Illuminaria
Spring Fall
Chapter 163 / B3-8

Please feel free to make comments, corrections, and suggestions on this document.
You all are given commenter rights to these docs.



Chapter 163 / 8: Hellish Training

Joe had gotten used to stepping into the long stretch of terrain that was far too big to fit into the block the guildhouse was on. Joe was always amused by the fact that if you walked down Skill Street, the lane that ran alongside the guildhouse, there was only a brief section of wall, maybe a dozen strides in length, that corresponded to the backyard where these massive fields were spatially folded into.

This time, the training field was even larger than usual, so much so that Joe couldn't even spot the far walls. It was as if he were standing on the edge of a vast open plain dotted by a number of stands of trees. In the far distance, Joe was able to make out that the grassland ran into what looked like a dense forest.

"Take a minute to work out your strategies, and then we'll get going," Myllo announced as he headed for a spacious gazebo. Vexor, Kerrig, and Taylyn were already there. It was pretty clear that those not directly involved in the upcoming skirmishing would observe the confrontations from what looked to be a very comfortable pagoda.

Kendell huddled the group up and initiated a party request.

PARTY	Name	Level	Health	Stamina	Mana
	Earcellwen	15	700	1768	618
	Hah'roo	24	697	2197	1314
	Kendell	18	925	2353	1278
	Tezeno	18	2941	4225	738
	Yuk	?	883	1872	1266
	Joe	15	2185	3133	8718
	• Finn	17	1249	2665	273
	• Mojo	3	43	130	63

"I think we should try a formation first," she suggested. "I know we don't have any actual formation magic, but it's the easiest way to watch each other's backs."

Glancing around the circle and getting all nods from her teammates, she continued. "Tez, you're the anchor. Joe and I will triangle around Wen, giving our artillery cover. Yuk and Hah'roo, you two will be our wings. I know Yuk's choices, and I'm guessing you'd want to be a mobile striker, too, Hah'roo," the skill savant asked the white skinned huntress.

"That would suit me best," Hah'roo replied, "but I can also slot into the line if needed."

“I think we are going to need you to keep Naragash busy. She is a nightmare to fight. Joe, focus on support as much as you can.”

“I don’t think you should keep Mojo with you,” Tezeno expressed in his monotone voice. “At least not until we have a gauge on how badly we are overmatched.”

“Yeah. That’s a good idea. Thanks, Tez.” Joe sent Mojo a thought that he needed to stay under the canopy and to be nice to Taylyn. The shug monkey was still obsessed with the little mouseling bombardier and needed to pump the brakes on his overly enthusiastic attempts at being affectionate with her.

“Our first goal should be to knock out Mortalius,” Kenda remarked. She was referring to the quietest member of the Hellions. As a matter of fact, Joe had not heard the large woman speak even once yet.

Mortalius M’karth: Fomori: Cleric / Graveguard 22

Mortalius was almost as tall as the cambion leader, but her shoulders were easily twice as wide. Fomori were the ogre heritage race, meaning they had hulking body types. She was dressed in pitch-black mail, ornamented with ebon feathers.

“Without their cleric,” Kendell continued, “we remove their ability to easily regain health and clear conditions. They are likely to have the same idea. They’ll be coming after you, Joe.”

“Then, should we shelter Joe with me?” Earcellwen asked.

“Joe is surprisingly resilient,” Hah’roo stated breezily. “If it looks like they are hitting him harder than he can maintain, I will take his place.”

“Alright,” Kenda asserted. “Yuk, I’m going to give you my speed boost. Get out there and layer on as many of your [Poison Bites] as fast as you can. Try to get everyone. Even Zaebos, when Graymuck unkennels him.”

“BBBBrrroooon”

“Right, Broon is immune to poison. Everyone else, then. I want Mortalius busy clearing your toxins while we hammer him. Morty has some devastating AoEs. Let’s not give him the chance to drop one on us. ” She adjusted her breastplate and gave the team a fierce grin. “I know it's not much of a plan, but this is how we learn what will work best for us. You guys ready?” she shouted, sticking her arm out into the middle of the circle.

The rest of the group clapped their palms over the back of her hand in a very sports-like manner. They all let out an affirming yell before moving into position. Joe moved to the left and behind Wen. Kenda mirrored him on the right. Tezeno stepped to the front. Hah’roo and Yuk moved off to either side.

This closely gathered, it was not surprising when Broon took the opportunity to cast an area-effect spell. The gaunt, gray man pointed at the sky, and a black vortex appeared overhead, unleashing a deluge of oily, oozing rain.

Broon Barbone: Revenant (Human): Necromancer / Gravewalker 23

Tezeno raised his hand overhead and yelled, "[Aegis of Order]," which made Joe feel better about his habit of also calling out his spells. The black rain hit a dome over the group and was shunted aside.

"No, ready, set, go?" Kenda contented at the death-mage.

"Consider it a gesture of respect, my dear," crooned the gravewalker with a wicked smirk. "As are these," Broon added.

He swooped a hand upward, and the sound of cracking and clattering emerged from the soil around them. It sounded like something was about to burst out of the ground under their feet, but the sentinel just shook his head. Bony hands popped out of the dirt outside the arcane shield. Joe could hear scratching sounds coming from directly under his taloned toes, but none of the rising skeletons broke through the turf below them.

"It's a sphere, Broon," the archon droned. "Did you really think I'd leave the bottom open?"

The languid revenant pantomimed an exaggerated golf clap as the rest of the Hellions unloaded their attacks. Flaming axes, sizzling arrows, arcane bolts, and a swarm of glowing ravens descended on the four guilders. Meanwhile, outside the barricade, Yuk burst into a swirling swarm, while Hah'roo and Naragash closed for battle.

Joe managed to catch sight of the two melee fighters through the buffeting black wings and magical splashes. If Naragash was holding back, Joe could not imagine facing her at full force. Her enormous bone axe shattered boulders. Only the wind-dancer's inhuman grace and incomprehensible fighting style allowed her to withstand the towering warrior's assault. Joe doubted the Tezeno's sphere would fare well if the half-fiend was also hammering on it.

Joe's team fired through the barrier, since the shield only blocked attacks coming from outside the orb. Joe launched a [Rattlebone] curse, which was unfortunately dispelled by Broon. Even so, Mortalius was hit by an axe, an arrow, and a blot of biting bugs.

"Shield down in five seconds," Tezeno murmured just loudly enough for the group to hear. "Shift left."

The globe was cracking in several places. Joe glanced in the direction Tez had suggested, and sure enough, the sentinel had determined the best direction to gain them some cover if they headed for a nearby pile of boulders.

When the shell shattered, they were already moving, only to find that somehow Reven had gotten to the rocks ahead of them.

Reven Miano: Ignin: Brawler / Burnrager 21

The warrior was a ruddy-skinned ignin, aligned to fire the same way Hah'roo was bound to air. He carried two wicked-looking axes that looked too long to be thrown easily, yet Joe had seen the pair fly into the barrier Tezeno had erected. Reven flicked both weapons up into the air and clapped his hands, launching a fan of embers that engulfed Joe, the three teammates beside him, and the swirling blot that was Yuk. The fiery gladiator caught his axes as the sparks landed on Joe's skin, stinging but not inflicting any real damage. Inexplicably, Joe felt a burst of anger from both himself and the wildness flare up. There was something about those minor, inconsequential burns that really pissed him off.

You have resisted being {Fixated} by Reven's **[Burning Fury]** skill.

The following party members have been afflicted by the condition: Kendell Bracey, Earcellwen Rhuival, and Yuk

"Oh no." Joe did not know what 'Fixated' did, but it could not have been good for his side. With his new and improved [Witch Sight], he could see the affliction as a crown of ethereal flames burning above their heads.

Joe considered using his new Spirit boosting trait, but it had such a long cooldown, he knew he'd only get to use it once this session. Before he resolved his internal debate, an arrow slammed into his chest with so much force it hurled him twenty feet away from his group.

Graymuck's **[Cannon Shot]** has injured you. You have lost 350 health, and you have gained the {Winded} condition.

Thankfully, the arrow had to get through the wolf-pelt, his gambeson, a Thickhide ward, and [Bonemail]. Considering how far it threw him away from where he had been standing, Joe felt lucky he had only lost a sixth of his health. He tried to take a breath, but he only managed a gasping wheeze. Joe used [Purge] on himself to undo the Winded condition, which allowed Reven's enchantment to do its damage. The enthralled members of his team split up.

Wen shifted her focus from the black-garbed cleric to Broon, slipping into the terrain and launching volleys of arrows at the necromancer. Kendell had rushed Lexaroth, much to the warlock's chagrin. Tezeno, who resisted Reven's spell, stayed focused on their primary target, Mortallius.

As Joe got back up onto his clawed feet, Yuk dispersed for a second, only to reform around Joe a moment later. He couldn't help but dance and swat at himself as a hundred tiny mouths began chewing on any exposed skin they found. Even though in the back of his mind he knew he was squashing parts of Yuk, the need to stop the stinging bites was instinctive. [Witch Sight] showed Joe dozens of toxic green blooms appear across his body as Yuk's bites layered stacks of poison on him.

Joe dual-cast [Purge] to rid the mind-altering confusion from Yuk and the stun-like winded state from himself.

“Sssssooooorrrryyy, Jjjjoooo,” the disjointed voices apologized.

“All good. Just go get 'em,” Joe replied as he cleansed himself with [Dispel Noxa], wiping out the poison.

He and Yuk were back on track after just a second, but the damage had already been done. Instead of ganging up on the cleric, the underdogs were spreading their attacks across the varsity team. Concentrating on one enemy at a time would have been a much better tactic. Which was, of course, why Reven used his [Burning Fury] skill.

Yuk intercepted the burning axe warrior who was charging Joe. Joe watched the sentient swarm’s health and stamina rapidly decline as they encountered a burning aura around the ignin. Joe boosted the vermin-collective and sent one of his paws to Wen. He’d [Purge] her when it got close.

Kendell was going to be harder to help. She and the warlock were moving all around the battlefield. Like Joe, Lexaroth must have a combat teleport ability. He used it to keep blinking away from Kenda and her whirling hatchets each time she got close. Unfortunately for the new Hellion, the trainer could also hurl her tomahawks quite a long distance. Unless something changed with that pairing, Joe didn’t think Lex would last much longer. Maybe then the amber paw he had chasing the pair could get close enough to [Purge] Reven’s spell of obsession from the young woman.

Joe noted that Graymuck’s gaze was also tracking the pair.

Greymuck: Banderling: Hunter / Beastmaster 22

The archer was a gangly, feral-looking humanoid as tall as Naragash and Mortalius, though he was far reedier in build. Orc-like tusks jutted upward from his lower lip, and long, elf-like, pointed ears speared out of a mop of lanky gray braided hair. The hunter bore a huge bow, and several jawed traps hung from its belt.

The banderling snapped his fingers, and what looked like a stable door appeared in the air. It swung open to disgorge a mottled, shaggy monstrosity, almost as large as Finn.

Zaebos: Level 21: Beast (Hyena, Companion), Brute, Strength

“Go get ‘er.” the fearsome hunter growled, pointing a finger at Kendell’s back, who was lost in her fervent mania, chasing the shrieking warlock.

This was not going well at all. Joe’s team was each paired off with a Hellion, instead of ganging up on a single target. Being the lower-level party, this was a losing tactic. Joe started working on a plan when

the wildness roared from within his gut. Though it lacked actual words, the feral spirit's meaning was perfectly clear. *"Get out of your head, dipshit. Do something!"*
