

Hunter 176

Chapter 176: From the Myst They Came...

Jake couldn't help but be disappointed in the Minotaur. He had felt it invade his mind as he struggled to fight off the energy. He couldn't move, and he just stood there, less than fifteen meters separating him and the monster.

His sphere made him aware of the outside world, but nothing more. Yet inwardly, he also felt... something.

Half an hour passed like that, the two having a battle of the mind. Well, it was more Jake in a bit of a haze, slowly fighting off the mental energy and the damn Minotaur trying to find a weakness to exploit.

It was all just a shame. Jake believed he could have actually had a good fight with the D-rank. He was faster, but it was stronger and had its mental magic to at least throw him off here and there. And while its body wasn't that resilient, its vitality was high for sure.

The wounds caused by him earlier were mostly healed on the dead body of the Mindchief, just through the passive consumption of health points to heal it. Jake was also pretty damn sure the monster wasn't anywhere close to out of mana or other magic tricks. He doubted the fight would have ended within the next hour even if they just slugged it out... and Jake had been looking forward to it.

Yet it died. Not because of running out of health... it had just given up. Jake had allowed it in, not bothered to resist its mental exploration of his memories. He didn't know where it was looking, at least not to begin with, but he soon got the feeling the Minotaur was seeking towards a deep part of his soul. One the Minotaur could usually never approach. But Jake allowed him closer... and as soon as the Mindchief caught a glimpse of what it had been looking for, it chose to end itself.

A fucking coward.

It was just a bull that had gotten lucky and found some item that allowed it to evolve quickly. Jake didn't think all beasts would gain memories from before they evolved, but clearly, the Minotaur had. Perhaps due to its skills. Not that it mattered anymore.

Jake walked forward to check out the corpse of the monster, and the first thing he noticed was the staff.

[Pillar of Encumbrance (Rare)] – A metal rod made of a type of metal with the natural ability to change weight based on the intensity of the mana infused within. Incredibly durable.

Requirements: N/A

Jake looked at it and was honestly a bit surprised. It wasn't even a weapon... it was just a rod of metal that could get heavier if infused with mana. It didn't even have any requirements. The weapon did fit the Minotaur fantastically, though, and Jake also happily picked it up.

The monster hadn't had any other equipment, leaving only its body behind.

That is also when Jake heard the yelling behind him, and he suddenly remembered that the large barn behind him had been filled with mind-controlled humans.

Jake deposited the Minotaur's corpse and the Pillar of Encumbrance before he quickly made his way into the barn to see what was going on.

He entered it and instantly felt dozens of eyes land on him. All the people held prisoners by the Mindchief were now clearheaded and out of whatever hypnosis kept them passive. The appearance of a masked figure walking into the barn quickly got their attention, their wariness clear.

None of them spoke but just looked hesitantly at him. From the looks of it, they had broken out of mind control a bit ago and had time to try and get a basic understanding of their situation. And Jake was more than happy to clarify what had happened further.

"The Minotaur is dead," Jake said, summoning its corpse. Now, that got their attention.

"Did you kill it?" a person in the front asked - one wearing a familiar uniform.

"I did. Are you from that fort led by a guy named Phillip?" Jake asked, tossing the Minotaur back in his storage immediately.

"Yes! Do you also come from there? I didn't see you before, are you?"

"Where are all the bovines?" Jake asked, cutting the young guy off.

Maybe it was a bit late... but Jake clearly remembered the area outside the barn filled with bulls and quite a few Herd Leaders...

"I saw some run off towards there," a voice cut in, pointing out the large gate and into the distance. Directly towards the fort. "The beasts left a good while ago just as we all began waking up..."

Well, ain't this just great, Jake thought, quickly having put together what had happened.

Perhaps it was a failsafe or an ingrained command, but it appeared like the Minotaur Mindchief had ordered every single bovine to charge towards the fort. A real asshole-move, entirely in line with its personality. Even if it lost to Jake, it would still at least succeed in wiping out the settlement.

Jake shook his head and turned to the people still in the barn. He was pretty sure they were all there, likely too scared or confused to leave. "Wait here. I will have a group sent to escort you back towards the fort within the day... after I go fix things there."

He didn't bother explaining more as he left, using One Step Mile to quickly head back to the fort. By now, it had to have been 45 minutes since the bovines left. Which meant that, by his estimate, they had likely already arrived there.

Not that Jake was anxious. Neil and his party were there, and they could surely buy some time even against the Herd Leaders that were closing in on the level-cap for E-grade.

Oh yeah, and Mystie was also chilling there.

"GET READY! MAGES PUSH THE WALL!" Phillip yelled as he looked out into the horizon, cold sweat running down his back.

"We will need your help, or we will all die," he said, turning to Miranda's group, Neil just nodding in agreement.

"How many?" the space mage asked, and after Phillip listened to one of the snipers on a walkie-talkie, gravely answered:

"More than fifty Herd Leaders counted and based on their sizes, some of them appear to be above level 90. They are followed by an army of Roughhide Bovines and Bulls. I... we should maybe evacuate."

"In other words, way too fucking many?" Christen butted in, getting a nod from Phillip, not even bothered to argue against it.

He turned to Miranda and sternly asked. "Is this the doing of this owner? Did he go and provoke them into attacking us?"

"First of all," Miranda said, "why the hell would he do that? Secondly, if there was an army on standby not far away, ready to charge here within an hour of him leaving, don't you think they planned on attacking all along? At worst, he just made them push up their attack plan slightly."

Phillip just looked at her before shaking his head. "Doesn't matter, we need to evacuate as soon as po-"

He was interrupted by an eruption of light, stemming not from the approaching herd but within the fort. More accurately, from the top of the central keep.

Spectral blue feathers began raining down from above as a giant blue hawk lifted itself slightly off the keep, floating in mid-air. It had a wingspan of nearly ten meters, and what looked like blue mist floated all around it, taking on different shapes.

It was the D-grade brought by the masked owner.

[Mystsong Hawk - ???]

Mana hummed to life as the mist began condensing and forming magic circles in the air. All the humans within the fort found themselves suppressed; even the powerful ones like Neil and his party felt the pressure. It was magic with power above anything they could handle...

The many circles of magic floating above began overlapping, and soon they formed a huge perfect circle. Blue light began being emitted from the center of the large circle, soon covering its entire center. A few more seconds passed, and the shining blue plane floating above began slowly pouring out even more mist.

It looked like a shining blue vertical lake had suddenly appeared in the air, one with a diameter of more than 20 meters, making it look more than a little intimidating.

Just as the ones below began wondering what the D-grade was up to, the surface of the metaphorical lake rippled as something came out of it. It looked like some kind of giant cat, but before anyone could get a good look at it, the second creature exited. And then a third, and a fourth, before soon dozens of animals were floating in the air above.

All of them were blue, with mist emanating from their bodies. They looked semi-transparent, and when Phillip identified one, he was shocked.

[Mystbeast - ??]

Phillip was level 59, so a beast below D-grade he couldn't identify had to be at least level 89... and he couldn't identify a single one of the blue beasts. But that in itself wasn't as shocking as the fact they could even be identified. Were they summons of some kind? Or were they teleported there from elsewhere? He didn't know, and he doubted the giant blue bird would share.

After the portal summoned more than 30 Mystbeasts, it stopped spitting out more. No two of the summoned beasts were identical but varied widely - from cat-like beasts to birds and even one that looked like a mix between an elephant and a rhino.

With a simple wave of its wing, the Mystsong Hawk ordered the summons to move. The mist swirled around each beast as they ran on a trail of mist forming beneath their every footfall.

Phillip could only watch in astonishment as they stormed towards the approaching herd. The Mystsong Hawk was already churning up its next move.

"Looks like we can avoid an evacuation," Eleanor said with a small smile.

"Did you know the D-grade stayed behind?" Phillip asked Miranda, who had been looking relatively relaxed even after the Mystsong Bird unleashed its power.

"Of course, did you think the owner would leave the fort defenseless in his absence?" she answered confidently while inwardly thinking the exact opposite. How the hell could I know, he didn't say anything, and the damn bird is hiding in invisibility the whole time.

But that didn't mean she wouldn't take advantage of the situation nevertheless. Heck, while the owner had gone off-script more times than she liked... boy had it worked out well. He managed to display his own power, the power of his companion, and at the same time create goodwill towards all the inhabitants of the fort. If he was to be seen as a protector of the city... proving exactly how capable he was at protecting them by wiping out an army of beasts was a good start to build a reputation.

So with anticipation, she watched the battle that was about to unfold.

Neil also looked out over the walls as he turned to his party. "Wanna join in? Quite a few of those Herd Leaders should be well worth hunting down."

"Sure thing," Christen said. "As long as those weird mist-creatures don't attack us too."

"Let's hope they don't. Begin to prepare; we'll go the second Silas gets here," Neil finished as he began to take out some weird stones and crystals from the Orb of Kallox and began placing them down as a magic circle on the ground.

Once he was done, he gave each of his party members a small crystal.

"Emergency teleports," Neil explained to Miranda and Phillip.

Miranda just nodded with understanding, while Phillip looked very interested. He didn't know exactly what the party of five was capable of, but teleportation certainly did sound impressive.

Ten or so seconds later, the first clash of Mystbeasts and the herd of bovines happened, and... it wasn't a fight. The sharp claws of a cat-like Mystbeast ripped three Roughhide Bovines, all only around level 30, apart with a simple swipe.

The giant elephant-like beast trampled them easily, as it soon began wrestling with a Herd Leader around its own level – coming out on top.

Neil and the others soon joined in, leaping over the wall only a few seconds after Silas arrived. They all landed on a floating disc as Neil brought them closer, Levi already beginning to buff himself up. Eleanor didn't wait either but had already fired a Powershot before they landed. She stayed up on the floating platform floating ten meters above as her party leaped down.

Christen took the front as they headed straight for one of the largest Herd Leaders. They needed to challenge themselves to keep progressing, and a beast near the peak of E-tier was a fitting opponent.

Levi jumped in, cleaving long scars of fire on the ground with every swing, sending bovine-parts flying. None of them hit Christen as she pushed forward, knocking away overgrown cows with her buckler or just straight-up killing them with her blade.

Neil summoned two discs of space mana that he controlled like two circular razor blades. It was basically just taking a space-barrier and tilting it, turning it into a powerful weapon. Of course, they could be broken, such as how Jake had done it, but they were pretty helpful when unblocked.

Eleanor released a barrage of arrows, using a skill similar to Splitting Arrow, but instead of making one, it made hundreds. The difference was that most of her arrows weren't actually real but were illusions making only a few do actual damage. But it helped cause chaos and allowed Levi to close in.

They quickly got close enough to fight the Herd Leader and began their assault with the five of them. They worked together, covering each others' weaknesses, and landed blow after blow on the beast. Neil fired space bolts that each hit like a sledgehammer with intense kinetic energy, Silas healing or putting up the occasional barrier or buffing someone.

It took them a few minutes, but they soon had the Herd Leader on the backfoot. It was impressive that a group of humans nearly 40 levels below the beast could make the fight so one-sided. Granted, the Herd Leader wasn't the strongest of E-grades as they were more suited to buffing up and leading their groups compared to solo-combat, but it was impressive nevertheless.

Yet... in the same period it took them to nearly beat one, the group of Mystbeasts had already killed over a dozen Herd Leaders and slaughtered over a thousand normal bovines. All of this without the Mystsong Bird directly getting involved besides its summons.

And when it got involved...

Jake made his way over the hill, and the fort finally came into sight. He saw the massive herd in the midst of being slaughtered by a group of blue beasts that gave off Mystie's aura, making him instantly aware they were connected to the hawk.

He looked from afar and saw that Mystie had summoned some kind of phantasmal form around itself as it still floated above the fort. He saw the magic circles around it as they all came together and formed a single small circle.

Mana exploded out of it as it fired off a single beam of energy that arced out and hit one of the many bovines. A second beam came out a moment later, and then it fired a third and a fourth until it fired over a dozen every second. Like a machinegun firing off homing lasers, it launched out attack after attack for the next ten seconds before the magic circle dispersed.

The entire battlefield was now filled with headless corpses of bovines – only around 50 beasts left standing, the majority of them Herd Leaders. The giant magic attack had slain thousands of Bovines in a single move.

Jake chuckled to himself as he took out his bow and decided to join in on the fun... the Herd Leaders alive were all around or above his own level... so why not?

Though he would have to hurry because the remaining ones were already set upon by the Mystbeasts.

And Neil and his party were still working on taking down their one Herd Leader - Mystie nice enough to not interfere in their fight.