

Hunter 139

Chapter 139: Going Up

Chugging a health potion, Jake opened his eyes once more and wiped the blood away. He was currently flapping his wings, trying to keep himself in the air as he saw the hawk gaze back at him like he was an idiot for talking to thin air. But its look was now not only of ridicule but now containing a hint of fear and respect, which gave him a silly sense of satisfaction for one-upping a freaking bird.

Villy being a peeping tom was something he honestly didn't even notice anymore. Maybe the tutorial where many gods observed him all the time had desensitized him, but he did notice when suddenly three new observers joined after no one but Villy looking since returning to Earth. How exactly he knew... well, it was just his intuition.

He took a quick glance at his notifications and saw that he had killed 641 birds with his Gaze. This was the first time he used it with full power and the intent to kill and not immobilize - the effect was way above his expectations. Not a single bird below E-grade survived, and even the weaker ones in E-grade died instantly.

Jake had chosen the skill for its ability to immobilize his foes. To have a skill that made use of his high perception. But today, his eyes were opened to exactly how potent the skill was. It wasn't just its ability to kill, but how it did it.

Not a single one of the dead birds had any wounds. Their bodies were completely unharmed. Instead, their souls had been completely and utterly shattered by the Gaze. The attack had been instantaneous and unavoidable. As long as they were within his line of sight and he intended to hit them, they would be affected.

The backlash he suffered was more due to his own inexperience with the skill than the skill itself. He had pushed more power into it than he could handle, which caused his eyes to suffer damage. But it was nothing a healing potion couldn't solve in seconds.

Flying down, he managed not to screw up the landing entirely as he only took a few stumbling steps. The hawk followed him, perching itself on a tree nearby. Jake could feel how tired it was as it rested its eyes for a moment.

Jake also sat down on the ground as he entered meditation. The first thing he did was to check the notifications. The birds he had killed with his Gaze had all been between level 10 and 37. Sadly the experience gained wasn't really worth much due to the significant level-disparity.

Next, he checked the upgraded skill.

[Advanced Archery (Common)] – An Archer's best friend is the bow in his hand and the arrow in his foe's heart. You have shown improved proficiency with a bow, making the weapon even more familiar to you. Adds a minor bonus to the effect of Agility and Strength when using a ranged weapon.

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[Expert Archery (Uncommon)] – An Archer's best friend is the bow in his hand and the arrow in his foe's heart. You have proven yourself an expert with your chosen weapon and are fast approaching the level of mastering your craft. Adds a small bonus to the effect of Agility and Strength when using a ranged weapon.

It wasn't fascinating either, despite how much he had anticipated it. It was a simple and boring skill that just made his archery slightly better. It didn't give him any knowledge of any kind. It was more just a confirmation that he had reached a level of proficiency - unlike his Basic Twin Fang Style, which gave him limited knowledge and guidance for melee combat.

He did remember that Casper told him how the Basic Archery skill gave him knowledge of using a bow upon first entering the tutorial. Knowledge Jake, of course, already had.

Closing down his menus once more, he instead focused on recovering his dwindling stamina pool. He and the hawk had been flying around for a few hours before the flock attacked them. It had already been more than half an hour into the fight before Jake decided to end it with Gaze of the Apex Hunter.

He and his new bird friend had truly bonded over this past day. And when he said bonded, he meant that his hatred had slowly been replaced by gratitude, while the bird was still condescendingly teaching him how to use his wings properly.

Yet he had a feeling the bird would be a bit nicer after today. Despite its level being higher than his, he believed that he had proven himself stronger. Because he was.

While the hawk was quite strong, even for its level, it didn't make Jake feel threatened at all. It was focused on speed and wind magic. Its attacks mainly comprised of quick and powerful blows that aimed to take the opponent by surprise.

Meanwhile, Jake had his danger sense and, if necessary, Moment of the Primal Hunter that would warn him of any sneak attack well ahead of time. At the same time, he could use Gaze to freeze it and land a blow. The hawk had been hit by a few blasts from the flock before, making him aware of how feeble the bird actually was.

To sum it up, the hawk was a glass cannon - incredible speed and damage, but low toughness and vitality. If he had to guess its stats, he would say nearly all of it was mainly in intelligence and agility, with a respectable amount in wisdom and strength.

Not that he had any intentions of fighting the hawk. They were buddies. And from the bird's actions, it clearly didn't intend on fighting him either.

After meditating for an hour, he opened his eyes once more. The cooldown for potions being over, he took two stamina potions out and downed one of them. The hawk saw him do this, as it gave him a knowing glance. With a slight chuckle, he tossed the stamina potion up in the air, only for it to be swept up in a gust of wind, landing in the talons of the hawk.

He spread his wings once more as they, in concert, took to the air.

They flew around for a few hours, bumping into a few wayward birds that quickly met their end to the blades of wind. Soon the hawk began flying back towards wherever it left to the day before, and like the day before, it stopped Jake's attempt to follow.

So Jake did as last time and landed once more. He didn't do any alchemy this time but instead began testing out his upgraded archery skill. There was not a lot to test, but he wanted a better idea of how effective the increase in the effect of attributes actually was.

It didn't take him long to discover the faint improvements. The string slightly more comfortable to pull; the arrow was flying slightly faster and carrying an almost negligible amount more power. It was small, nearly to the point of being unnoticeable, but any bonus was a welcome one.

After firing off a few more arrows to get a better feel for it, he thought about what to do next. It was either alchemy or a bit of solo flying practice. His decision, in the end, landed on flying practice. The kind he didn't practice with the bird.

Flying up a little, he tried his best at hovering. To flap his wings and have the rest of his body remain as stable as possible. He could already imagine how effective he would be if he became able to actively fight with his bow while flying at the same time.

But that was far off, as he couldn't even correctly hover in the air yet. His flying practice was something that would simply take time and effort. It wasn't something that should be rushed.

It was like a human child – in this case, an adult - learning to walk. Despite it being such a simple thing for any regular non-disabled adult, that didn't mean it was entirely instinctual. It wasn't like breathing, making your heart pump. It took conscious effort and trained motor controls, and people who later in their life had to learn to walk or went through retraining took time to do so.

The skill itself didn't give him any hint or help with flying, so he was indeed a newborn bird in the sky. His only real help was his monstrous stats, which allowed for his suboptimal movements to let him fly. No matter how sillily or horribly he did so.

By the end of the day, when the hawk returned, he still hadn't learned to hover, but it was getting better by the hour. The two took to the air as they this time flew straight up. Higher than Jake had ever been before.

Before, they had never gone higher than a few kilometers. Jake had quickly learned that the skies had their own separate ecosystem from the ground below. Different flying creatures dominated above. The higher one went, the stronger they were.

Below 5 kilometers, one barely encountered anything in E-grade. The flock they ran into earlier being an incredible outlier. They were like locusts scouring the low skies, killing any other bird or flying creature on their way.

Above a couple more kilometers, one began running into the occasional stronger monster. Which is the threshold the two of them had just passed. But the hawk didn't show any intention of stopping or even slowing down.

They passed by a few low-hanging clouds, the hawk purposefully avoiding them. Jake peered into one of them and understood why. Within were several unnatural movements. He couldn't quite discern as to what they were - a natural phenomenon or perhaps a monster. Either way, he decided to rely on the hawk's expertise and avoid the clouds for now.

Monsters of many kinds appeared in his vision as they continued. Many different types of birds, even ones he had never seen anything like before. One looked like a flamingo but had two sets of wings. Another was just a big balloon-like bird that looked like it quite honestly didn't belong up there.

None of them had a level above 50, making Jake and the hawk ignore them entirely, but as they kept flying further and further up, that started to change fast.

At eight and a half kilometers, they encountered a not-so-friendly giant wasp that tried to sting Jake. This resulted in Jake just catching the stinger and with his hands on the thing, spreading death through it with Touch of the Malefic Viper. It had only been level 61, so Jake honestly didn't know where it got the guts to attack him from.

At 10 kilometers, they had to avoid a brawl between two giant flocks of birds. Thousands of birds in each flock were ripping into each other. They were relatively weak individually, most still not in E-grade yet, but their sheer sizes made up for it.

Jake felt tempted just to use Gaze of the Apex Hunter but decided against it pretty quickly. It was pointless to do, and he quite honestly wasn't keen on the idea of committing bird-genocide for no reason.

This kept up as they flew upwards. The hawk had clearly been up here many times before as it swiftly dismembered any bird that attacked it while avoiding flocks and stronger-looking monsters. Jake felt more like a tag-along but had no complaints.

He was blown back by the sights he saw. It indeed was an entirely new world up there. But he did wonder why it was like this. The hawk had clearly shown a need to land once in a while. To rest. While he didn't doubt that some monsters could rest while remaining in the air, he seriously doubted any of the more common-looking birds could.

At 15 kilometers, they encountered their first challenge – the word challenge being said relatively lightly. It was a small group of three hulking birds. They looked like vultures that had gone to the gym 6 days a week, never forgetting wing or talon day - all of them the same level at 87.

It was a bit novel to encounter such strength-focused birds. They attacked the pair as one of them went for Jake and the two others the hawk. The hawk danced around them effortlessly as the wind cut into them, while Jake met the brute in melee.

Luckily for him, it didn't even try to dodge but just smashed into him, trying to pierce him with its sharp talons. He summoned his sword and dagger, blocking the foot with the sword as he plunged the dagger into the leg of the vulture.

They kept tussling for a while before Jake managed to get in a few good blows to its stomach and lower body. The wounds didn't look lethal, but they sure as heck were. The dagger was releasing its innate venom with every stab, only further amplified by Jake coating the blade with his blood.

The hawk had managed to finish off one of its vultures when Jake's failed to keep itself airborne. It began falling to the ground as he flew over and helped the hawk finish off the last vulture. The one he had been fighting dying half-way through as it succumbed to the poison before even hitting the ground.

It had been a relatively easy and fast fight, which was why he was surprised as the message popped up with the death of the last vulture.

'DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 84 - Stat points allocated, +4 free points

'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 77 - Stat points allocated, +5 free points

It was his first level in his class since returning to Earth, and he had a feeling that the sky would be the source of a lot more levels and unique experiences.

"Of course, my lord," the first sister quickly agreed to the Viper forbidding them from speaking of the mortal. Her two sisters were nodding along fervently.

"All is good then. Now, on to official business," The Malefic Viper said, getting up off the bed while summoning a robe. The women following his lead as they, too, conjured a dress each.

"My Order has turned to shit in my absence. I don't blame anyone but myself for this. I wallowed in self-pity for long enough," he said with a big sigh before continuing.

"I plan on getting shit in order. With only a single hall right now, we are confined to only a small part of this universe. I fear that my name has begun to be forgotten. Time to change that."

"What are you planning, my lord?" the second sister asked, excitement in her voice.

"I don't care for expansion much. Faith is not a big part of my path anyhow, and I couldn't give less of shit about how many faithful believers I have. No, I want to consolidate our power in this part of the universe first. Make it like the good old days. Then we can expand from there."

"You mean?" the third sister asked, stars in her eyes.

"Exactly. Send out warnings to every single faction and deity within this sector. Give them a week to either pack up and get the fuck out or to come here and swear allegiance. Make my word echo through the multiverse, so all know my message. Those that don't listen... well," the ancient Primordial said, with a big smile, "a show of force has never done any harm either."

"Additionally, I want you three to formally return to the Order once more. Having only Snappy and I as known gods is a bit too little. I want each of you to take a leadership position to help get this entire organization back on track."

“Once the Hall Master, as well as the branch leaders, return from Nevermore, I want one of you to take charge and guide her and lead the Order. She is your descendant, so that part should be easy enough. Another one of you takes charge of the academy, while the last takes care of managing the governed area of the Order and assisting me in taking any newly conquered land under our wing. You decide between yourselves who does what. Any objections?”

“We are more than willing to serve,” the first sister said, talking for all three of them.

“Good. I already informed Snappy to bring back the other leaders, so you may as well begin preparing now,” he said, nodding at the three women.

Looking at the messy bed, however, he added. “Though I guess we do have a bit of time.”

A request none of them had to hear twice. A few hours and plenty of ‘exercise’ later, the Viper walked out of the chamber, leaving the three women resting in the bed. He felt quite proud if he had to say so himself. Tiring out gods to the point of exhaustion was no easy feat.

Teleporting, he stepped into a giant laboratory with only a single old man in it. He was currently tending to a giant tree that appeared to be wholly rotten yet gave out an overpowering amount of life-affinity mana.

“Duskleaf, my dear disciple,” the Viper said with a big smile, the old man not reacting at all.

“Come on, old pal, don’t be mad,” he tried again, only to continue to be ignored entirely. So he tried something else.

“My, quite the tree you have made here. Your own creation, I presume? Very impressive.”

This time he got a reaction. “A tree someone, especially my so-called ‘master’ would be fully aware of if he didn’t keep breaking his promises actually to do some – any – alchemy with me.”

“Look, I know I fucked up, but I just had too much to deal with,” he tried to explain, being quickly cut off.

“Like sleeping with those witches? Or staring at Jake creepily? Or have you found a new deplorable hobby?” Duskleaf sneered. Clearly still mad.

“Okay, okay. Jeez. I even came here with something I thought you would want to hear,” the Viper muttered.

“We are doing an experiment?” Duskleaf beamed, all his anger momentarily forgotten.

“No, not that,” the Viper said, Duskleaf instantly deflating. “But! It is still a good suggestion. I plan on doing a bit of restructuring and improvements around here, and I want you to come out of hiding and take up a more official position in the Order.”

“How can that in any way be construed as good for me?” Duskleaf sighed.

“Listen, I want you to take the position as principal of the academy. One of the witches will help you do all the boring stuff; I just want you to have the title. The only work I will ask of you to do is to be involved in the next enrollment of alchemy students in a few years,” the Viper explained.

“I still don’t get it,” the old alchemist said, clearly not keen on the idea. “Why the heck would I want to be involved in enrollment of all things?”

“I think a certain student I plan on convincing to join will be of particular interest to you,” the Malefic Viper smiled deeply.

“... Let me guess, you haven’t even asked Jake yet?”

“I am sure he is 100% on board! Who doesn’t like having an extra school-arc in their lives!?”