

Hunter 124

Chapter 124: One Step Mile

The once-great city that Jake had called home for the last few years was nearly unrecognizable. The grand buildings were broken and in tatters, the streets dominated by the reclamation of mother nature.

Jake simply walked down the street at an average pace. Not asphalt but grass and weeds beneath his feet. On the way, he saw several other groups of humans. Some tried to approach him, some observed him warily, while some hid and believed their gazes undetected.

For those who tried to talk, a quick glance was usually enough for them to leave him be. Their inability to identify him without a doubt also playing a role in their decision to avoid him, which was exactly what Jake wanted right now. To be alone.

He was actually quite overwhelmed by the number of people he saw. One often forgets precisely how many people lived in big cities. In the end, it got so bad that Jake had to get off the streets. A quick leap using Badger Jump took him up to the roof of a still-standing four-story apartment building. That also earned him quite a few glances.

Jake needed time to think. His mind was a mess, only exacerbated by getting into a conflict first thing upon returning to Earth. He couldn't even blame Mike. He, too, hurt just as much as Jake, and lashing out was to be expected. They were both assholes. Himself appropriately more so as he had hurt the man for no good reason.

Looking towards the pretty blue sky, he thought of his next steps. What he usually did whenever he felt overwhelmed by something was to drown himself in work or studying. An approach he decided to replicate once again.

He wanted to find somewhere to settle down for a while. To do alchemy and practice and familiarize himself with all his upgraded and new skills. Without any clear direction, he, in the end, settled on just following the advice of the Malefic Viper. To find the territory that the King of the Forest was supposed to occupy.

Glancing about, he located the tallest building still standing. It even still had the radio tower on top.

A quick climb later, mainly consisting of him just penetrating stone with his fingers while climbing, he found himself on top of the tower. From there, he had quite the vantage point and could see the city in all of its decrepit glory.

But more importantly, he could see beyond it. And what he saw wasn't what he expected. The city itself was as he remembered it, save for the destruction, but what lay beyond certainly wasn't.

On one side, he saw a giant lake. Or maybe even an entire ocean. It had to be noted that there wasn't even a beach within a hundred miles before. Besides the lake, on all other sides, there were now only vast plains. Looking about, he could actually see where the roads just suddenly cut off. It was like someone had just plopped down landmasses all around.

Only one side looked somewhat normal. Jake could see the highway still continue outwards, and he could see it all looking relatively normal. There were quite a few things that stumped him, though.

He didn't see a single car anywhere. The radio tower he was on didn't have any of the electronic components either. He still saw plenty of bicycles scattered about but no cars, scooters, busses, or anything like that.

Another thing he noticed was the vast distance he could see - his insanely high perception, coupled with the lack of air pollution, giving him quite the view. However, there was one more thing contributing... the curvature of the Earth. Or more accurately, the lack thereof.

Oh, it was still there. Somewhere. But from where Jake was, it was barely noticeable, if at all. He had to guess that he was a bit more than a hundred meters up currently. And he could easily see hundreds up to perhaps a thousand kilometers away.

In the distance, he even saw a huge mountain range. One that certainly hadn't been there before. It all did begin to get a bit blurry at that distance, but the fact that he could see them was crazy enough.

Of course, he was looking for something rather specific...

Quest: Claim the Pylon of Civilization

As the rightful owner, you may be the first to claim your Pylon of Civilization. As long as this quest is active, no one else can claim it.

Objective: Claim Pylon of Civilization

Duration: 71:02:21

Remembering his original objective, he kept scouting around until he saw it - a huge forest. Naturally, due to the trees, he couldn't grasp its size, but it appeared huge at first glance. It was around fifty kilometers outside of the city or so, across a vast flat plain. His quest also gave him the vague feeling that the Pylon was that way.

Having a target, he jumped down from the building once more. He didn't bother with the frightened glances as he landed on the ground and began sprinting forward. Right now, he just wanted out of the city and away from civilization.

If the Viper was right, then that Pylon should be worth claiming. The Viper had said that the Nobility: Lord title allowed him to take control of it. Jake didn't have the faintest interest in creating a city, but chances are there would be some kind of reward associated with taking control of it anyway.

It didn't take him more than ten minutes to reach the outskirts of the city. On the journey, he was only attacked once. By humans even. A stupid accident where a bunch of arguing idiots got scared and threw a couple of spells at him.

He just ignored them as they missed, but his sheer speed was clearly enough to deter them and make them run away. The conflict he saw also wasn't just a one-off.

Many different groups found themselves in conflict. None of which Jake gave a shit about as he ran by. It wasn't his job to be a mediator. Life would no longer be safe, and laws didn't really matter anymore. No way he was going to begin playing judge, jury, and executioner towards random people. Oh, but there were three men ganging up on a woman and two kids, so he 'accidentally' loosed a Splitting Arrow, blowing off a few legs.

Getting to the plains, he finally felt free. Enemies had been scarce within the city. If you ignored all the humans, that is. Only a few roamed about, most of them weak. On these plains, however, he saw far more action. The first thing he encountered was a group of... cows. Yep, cows.

Identifying some, he discovered that they were all only F-grade.

[Bovine Stomper – lvl 19]

Jake smiled a bit to himself. He didn't even notice it himself as he found the silliness of cows being the first true challengers he would meet upon his return to Earth. He didn't count the stupid lizard.

Not that he had any intention of fighting the things. It would be pointless. None of them would give him any experience worth noting, and from his kill on the lizard, he also saw no replacement for tutorial points. Kills just gave experience, and that was it.

Evading the beasts, he finally came to the open ground - just a vast flat area in front of him with the rare creature here and there. It was the perfect opportunity to try something he had wanted to do ever since getting his tutorial rewards.

Focusing on the skill, he took a step forward. It was like his vision zoomed in, the ground between where he wanted his foot to land and where he was shrunk. The moment his foot landed, so had he moved the distance.

In a single step, he had traveled more than fifty meters. Not quite the distance promised by the name One Step Mile, but to Jake, it was more than enough for now. It was just straight-up teleportation. In an instant, he had just warped space itself to travel forward.

It was the kind of thing that he found inconceivable despite just doing it himself. He didn't understand how the skill worked at all behind the scenes. He could feel mana and stamina's flow for most of his other skills to at least get some grasp on what it did.

It felt like he just took a standard step with One Step Mile, and space itself warped for him. He knew this had to be him somehow manipulating or perhaps being assisted by the concept of space. A type of force or phenomenon he was far from understanding.

It was like how he could bend time with Moment of the Primal Hunter or directly attack the soul with Gaze of the Apex Hunter. He knew how to do it, but not how he did it. In other words, system-stuff. Despite him not currently getting shit, he was nevertheless confident. He had time - time to understand it all.

Looking at his consumption of resources, he was even more pleasantly surprised. It had only taken a trivial amount of stamina to use. Not a single point of mana either. Of course, he needed more tests and experiments. Something the fifty or so kilometers to the forest was just perfect for.

His travel went rather uneventfully except for the events he caused himself. He had engaged a few beasts to try the skill out in combat. Which was an excellent thing as it was hard as hell to use. Currently, he had to really focus to use it, which was fine and all when just traveling, but not so much when fighting.

The important part, however, was that it did work in combat. If a bit iffy to use.

One thing was that he actually had to take steps in order for it to activate. Raise his leg, focus on where to go, and then put said foot down again. Which, again, was totally not an issue when running or walking, but a bit problematic when fighting.

The first problem with that being actually having to be on the ground as Jake often jumped and dodged a lot, resulting in him being airborne a lot of the time. The second problem was that he had to make the stepping motion, which he couldn't do while crouching. The third being the fact that the step had to be forward and not backward. In other words, he couldn't backpedal with it.

The last problem he solved rather quickly, though. The skill required him to 'see' where he was going. And, well, as he could 'see' 360 degrees around himself with his sphere, he could use that as a guide. Admittedly, it did look quite funny when he effectively moonwalked through space.

To sum it up, the skill was fantastic but hard to use at maximum efficiency. It would take a long time to practice to use it well in combat, but once more, Jake had time. It would be a good distraction while not doing alchemy, at least.

In the end, it only took him a few hours to travel through the plains. Far slower than if he just ran normally, but the practice was worthwhile. It also helped him get a better understanding of the power of enemies on Earth currently.

To his surprise, the stupid lizard was actually quite strong compared to everything else he saw. Most weren't even level 25 yet, and those that were often led their flock of fellow beasts. He had kind of expected them all to be a lot stronger. It was like he had returned to the outer zone of the tutorial once more.

But thinking on it a bit more, it did make sense in some ways. The other humans he met were all pathetically weak. Only Jacob and Bertram were worth mentioning. He only saw a handful of other people in the city that had reached level 25 in their race.

It was just him being an outlier. Perhaps it was a good idea to lay low for a while. Besides, he still had one comfort. A bit weird to think of it as a comfort, he confessed internally. He had feared for a second that he couldn't get any proper challenges. But then he remembered.

The other inner zones, or danger zones. Areas led by D-grades and which had many late-stage E-grades within - locked areas that were just ripe for the taking. Fish in a barrel waiting for him to grow in power and strike. Of course, he didn't have infinite time... but unless the system planned for all humans on Earth to be wiped out, he should have some time.

And according to the Viper, other places would exist, too, with many D-grades. Jake couldn't help but imagine what could be found in the deepest oceans, the furthest into the forests or the highest mountains.

Shaking his head, he looked into the forest he stood in front of. The trees were tall, and many of them even the same type as had been in the tutorial. Stepping into the forest, he felt like he had returned to the tutorial once more. He even instinctually kept an eye out for hidden lockboxes.

It was nice. Jake heard the chirping of birds and saw them soon after. They were low level, only in the single digits. They looked normal, just like before the system. Which made sense as they hadn't had any evolutions yet.

Of course, he recognized they could still likely kill an average pre-system human. The size wasn't the determining factor for how powerful something is, after all. Just take himself compared to the stupid lizard. It was bigger and stronger looking, and yet it died to a single normal arrow in the head.

The birds ignored him as he walked beneath them. Perhaps sensing his power or maybe just not interested in fighting. It would explain their low levels. Either way, he was able to walk without any interruptions.

Most beasts got out of his way, seemingly afraid of him as the raptors had been during the tutorial. There were some stupid animals that attacked him anyway, such as a small swarm of wasps that were barely level 10 and some overly ambitious fire-spewing squirrel-thing called a Maki. The wasps died by just looking at them hard with Gaze of the Apex Hunter while the level 10 squirrel died to a solid kick.

After walking for an hour, he had to say that the forest was indeed huge. Far more extensive than the plains he was on before. Yet, he wasn't afraid of being unable to locate his target. He could already feel it.

The mana in the air got denser the further he got in. But not just denser, it started to become less passive. As if something was influencing it. Every once in a while, he felt the mana change again - not a change of affinity, but more like it became another person's or beast's mana for a few moments. But only a very minor, almost unnoticeable part of it. Without the Sagacity of the Malefic Viper skill, he doubted he would even be able to feel it.

Another hour later, and he was close. The level of beasts he encountered was also growing. Before, there were barely any above level 25. Now he was lucky, or perhaps unlucky, to see one below 30. Whatever drew him there clearly also attracted the beasts.

Finally, his sphere picked up an open area ahead. A few seconds later, his vision caught up as he saw what was going on.

Floating in the middle of the small clearing was a transparent crystal. It was about the size of a human being and emanated a powerful aura of mana. Around it lay hundreds of dead beasts, all of varying species. Only one remained alive.

[Savage Mole Lord – lvl 61]

Thought it was a bear. It was huge and bulky, with long sharp claws. More noticeable, it had Lord in its name. Feeling its aura, Jake also recognized this was the thing that kept influencing the crystal that he assumed was a Pylon of Civilization. It tried to control it but kept failing, likely because the system had 'reserved' it for Jake already.

At the same time as Jake saw it, it too saw him. But to his surprise, it didn't attack him. It just stared at him with its tiny eyes. The moment they made eye-contact, it even stumbled back slightly. It was afraid.

But Jake didn't have any intention of letting it go. It was another Lord that had tried to claim what he felt was rightfully his. He didn't know if what it did to the Pylon would negatively affect him either. So he moved.

Using One Step Mile, he appeared right before it. Now it no longer hesitated as it attacked him. It was the strongest being he had seen on Earth so far. By quite a margin. It was both fast and strong for its level. Sadly it had met a being that had thrived even more than itself in this new world.

Its claws were stopped dead by a small sword. At the same time, a dagger plunged into its chest, releasing deadly toxins. It tried to fight back, but quickly it was stabbed again until it was smashed to the ground by a blast of pure mana - a final dagger-strike digging its way through its skull, ending its life.

Jake dismissed his weapons as he let the mole's corpse join all the others already lying there. He ignored them all for now as he went to the crystal. He felt its mana as it appeared to beckon him.

Placing his hand on it, he was met with a message.

Congratulations on discovering a Pylon of Civilization! Lord title requirements met. Do you wish to claim this Pylon?

Without thinking about it further, he accepted - a decision he would both rejoice and curse at in the future.