

Hunter 160

Chapter 160: Can I?

Jake stood on the small island of clouds with Hawkie still at his side. The hawk had been giving him inquisitive looks for the last few hours as Jake had just been standing there, staring at the giant creature in the distance while recovering his resources.

[Storm Elemental – lvl ???]

Can I?

He honestly wasn't sure. The Thunder Roc had been far easier to take down than expected, but he was well-matched against it. His poisons worked wonders as it was flesh and blood, its defenses were weak, and it had been barely D-grade.

The Storm Elemental gave him the feeling that it was slightly stronger... and that was ignoring how bad of a matchup it was for him. His poisons were borderline useless. Even the poison mist from his wings would be ineffective, as there was a constant current of air surrounded the elementals, blowing away the poison.

Arrow of the Ambitious Hunter was still useful, but it could only be used once as it simply took too long to summon another arrow. He had thought of having Hawkie join him, but... without sounding rude, the bird would only get in the way.

He doubted the bird's attacks would do much harm to the Storm Elemental and instead just end up getting fried by the streaming bolts of lightning within its body. It would only distract Jake, making him worried about the bird throughout it all.

Jake's mana bolts would do damage, but far from enough to bring down the massive elemental. Sure, if he could just bombard it constantly from far away without it fighting back, he could maybe... wait a second.

Why couldn't he just do that?

Cloud Elementals were slow as hell, and he assumed the Storm Elemental to be no different. He saw it mulling about close to the massive tree at the center of the cloud continent, and its movements were slow. Sure, due to its enormous size, it still traveled tens of meters a second, but to Jake... that was actually pretty damn unimpressive.

Can I?

What if he just stayed... tens of kilometers... no... even further away. Finally, put his massive perception and range to good use by being a true sniper.

Hawkie kept looking at him, and as it saw determination begin to form in Jake's eyes, it gave him an encouraging call.

Jake looked up at the hawk as he remembered something. "You collect those beads from the Cloud Elementals... could it be you want the one from that one?"

It gave him another encouraging sound, pretty much confirming it to Jake.

“Why do you need them, anyway?”

Hawkie looked a bit hesitant before finally motioning for him to follow. Jake was still unsure why he should follow, but he was still low on resources from the Thunder Roc fight, so it wasn't like he planned on fighting right away.

Spreading his wings, he glided down after the hawk as he soon noticed the direction they were heading. Hawkie tended to leave nearly every day for a few to over a dozen hours. Jake had tried to follow on prior occasions, but every time the bird rebuffed him.

Yet this time, it wanted him to follow.

Without questioning it, he flew down towards the forest below together with Hawkie. They kept flying at their high speed as Jake noted exactly where they were going.

The forest was absolutely massive, larger than most major continents on the old planet if he had to guess. He saw only trees from far up in the air, some even being at eye-level with him ten kilometers up in the air. He knew that D-grade beasts roamed deeper within. And at the moment, they were going deeper.

Feeling the Pylon's location, it was already hundreds of kilometers away, towards the outside of the forest, yet they kept flying. Deeper and deeper they went, and Jake began noticing the level of the beasts growing below.

He spotted a monkey-like beast at the top of one of the trees at level 73, higher than the Mole Lord that had dominated the area of the forest where his Pylon was.

Minutes passed as they kept going until finally, Hawkie began flying downwards. They were still not in the deeper parts quite yet, but the average level of beasts around there was still on average in the eighties.

What do you have going on this far in? Jake wondered

He had already guessed that the reason why he met Hawkie, to begin with, was that it had been heading towards the cloud continent when it saw him, but he hadn't thought that it lived this deep in.

With his sharp senses, he could even feel D-grades deeper inside... no... one was close. Straight ahead of them, where Hawkie was heading. Is it leading me into a trap? Why would it?

Jake felt a bit of doubt, but he wasn't that afraid. He felt confident in escaping from an early-stage D-grade, and on the way, he had chugged another stamina potion, meaning he was above 70% in all his resources.

Besides... his intuition told him that the hawk didn't wish to cause him any harm.

He didn't believe for a second that Hawkie didn't feel the D-grade ahead either. It was practically projecting its aura in the surrounding area to scare off any other beasts.

The two of them entered what was clearly the territory of a D-grade beast as Jake felt the aura come down on him. He scoffed as he countered with his own, utterly rebuffing it. He didn't fear the presence or aura of the Malefic Viper, and this D-rank beast wanted to suppress him?

Hawkie at his side wasn't affected by the aura at all, or maybe it was just used to it. At least that is what he assumed, as it didn't react.

Jake felt the focus on him intensify, making him fully aware that the beast had some kind of perception skill to zone in on him.

He just kept following Hawkie confidently as they reached a barrier of some kind. It blocked both vision and sound, only allowing the aura of the beast within to get through. And his Sphere of Perception, of course.

Not that he needed it as what was within came out for them.

Jake felt it coming as he landed on the ground. Out of the barrier first came a flash of colors and light before a beast emerged. A small figure with blue mana flashing around it came towards them, stopping only a few meters before him and Hawkie. Hawkie had landed to his side and was already making bird sounds towards the newcomer.

With a quick Identify, he identified this was indeed the D-grade. Well, the aura also made it obvious.

[Mystsong Hawk – lvl ???]

The hawk was about the same size as Hawkie, aka not that much larger than a regular hawk. But while Hawkie was brown, this bird was nearly entirely light blue with deep blue rune-like markings all over its body. It actually reminded him a bit of the Great White Stag with its demeanor. It was a mana-focused bird for sure, something the barrier, and without a doubt, what lay within, was only further proof of.

The two birds were now chirping back and forth, clearly not quite in agreement. Jake smiled a bit to himself as he got the situation. Damn, Hawkie scored a D-grade. Nice.

He couldn't help but mentally give the bird a fistbump. He had to admit that he wasn't even sure if Hawkie was a he or she, but it didn't matter. A score is a score; either way, it was impressive.

"Sorry to butt into the family drama, but what's the deal?" Jake finally asked after more than a minute of intelligible bird-talk. Wasn't he supposed to have some kind of overpowered translation-skill?

Two pairs of eyes turned to him because the shiny bird screeched madly, trying to intimidate him.

"Yeah, no. Anyway, what's inside that barrier you really don't want me to enter?"

The D-grade bird looked a bit baffled at the human who just completely ignored it. A few quick sounds from Hawkie made it look over before looking back at Jake with skepticism.

“The barrier?” Jake asked again, seriously considering just trying to enter it.

Exchanging looks yet another time, Hawkie made a few more sounds before the Mystsong Hawk did what Jake could only interpret as a sigh before turning around and flying back into the barrier. Conveniently leaving a hole more than large enough for Hawkie and Jake to enter.

Jake didn’t need a bird-translator to get that one, as he and Hawkie went through it.

After they entered, the hole in the barrier closed right away. Jake noticed that you could still see out but not into it. It was a bit like the barrier around the Pylon, albeit far weaker from what he gathered.

The inside of the barrier was certainly not as he had expected. A constant white mist covered the entire area, and Jake instantly felt his mana regeneration spike. The mana density within was practically tangible as Jake breathed in.

“Screech!”

Which got him a mad screech from the Mystsong Hawk, clearly telling him to cut it out. Jake got the message as he stopped breathing in the mana. His mana pool was already full anyway; he just wanted to test it a bit.

Hawkie made some more sounds towards its mate, Jake just looking around. The spherical space within the barrier was only forty or so meters across, more than large enough to house the two hawks and the human, but also small enough so that his sphere covered a large part of it.

He observed the inner zone with his sphere and saw that the ground was entirely bare of plants. It had all been replaced with intricate markings and runes, glowing a faint sheen of mana. Specific gathering points with piles of small orbs were also found around the pattern, and Jake identified one of the orbs.

[Cloud Orb (E-grade)] – A cloud orb dropped by an E-grade Cloud Elemental. Contains highly concentrated cloud-affinity mana within.

So this is where Hawkie takes them, he thought. They were clearly powering or amplifying the formation and the source of the abundance of mana in the air. It also explained why it was so misty, as it stemmed from the cloud mana.

Cloud mana was a mix between air and water based on the knowledge his Sagacity of the Malefic Viper provided, but the white clouds leaned far more towards the air-affinity. Why it worked like that, he didn't know, but he reckoned the darker clouds leaned closer to water-affinity. Or wasn't it actually just straight-up lightning and air affinity at that point?

While the formation and the two birds still making sounds at each other were interesting, he saw one thing that gave him pause. The formation was clearly built with a center, and in that center was a small nest. And in that nest, a single egg.

"You two expecting a kid?" Jake asked, his voice actually a bit surprised. He didn't even think about how a D-grade and an E-grade had 'gotten it on' but was genuinely happy for the two hawks. Sure, it was a bit of a fucked up world, but he was happy that his buddy Hawkie had a family.

Both turned to him, Hawkie puffing up a bit with pride, while the D-grade hawk looked at him suspiciously. This earned a few bird-words from Hawkie, as it appeared to want to convince its partner about something.

Wait, how do these birdbrains even understand me? Translation skill or just really smart birds? Well, they are smart birds...Jake thought as he stood there in contemplation about ultimately useless things.

Jake walked a bit closer to the egg to see it with his eyes, which got him a small blast of mana from the Mystsong Hawk, rebuffing him.

“Easy there. I am not going to eat my pal’s kid, geez,” Jake said as he shook his head.

He moved closer to the egg and, under the watchful gazes of the two hawks, squatted in front of the nest.

The egg was small, only a bit bigger than a chicken egg. It had a brown color but had white markings running through it. Jake could feel the intense mana surrounding it and could even faintly feel the life within it. His Sense of the Malefic Viper feeling for the mana sensed strong undulations of wind-affinity mana and pure mana.

“You want the orb of the Storm Elemental, right?” Jake asked after standing up.

Hawkie didn’t hesitate to give an affirming screech.

“Why don’t you just hunt it down?”

He looked at the Mystsong Hawk, which just averted its gaze to the formation around them.

“Ah.. you need to be here for the formation... I guess other powerful beasts are also in the area... got it. Damn Hawkie, seems like you are the breadwinner, forced to take home the orbs. Wait, you stole my orbs too... does that mean I am a contractor...?” Jake said, going on a bit of a tangent.

The Mystsong Hawk looked confused at the Galesong Hawk, which just looked away embarrassed, perhaps beginning to wonder if bringing the weird human to its nest and mate was a good idea or not.

“Well, what’s in it for me?” Jake finally asked, bringing both of the bird’s attention back on him.

It was a question that clearly neither of them had considered. While Jake couldn’t fault the Mystsong Hawk as it had met him only minutes ago, as it clearly didn’t know he was coming based on its reaction, Hawkie was something else.

“I may have given out potions and let you take those beads without asking anything in return, but that was to return the flight-training favor. This is different. You aren’t asking me for some useless baubles but for me to face a D-grade elemental and then give you the loot afterward. Even as a favor for a friend, that doesn’t seem fair.”

His scolding made the Mystsong Hawk glare at Hawkie, while Hawkie looked both a bit embarrassed and ashamed. Clearly, its partner disagreed with Hawkie's selfish ways, and Jake was more than happy to make the hawk feel the scorn.

The hawk made some angry screeches like a mad wife finding out that its husband was being an asshole to others. Jake just laughed a bit internally, finding it a reward in itself to see one magical bird slapping another magical bird with its wing.

He let the two continue for a bit as he just looked at the magical runes a bit closer. They appeared more powerful but less complicated than what the Great White Stag had created. The power, without a doubt, due to the bird being D-grade.

Should I try and have it teach me? Nah, we can't even speak, and I already have a buttload of alchemy to catch up on, he thought.

"You know what," he said, interrupting the one-sided bickering. "I'm gonna go kill that elemental; meanwhile, you two can figure out payment."

And with that, he flew upwards, passing through the barrier harmlessly as he soared towards the island.

Can I?

Well, I am sure as hell gonna try.