So how the hell did it see him? Was it magic? It hadn't used any magical skills yet, making Jake doubt it.

He wrestled a bit with the beast, kicking it back once more. He didn't finish it off as he was more interested in learning how it located him. He tried jumping back and to the side, but it followed him quickly.

Jake tried a few different things. His first thought was that it somehow detected mana. He tried to summon a ball of strings in his hand but found it quite challenging to do for some reason. He eventually managed to do it anyway, but the mana consumption was way above average. Something for later, he noted mentally.

What was most important was that it didn't seem to react to his mana at all; it just continued its frenzied assault. He tried a few other things until he tried summoning his Alchemical Flame. He instantly felt the beast focus on his hand as it attempted to bite it off.

Smiling in self-satisfaction, Jake rushed forward, no longer wasting his time with the wounded beast. A solid stab to the heart later, and the rat stopped moving, followed by a kill notification a few moments later.

It was the heat - the beast could see his body heat despite the dark-affinity mana. It was an evident strength, but also a massive weakness if exploited. Something he was happy to do.

He continued onwards for a while until he came across yet another pipe. This one had two Creeper's within it, though. It didn't matter much to him, as the things weren't all that strong. Weaker than the White Does by far despite the similar levels.

Standing ten meters away, he took out his bow and got an arrow from the quiver. The conjured arrows imitated reality very well, even to the point of the wood being flammable. His Flame sprung forth on his hand as he ignited the arrow. He could clearly see the rats react within the hole as they seemed very interested in what he was doing.

Firing the arrow at the wall as he had tried with the last rat, he this time got the response he wanted. Both beasts jumped out towards the arrow without hesitation as Jake followed up with a Splitting Arrow. The creatures discovered nearly instantly that they had been bamboozled, but his feint had bought enough time for them to be peppered with arrows.

10 meters didn't seem like a lot, but in a relatively narrow tunnel, it sure as hell wasn't when a dozen or so arrows were flying at you at once. Both beasts were hit with arrow after arrow as they attempted to rush towards him. One died before it even reached him, while the second one fell shortly after. Of course, he had remembered to poison the arrows beforehand - only the best for his new creepy rat friends.

Moving on, he thought about how one was meant to do this normally. Without his sphere, that is. Unless one had some powerful light-affinity item or-

Oh... oh.

Jake smacked himself mentally as he looked into this storage and fished out an item he had collected plenty of. A small stone he had found within one of the many ponds in the Lucenti Plains.

The moment it appeared, the darkness was pushed back for nearly two meters around him as light and color returned.

There was only one minor problem... the stone hurt to hold, and it only took a few seconds before it ran out of energy and became inert. Jake assumed you could channel more mana into it to make more light, but sadly Jake couldn't do that, as the light-affinity and he clearly didn't get along. Besides... he actually preferred the total darkness. It felt more comfortable than the light-affinity mana given off by the stones.

Throwing the broken rock on the ground, he moved on, focusing on his sphere and the dense mana all around him.

Well, maybe this isn't going to be that bad after all, Jake thought to himself as he continued onward. Following the left wall, of course.

The archer had been there - corpses on the ground all around, badgers dead in droves. An entire valley cleared out, in fact.

William had entered the inner area right after getting rid of Jacob.

He couldn't help but frown when he entered the inner area. He found many corpses after searching around for a bit, many of them killed days, maybe even more than a week ago. The tutorial panel still showed two people alive, and William refused to believe it not to be that bastard Jake.

But after searching for a long time, he didn't find anyone. Not wanting to waste much time, he, of course, began grinding some levels. Being level 54 in his class, William didn't gain that much experience from the lesser beasts he encountered, but he managed to make do with sheer numbers.

He started clearing the valleys and mountains one by one. Like a meat grinder, he slaughtered everything living he saw. Eventually, he found himself before a hole in one of the five weird mountains. A tunnel of some kind clearly.

This was the smallest mountain with all the badgers around it, and William couldn't help but inspect what may be found inside.

Within, he noticed a door sitting in the middle of it all - a totally out of place wooden door.

Floating down by manipulating his armor, he landed in front of it as he inspected it for a while. Summoning a sword from the armory in his armor, he tried pushing the door open. It didn't work as the sword couldn't even touch the door, as if a forcefield surrounded it, less than an inch from its surface.

William tried a few other things until he tried poking it with his finger. When he did so and saw the system message, he couldn't help but make a giant grin, and with a thought, he disappeared into the Badger's Den.