

Hunter 170

Chapter 170: The Battle of Fort's Deep

Jake had to admit that the fort was really well-positioned when it came to defending against enemies approaching on the ground. He had seen the beasts nearly ten minutes before they would get there as they were approaching from a slight downward angle.

With Jake's insane perception, it was effortless to spot anything getting close. From a small watchtower, the sniper that had yelled out earlier had also finally been able to spot the beasts, and now the entire fort was in full swing.

Jake just stood there with Lillian as people ran around him, looking out at the approaching beasts. The soldiers all narrowly avoided him, and he heard Phillip and Miranda in the courtyard below making their way towards him.

"Does this happen often?" he heard Miranda ask as they moved closer.

"At least once a day... it is exhausting, but it allows us to rake in levels and materials," Phillip answered, walking up the small rampart to the wall together with the woman.

"Is it always a horde like this?"

"Yes... it's always a stampede of weaker beasts, few reaching above level 30. Sometimes stronger ones up to level 60 are present, but the strongest so far was 71, so we have yet to encounter anything we couldn't handle. But it is getting worse..." Phillip said with a bit of resignation.

“Well, just a better reason to go with us,” Miranda smiled.

Phillip smiled back as he subconsciously made a small nod.

It looks like Miranda is doing pretty well, Jake thought, seeing the man borderline convinced already. Well, they had spent a few hours in the building, and it seemed like he just needed the final push to agree.

As they got onto the wall, Phillip and Miranda spotted Jake, and both went over. They seemed relatively relaxed despite the apparent panic of the soldiers earlier. Well, the man was a higher level, and from what he had seen, the charging beasts were pretty damn weak.

He Identified one of them for the heck of it, and it was a bit disappointing.

[Roughhide Bovine – lvl 33]

“Sir,” Miranda greeted, bowing slightly towards him. We really need to find something else to call me, Jake thought. Wait, did she even know his name? Thinking back... he had never introduced himself, and when he signed the contract back then, he did it with a cursive abomination his dad taught him to make. Because apparently, the more illegible your signature, the more professional it is.

Phillip gave him a nod, too, as he turned his gaze to the approaching horde.

“More Roughhides... most seem to only be standard bovines, with a few bulls mixed in. No Herd leaders spotted as far as I can tell,” he said as he scouted the group, speaking out loud to both Miranda and some of the other men that had followed him.

Turning to the young man they saw in the workshop with the machinery earlier, he ordered: “Get a drone in the air and try to get an estimate of how many there are.”

The man nodded as he brought out the same small drone he used earlier. It flew up quickly, and the man somehow projected a screen in front of him showing all the drone saw. Very neat, Jake approved internally.

Jake looked at the screen and saw the horde from above. Well, he could just summon his wings and go for an aerial look himself, but it was pretty entertaining to watch the screen instead.

There really were a lot of them. He also spotted quite a few larger versions of the normal bovines, and he assumed those were the bulls. Finally, towards the back, they saw one larger than any of the others.

“A Herd Leader...” Phillip said with a bit of resignation before explaining to Miranda. “The Herd Leaders are far tougher than the others and higher level too. The strongest one so far was level 71, and it took quite a while and many injuries to bring it down. It was a miracle we didn’t lose anyone. Hopefully, this one is wea-

“73.”

Jake had already Identified it as he looked out over the wall long ago. Identify didn't work through the screen.

[Roughhide Herd Leader – lvl 73]

Neil and his party had also made their way over together with the others, and Levi cockily spoke up. "Heh, worst case we just handle them, we have taken down wo-"

"No," Jake said, getting a few confused looks from everyone, Miranda included.

Needless to say, the fact that the fort would be attacked during their visit was not a part of their strategy and thus not discussed. So Jake was not going by practice to be seen as enigmatic or like a mysterious being... he was just saying his genuine thoughts.

"This is not our fight. It's theirs. It would be rude of us to butt in and steal their experience points or challenge. Besides... what is there to gain from slaying a bunch of weak beasts? Have the ones who have something to gain do the fighting."

Everyone was looking at him at his point, and Jake honestly felt a bit awkward. What was up with their looks? Did he say anything unreasonable? It wasn't like he was telling anyone to go die or anything; he just said that people should do their own fighting.

How else would they gain any levels?

“Can we interfere if it gets dangerous?” Neil asked. Once more, Jake felt a bit awkward that he was asking permission, but then again, he had basically just given them an order.

“Fine,” Jake answered. He reckoned having guardians behind them would negatively affect the soldier’s experience gain, but based on their sighs of relief, he got the feeling they didn’t mind.

“Ahem,” Phillip said, getting the attention back to him. “I believe we should get in formation. You are all free to stay and observe, but please do not get in the way unless you plan on assisting.”

Jake nodded, and so did the others. Miranda and Lillian stuck to him while Neil and his party stayed with Miquel and his goons.

Miranda, Jake, Lillian, and the invisible Mystie walked back into the courtyard as they tried to stay out of the way of the many people running about. The people just living there seemed to barely react besides the many that got up and grabbed a rifle and headed for the walls.

It indeed appeared like these attacks were a usual thing for the inhabitants of the fort. But if it could occur more than once a day, it made sense that they had begun being desensitized.

“Let us watch from above,” Jake said as he motioned to the invisible Mystie. She understood his intentions, and without any warning, Jake and the two women began floating upwards with the still-invisible bird.

“Woah!” Miranda exclaimed, surprised at suddenly being lifted.

"Did you?" she asked, looking towards Jake as they slowly ascended.

"Mystie," he answered, motioning with his head towards the invisible bird. From Miranda's point of view, it looked like he was just pointing towards the air, but she seemed to understand right away as she just nodded slowly. Lillian didn't have any significant reactions from all the happenings.

Quite a few glances were also thrown their way, but they soon turned back to the approaching horde. Apparently, the thought that the mysterious masked man with a D-grade beast following him around being able to make people float wasn't that amazing.

"Are you certain we should not interfere?" Miranda asked, floating well out of range of any listeners.

"Yes," Jake answered. "These beast hordes are a golden opportunity for these soldiers to earn experience. When else can you sit comfortably behind a wall and have the prey run headfirst into you?"

"I understand your point, but would it not also be worth it to display a show of force?" she asked, looking at the still approaching herd of bovines. They would soon be within the range of the first shooters.

"Perhaps, and if it becomes necessary, we can still do that. But as it looks, we won't need to. This will also allow us to get a feel for the fort's overall power-level and abilities. I am personally quite a bit interested in the fighting style they have developed with their modern weaponry."

“Alright... I just hope we can avoid any unnecessary deaths. We do hope to have these people be our new citizens, after all,” Miranda answered with resignation.

Jake nodded, agreeing but not intending to interfere still. They could handle this, and he would just be the observer. He wanted everyone to at least hold some power. If he always had to be around to address minor issues, he wouldn’t have time to focus on his own challenges.

As he waited for the herd to make it, he couldn’t help but take notice of the magic that was currently affecting him.

Using pure mana for telekinesis was something Jake had practiced quite a lot, but he had only really done it with inanimate objects. For a stone, he could just inject mana into it through a tether and lift it like that, but that method didn’t work for living things.

What Mystie did was very similar, but instead of injecting mana into an individual, she erected a membrane of mana around the person. The mana was flexible and perfectly coated the body, making it so no movements could really affect the membrane.

Yet, it was also fragile. Jake felt that he could dispel it with little to no effort. He wasn’t sure if Miranda or Lillian knew how to dispel it, but he reckoned most people at a high level did. All it required was to release some mana from your body and blow it away.

But... the membrane also reminded him of another technique he had developed: his water-walking. When he walked on water, he basically erected a membrane around his feet with a small constant upwards lift. It allowed him to more or less act like he weighed less.

And now... Jake was considering why he hadn't taken that further.

He closed his eyes and focused on the mana around him. Mystie lifted herself with the same mana technique she was currently using on all of them, meaning she could clearly lift herself with it too. Jake concentrated, and invisible mana soon covered his feet, pushing away Mystie's.

Mystie noticed what he was doing, and Jake opened his eyes briefly, throwing her a look. The bird understood as she dispelled the mana that kept Jake floating... yet he didn't fall.

Instead, he fell a few centimeters before he stopped. Standing solidly in the air.

Air-walking successfully unlocked, he cheered internally, wondering why the hell he hadn't thought of it earlier. Well, it took quite a bit of concentration, and he was unsure if he could use it in combat for anything, but it was a neat thing.

It was handy for a situation like now, where he didn't bob up and down from Mystie keeping him afloat.

Miranda and Lillian didn't even notice that Jake was now standing in the air instead of floating, both being somewhat distracted...

Distracted by the loud war raging at the walls of the fort below.

Whoops, nearly forgot about that, Jake internally joked as he turned his gaze to the war below, and man, was it a war. It was right out of some fantasy movie, except the elves with bows were replaced with humans with guns, and the orcs and trolls were replaced by cows and even bigger cows.

The humans stood valiantly at the wall as they fired out over their defensive line, hitting the cows below. On the other hand, the cows were either smashing into the wall or trying to climb it by... well, smashing into it.

He saw an explosion go off from the ground below, and inspecting it further with his insane perception; he saw fragments of what looked like a mine fly up. That one took out an entire cow while it injured two others, but the herd appeared almost endless.

Jake wondered... what was the goal of those bovines? They appeared to have no plan and seemed almost to be berserk as they just kept charging. The bulls had yet to make it to the wall, having all stopped a reasonable distance away, out of range of most attacks.

They stood with the Herd Leader that didn't appear to have any interest in entering the fray quite yet.

The constant sounds of explosions from different weapons were deafening, as the humans didn't hold anything back. The rifles themselves didn't really make any noises, but the mines and mortar-like weapons they had sure as hell did.

He turned his gaze to Phillip and saw the man fully in his military-mode. He was yelling out orders left and right, while also attacking plenty himself. His rifle looked like most of the other soldiers, but his bullets' power was more potent than anyone else.

Moreover, he was clearly using several skills as he shot. Some of his bullets exploded upon impact, some penetrated through a target, and some appeared to stun the beast it hit temporarily.

His most impressive display was when he suddenly began firing his rifle like a machine-gun; every bullet exploding, as more than 10 giant booms sounded out every second from him alone - the bovines below cattle to the slaughter.

Jake had to admit that while the soldiers with guns did work... they weren't the only ones. Not every individual had chosen a firearm as their preferred weapon but fought with styles closer to those he already knew.

He saw quite a few Powershots being fired from archers, bolts of all different kinds from casters, and some healers and other mage-like classes were even buffing up the soldiers. One formed a cloud of poison gas that swept through the plains, another made the earth tremble and spikes fly up and penetrate into the cows from below.

Jake did notice that these people tended to be of higher level and were gathered together. If his guess was correct, these were individuals from other tutorials that had joined them later on. He would have to ask Miranda if Phillip had talked about that...

To be honest... the fighting was just dull to watch. Like shooting fish in a barrel, it couldn't even be called a fight.

He saw snipers on the towers above shoot at the beasts below as they killed ones strategically to make some bovines stumble over others. The human side had yet to take a single injury, but Jake had already realized the Herd Leader's plan long ago and hoped that could lead to something interesting.

By now, the many dead beasts were beginning to form a ramp up to the fort. Phillip had also clearly noticed and ordered some of the mages or those with explosives to get some of the corpses away. Sadly... it appeared to be too late for that.

The Herd Leader made a roar – Jake was pretty sure cows, or bulls for that matter, couldn't usually do that – as the eyes of all the remaining cows turned red as their bodies began to swell. At the same time, the bulls all began charging straight for the ramp of their comrades.

Let's see how you handle this one, Phillip.