

Hunter 171

Chapter 171: Perhaps Too Easy

Phillip frowned as he yelled to the snipers to take down one of the bulls leading the charge. He used a skill of his to mark it, making everyone under his leadership instinctually aware of which one he was talking about - an instrumental skill for this kind of fighting style.

Four loud bangs sounded out as the bull was hit, two bullets hitting its head, one its body, and one its leg. It immediately stumbled and fell, getting trampled by its comrades. Those that trampled it also ended up falling with the sudden obstacle in their way, creating a domino-effect of cows tumbling over each other.

The one saving grace of this entire shitshow was that the beasts in the daily attacks were stupid and didn't have any proper fighting tactics. They would just charge until they got killed, only the Herd Leaders showing even a modicum of tactical prowess.

Yet even their tactic didn't go beyond having the weaker beasts make a ramp with their corpses. Phillip could already imagine tens of ways they could do it better, but he was just thankful for their stupidity.

When the Herd Leader enraged the bovines, he ordered their group's mages to push back the beasts. The wall itself seemed to come alive as the outer layer got pushed out. A grating sound was heard as the massive pile of corpses were slowly being pushed back, and Phillip saw earth mages all sweating buckets as they exhausted their entire mana pools to pull off that one trick.

But the trick worked, as they had now effectively created a second layer of walls. A practical method of constructing fortified cities or castles in medieval times revived to face huge magic cows.

Of course... this plan didn't come without cost. The fort's wall had lost around a third of its thickness to create the second wall. This wasn't the first time Phillip had done this, though, and they would get to reconstructing the wall as soon as the fighting was over.

He couldn't help but look up back towards Miranda but found her gone. Just as he was about to question someone, he looked up and saw her floating a few hundred meters above the fort. She and her assistant appeared to be floating while the masked man stood in the air. He felt his eyes momentarily meet his, and Phillip shuddered.

Is he truly human?

Miranda had assured him this city owner was human... but Phillip still felt some doubt deep in his mind. His eyes were that of a beast, his entire body and face covered, and his power far above anyone Phillip had ever seen. He even had a D-grade monster willingly following him around...

Phillip felt like he had done all he could to adapt to this new world. He had entered a tutorial with around five thousand others. It was a survival-type, and he had quickly taken charge and ensured as many people survived as possible.

He had entered with a few of his fellow veterans who had helped assist him. He had recruited people, negotiated with other minor factions, and eventually managed to ensure that nine out of ten survived. He had gotten rewarded for this and was even recognized with the Lord title. Putting it all together... he had already guessed what this masked 'owner' owned.

A Pylon of Civilization.

Phillip had planned on claiming one himself after he got the title and had even used one of his five purchases to buy information on Pylons, as well as the location of the one closest to him. He had gained plenty of information, but the only thing he had gained concerning the location was a vague "go north."

But... what he had learned did raise some questions. Many questions, in fact. The first was related to claiming a Pylon... as one had to slay the D-grade tied to it.

He hadn't disclosed to Miranda that he knew these things, so when she told him that the owner had claimed the area weeks ago, he was shocked. Had he killed it shortly after exiting the tutorial? Or maybe... during the tutorial?

It seemed impossible... but if all her claims were correct, he had indeed done so.

Phillip did have the theory that the D-grade beast following him around was the actual owner of the Pylon... but that also didn't really hold water. Why would it then leave its area and follow the human willingly?

Some details about the Pylon were off, though. Miranda said that no beast ever entered the area, but Pylons didn't have that effect. It could be a lie, or maybe this mysterious owner had done something. It could also be due to the D-grade beast if it were acting as some kind of deterrent.

Either way... he saw not many other options than to join her, and hopefully, he could get some influence that way. It was quite an issue that she apparently didn't know much about the owner, leaving him indeed an enigma.

But seeing him standing on fucking air, glaring bored down at a horde of beasts... who was he to question his methods? Clearly, it was working for him.

“Firebombs, release!” he yelled as he returned his full attention to the battlefield.

Several giant fireballs were fired from catapults behind him. They wanted to make a more mortar-like version of those, but they hadn’t gotten it working with the casters quite yet.

The giant fireballs fell on the approaching bulls, injuring all of them but not killing any.

Phillip frowned as he noticed many of the men and women already wet with sweat, their hands slightly trembling as they kept shooting. Their mana was about to run out, and looking at his own tank, he was also beginning to run low.

Parts of him wanted to ask that man Neil for help, but his pride didn’t allow it. Not if it wasn’t strictly necessary. He felt like he had already suffered too many losses today... he refused to fail here. He saw that the Herd Leader had also begun moving.

So he pulled out the big guns – literally so. He took out what looked like a missile launcher as he knelt and began channeling his strongest attack: the epic-rarity skill he had bought for nearly all his tutorial points.

Jake saw the man began to channel some hefty magic as he saw the shape of what looked like a rocket appear in his hands. It reminded him a lot of his own Arrow of the Ambitious Hunter but was instead a rocket. Rocket of the Ambitious Hunter... yeah, it just doesn’t sound as good.

He had to admit that big magic rockets were cool. He just hoped that the power it packed was equally as cool. Phillip took nearly two minutes to create the missile while his second-in-command, a man that had silently always just been by his side, took charge.

Once the missile was prepared, he placed it inside the launcher he had brought out. Jake was pretty sure it was actually just some kind of tube with magical propelling. Just a worse way of firing it than a bow, he scoffed. The only advantage was that the entire process was purely magical, meaning you didn't really need any physical stats worth mentioning.

Jake felt that you needed those stats anyway, though. Sure, as humans, they gained some to all stats at every level-up, meaning everyone had a bit of everything. The issue Jake saw with being too focused on mental stats was... what the hell was your plan when a person used One Step Mile right in front of you and attacked with a good old stab?

Mana barrier? That consumed mana, far more than Jake would spend in stamina by dodging. Teleporting away yourself? It could work, but once more, way more resource-heavy than just leaning to the side.

The only real mages Jake had fought of somewhat high power were Abby and the King of the Forest. Abby was weak defensively, and that was even while using space magic, a type of magic offering excellent physical defenses.

As for the King of Forest... Jake was unsure if that monster could even be called a mage. His physical defenses and stats were utterly insane, surviving having a mini-nuke of dark and light mana blow up from within his damn body.

The point was... Jake felt like everyone needed a bit of everything to truly excel. His encounter with the Cloud Elemental had taught him that focusing purely on physical combat wasn't the way either, as he felt utterly useless in front of the incorporeal elemental.

Well, if one went far enough on any path, those shortcomings would disappear. Jake's current Arrow of the Ambitious Hunter was in the realm of physical combat, but one just had to ask the Storm Elemental if it wasn't effective. He also reckoned that just progressing far enough in anything would make you eventually iron out most weaknesses.

Of course, it could be argued all this only really matters when fighting alone. When fighting in a large group or just a small party, you can make up for others' weaknesses.

Neil and his party were an excellent example of this. Christen was tough and could handle most hits and intercept enemies. But she couldn't protect herself against everything or heal herself, so Silas helped her in that department from behind.

Both Silas and Christen had had to non-existent damage, which is where Levi and, to some extent, Eleanor came in to provide the firepower while themselves being defended. Eleanor was also serving as the scout, and Levi served as the one to take down high-damage, low-defense attackers.

Neil served as the core, supporting every facet while not standing out in any particular area besides allowing the entire group's movement. He could teleport others or himself and even had several offensive options. Neil was a bit harder to place, but it clearly worked for them. Jake could see them being hell for any dungeon boss to battle.

The fighting style of those in the fort also facilitated focusing more on one aspect of fighting at a time. Jake was pretty sure that nearly all the gunmen had invested all their free points into intelligence and wisdom to increase their damage output and how many shots they could fire.

Jake couldn't precisely say their approach was wrong... he just felt like it wasn't sustainable in the long run. At some point, the walls would no longer provide an effective defense. The soldiers would have to team up with an army of builders and trappers to hunt anywhere and set up fortified positions even before reaching that point.

He frowned a bit the more he thought about it. This entire scenario of the fort being attacked by progressively stronger beasts all the time just seemed... implausible. That it happened only about once a day, even more so. They hadn't tried having two groups attack within a short while, always having time to refortify before the next wave.

It felt... designed.

Jake was momentarily distracted from his train of thoughts as Phillip finally released his attack. He hoisted up the launcher and fired his missile straight towards the Herd Leader. The beast reacted too slowly as it appeared to command a few of the bulls running with it to block the attack.

The red-eyed beasts jumped in front of the rocket, but Jake saw the man who'd fired it wave his hands as the rocket suddenly flew upwards over the bulls before heading straight down for the Herd Leader.

Okay, I can't do that with my Arrow of the Ambitious Hunter... yet.

A loud explosion sounded out as the Herd Leader was struck on its back. Blood and gore flew everywhere as a large part of the beast was blown off, and even some of the bulls around it were blasted away.

The explosion was... impressive. It appeared to be made out of pure mana mixed with a shitload of fire-affinity mana. Thinking about it, the man had also used explosive bullets earlier, so it made sense that he had some kind of fire-affinity.

After the dust settled, the form of the gravely injured Herd Leader was revealed. A large part of its body was blown apart, and portions of its hide were still burning with crimson flames. Yet, it didn't appear to be down for the count at all. The flesh where it was injured wriggled as it was regenerating in real-time.

Jake saw a few injured bulls around it fall to the ground, dead, as he understood what it was doing. What a vicious cow, consuming its herd to strengthen itself.

Phillip, at this point, was looking like a mess. He was sweating as clearly the attack had taken a lot out of him. He wasn't like Jake, with a very robust body that could handle utilizing so much power. He didn't make any more attacks himself but switched to exclusively yelling out orders.

The heavily injured Herd Leader was slowly healing as it continued trodding forward. Phillip had already ordered the soldiers to attack it, and it was pelted by sniper bullets, grenades, and a plethora of spells. All kinds of attacks slowly killing it and the many other beasts.

Roughhide was a good descriptor for them as they were tough... but that was really all they had. Their rough hides appeared very resistant to many of the attacks, but the bullets looked to be nearly unblocked.

From start to end... this entire 'battle' was just a one-sided slaughter. The human side's only real issue was running low on resources and having things to repair, rebuild, and perform maintenance on after the battle.

Jake couldn't help but frown as he got a closer look at the Herd Leader that was now already on its last legs. Its eyes looked... hollow. Like there weren't any thoughts or even proper instincts behind them. Something is off.

No one else appeared to notice, but the Herd Leader was acting weird to Jake. It just didn't move as he would expect a beast to do, and everything that had happened so far... just didn't make any sense.

Why would it direct its herd just to charge as it did and make a ramp?

Not because making a ramp was a bad idea... in fact, it appeared to be a too good idea for the cow to come up with - especially when compared to its plan of just charging headfirst into the wall of the fort. Towards the end, it didn't even look like it was trying to dodge... actually... was it even trying to win?

But if his thoughts were correct... why do this? Why practically throw away your lives and sacrifice yourselves to level a group of humans holed up in a fort? What could the reason possibly be? It reminded Jake of people 'feeding' in videogames... wait.

Was someone... feeding the fort? Not food, but levels and crafting materials?

The more he thought about it, the more plausible it seemed. Phillip had said that these attacks had been going on for weeks, progressively getting stronger, yet they hadn't lost anyone but were just slowly growing in levels and power instead.

Of course, this led to another question. Why?

But perhaps even more importantly... who or what was behind this?