

Hunter 289

Chapter 289: Treasure Hunt: The Girl & The Hawk

Carmen sprinted through the mist-filled halls, smashing down any damn ghoul in the way. It reminded her a bit of the good old days of the tutorial where she smashed zombies day in and day out. She snickered as she turned another corner, and before the ghoul could react, she dropkicked it square in the face, smashing its head between her heavy boots and the wall. She identified the undead-like thing with an oddly squishy head as she leaped back and landed on the ground.

[Vampiric Ghoul Thrall – lvl 114]

Even without its head, it kept swinging. She launched into a barrage of fists before she finally put it down for good as its body was utterly pummelled apart within a few seconds. They were kind of durable, but her attacks were far from simple. Every single hit sent waves of destructive kinetic energy through her foes, destroying them from the inside.

Without slowing down, Carmen kept sprinting forward. She had entered this Treasure Hunt alone and would prefer for it to stay that way. She encountered a few more ghouls, but upon reaching a crossroad, she noticed something. Corpses. Ones not made by her.

Curious, she stormed down the corridor, hoping to find this other person, only finding more corpses than before. Finally, a few minutes later, she reached the exit of the hall... or what had been the entrance of the ghouls' killer. Cursing under her breath, she turned around and headed back inside after having gone the wrong way.

She stormed through the halls again, this time a bit angry, and she soon reached the same crossroad. Going the right way this attempt, she continued and passed through hall after hall with only dead ghouls. All of them had been cut up or ripped apart by some magic.

Carmen frowned a bit, as some of the wounds didn't look like they had been made by a human. She found deep holes in the skulls of the ghouls and jagged cuts that looked to be made by a saw or something. Or maybe it was just some magic?

Not seeing it as important enough to think about further, she continued. A big part of her hoped it wasn't another human – or worse – a party of humans. Should I just kill them if it is? No, they would teleport out, and it could cause trouble... shit.

Yet, she didn't want to just turn around and leave. With annoyance, she continued onwards and turned a few more corners. She noticed how she was going downwards, and the signs of battle got more and more obvious - deep cuts covered the walls and dismembered ghouls the floor.

Finally, she heard a noise in the distance. A few hallways further, and she caught a glimpse of the action. A ghoul was blasted through the hall, smashing into the wall. Next, it was hit by a barrage of green crescent blades of energy that cut it into several pieces.

Carmen slowed her approach to get a better feel for what she was dealing with. That green magic wasn't a type she recognized. Another blast later, and she felt the rush of wind blow through the halls. Wind magic of some kind? she asked herself. Nothing she had seen so far was a real threat, so she ultimately just rushed in to get a good look at who it was that was fighting them.

Turning the corner, she saw it. A small figure flew through the hallway ahead at incredible speeds, leaving a green wind in its wake. A small tornado revolved around it, leaving shallow cuts on all the ghouls that got too close, and every time it waved a wing, a crescent green wave was sent out.

The three ghouls fighting it were quickly ripped apart. The last one had its entire mid-section crushed by a single talon that began glowing green and enlarged as the beast grabbed it. Carmen Identified it as she was waiting, getting nothing valuable out of it.

[?]

Frowning, she wondered if this was some hidden boss. It was a beast. A bird of some kind. She wasn't all that sure about birds. Maybe it was a falcon, an eagle, or a hawk or something. Either way, it was nearly entirely green and damn strong, if not as strong as her. This was one of the few times Carmen wasn't sure what to do.

Not being able to Identify the beast was not normal, that was for sure, and she hadn't seen any boss or enemy during the tutorial or in a dungeon in the outside world she couldn't Identify. Well, not Identify in that she couldn't see anything. Sure, if it was a lot higher level, not seeing the level was normal, but this clearly wasn't it.

The moment the bird finished off the last ghoul, it turned and looked over at Carmen. It stared at her for a while, and without breaking eye contact, she saw it summon a mana potion using a Hunter Insignia and drank it while staring her down.

Ignoring how comical it looked to have the small bird gulp down a potion, Carmen was now more confused than ever. Was this a participant of the Treasure Hunt? Why was it a bird? What was it green and a bit chubby-looking? Why did it have such big eyes?

Above anything else: why the hell was the bird so damn cute?

“Hey there, little fella,” Carmen said with a smile, trying to look as approachable as possible as she began slowly walking towards the bird with her hands held behind her back to try and look as unthreatening as possible. Approachable and not intimidating... that should work, right?

“Ree!” the bird made a weird screech at her, making Carmen stop. Did it want her to back off? Well, alright... she would... after just one small head pat!

Carmen kept slowly walking forward, talking all the meanwhile: “Did you come here with anyone? Are you alone? You’re sure a strong one, eh? I love your feathers, by the way. Those attacks were really powerful, weren’t they? You’re so pretty...”

As she talked, she saw the bird slowly calm down and just look her way, tilting its head back and forth, a bit confused. Step by step, she got closer, completely ignoring the many corpses she had to step over. The bird sat on top of a dead ghoul, being around chest height.

Then, after only a few more careful steps, she came within reach. She slowly extended her hand to pet the cute bird on the head. It looked at her hand as she lowered it to pat the bird on top of its head. The hand was mere centimeters from the bird’s head as suddenly, the bird dodged her hand as it pulled its head back, still looking at her.

She refused to give up and tried again, and once more, the bird avoided her head pat. Carmen steeled her resolve as she moved her hand a bit faster, but the bird was damn swift as it rotated its head to dodge her hand again and again.

Are bird necks even that flexible!? she screamed internally. No, this was not a battle she would lose. If the cute bird didn’t want a pat... it could get a hug!

Carmen opened her arms and tried to hug the bird, but it jumped back, landing gracefully on the ground.

“Ree!” it screeched at her before turning around, just strutting away from her as its tail swayed back and forth.

“Come on...” Carmen muttered as she ran after it. The bird sped up as she ran and began making weird jumping movements before it reached a turn in the hall. She chased after it, and just as she turned the corner, she was face to face with a ghoul that had clearly been tossed her way with a blast of wind. The huge gust that hit her along with the ghoul was clear evidence of that.

The ghoul was still alive and began ripping at her, but Carmen easily pushed it away and kicked it into the wall. She didn’t bother staying to kill it but chased after the bird. Now it had done it, and she would be damned if she didn’t get a least get a tiny cuteness from the bird out of this entire thing!

Carmen looked on ahead and saw the bird jump down the hallway happily as it flapped its wings. She was certain it was having way too much fun with this. Carmen smirked a bit as she chased the cheeky little bird. Yeah, she had to admit she found it amusing too.

The next fifteen or so minutes were spent with Carmen chasing the bird through the halls as an ever-increasing number of ghouls chased them as the bird kept pushing them back towards her, and Carmen really didn’t wanna stop up to smash them, hence abandoning her chase.

Finally, they came to a dead-end when they reached a large metal gate with a red rune on it, forcing the bird to stop. Carmen also stopped and smiled triumphantly. Only for a bit, though, as she saw the bird look behind her. She turned around and saw more than forty ghouls chasing them.

“We’ll settle this after the cleanup,” Carmen said, preparing herself. The bird jumped up beside her as it also prepared itself to fight. They exchanged a quick glance as the horde crashed into them.

After Jake left the party from the Noboru clan, he headed further in the hall that he assumed the party was originally heading into. Sure, he was maybe stealing their path a bit, but honestly, they would have been fucked and forced to retreat without him, so he didn’t feel that bad about it.

He encountered a few more Blackguards and a couple of Knights, but none were even close to his level of power. Jake was fully aware his current strength was far higher than necessary for this early in the Treasure Hunt, which was why he headed for the best stuff first. He wanted to find the Count of Blood as quickly as possible before anyone had time to gather themselves and find it.

Jake wasn’t stupid enough to think he was the only one who could kill them. He assumed someone like the Sword Saint and probably a few of the stronger parties around would manage. Probably a few others too.

He did end up picking up some more treasures on the way, but most were bad. It was a bit surprising the tower apparently held far less than the plains outside. Well, that, or they were just all bundled together in treasuries. Either way, Count first, then he would look for hidden caches.

On a side note, Jake did get the weirdest message of sorts from Sylphie. Something about making a friend and needing to say hi or something. Jake was a bit worried she had gotten herself into something bad, but decided to be a supportive uncle and took out a small pen and paper from his usual spatial storage and wrote a short message that he tossed in the Hunter Insignia as well as a few more potions. With that done, he soldiered on towards the boss.

Finally, he reached something new. Jake stood at a crossroad with a path to the left and one to the right. At least, that is what the vampires wanted him to think because the otherwise completely normal-looking wall directly ahead of him wasn't what it seemed. Instead of a solid wall, it was a magical barrier to block out physical stuff and make it feel like a wall and an illusionary barrier, making it look like one.

But to Jake? Well, even without his sphere, he could see the faint shimmering on the wall. With his sphere? He looked straight through.

Without any hesitation, Jake took out his bow and five barrages of explosive arrow later, and it was enough to dispel the barrier ahead. It went from looking like a slightly scratched wall to just a big gaping hole in the wall all at once, with the only signs of it not just being a regular continuation of the hallway the marks left by the arcane explosions on the floor.

Jake looked through the hallway ahead with both his sphere and eyes, and the conclusion was unanimous: it was a trap room. Formations, physical traps, the whole shebang.

Anyway, to cut a long story short, Jake found himself at the other end of the trap room ten minutes later, not a scratch on his body, and the entire hall behind him now filled with black spikes glowing with poison, signs of explosions, broken stones, large blades pulsing with curse magic, and all the good old trap stuff.

With excitement, Jake turned a corner and finally laid his eyes on the end of the hallway. It was a black gate, a bit like the one he had stolen but even bigger and with some very complicated scrips on it, as well as a rune that was glowing deep red.

Walking up to it, the entire rune changed as words appeared.

Present a Rune of Blood to unlock to be granted access to the Count's Chambers.

Well, fuck me, Jake said. Why hadn't that shitty projection told him about needing a fucking quest item to get to the boss and get another quest item? It was a god damn chain quest where Jake had skipped a step.

Jake grumbled a bit to himself until he felt a slight mental nudge from Sylphie, making him break out a massive smile.

Carmen leaned against the wall, breathing heavily. The bird was also sitting down and relaxing. She had to admit... the little feather ball was strong, even if she was a fair bit stronger. But even worse than that, she hadn't even gotten her hug or even head pat yet!

She took out a potion, ready to drink it, but the bird jumped over and made a screeching sound, interrupting her. Carmen looked down and saw the bird summon a health, stamina, and mana potion out of its insignia, as well as a small slip of paper.

Picking the stuff up, she noticed how the potions were far better than her current ones. She only took the stamina and health potion, leaving the mana one. "Just keep the mana potion; I don't need it," she said as she checked out the paper. On it was a written message with pretty bad handwriting. Not that she was much better. She read the note and frowned a bit.

"Hello, my name is Sylphie, and I'm a hawk. Please be nice to me; I am not dangerous and a part of this Treasure Hunt just like you, and if you hurt me, my uncle will get very mad."

“You have a strong and awesome uncle, huh?” she asked the bird she now knew was a hawk with a smile. Also, that part about ‘not dangerous’ was just a god damn lie.

“Ree!” Sylphie answered happily. This time she didn’t dodge as Carmen managed to land a light head pat with only a single finger. A major victory in her head.

“That sound’s nice,” she said, a bit sad thinking about her own fucked up family situation. “Anyway, we should-“

Another ghoul interrupted her as it came charging down the hallway towards them, likely having been attracted due to their fighting earlier. Sylphie seemed as annoyed as her, and together they attacked it. She punched it, and the hawk cut it up.

The ghoul was blasted through the hall, and once it got up, they attacked again. Their second strike ended up being from behind, and the poor ghoul was sent flying towards the large metal gate with a red rune on it. Contrary to expectations, the door neither of them could do anything to before gave way and opened to the ghoul, the rune shattering in the process.

Carmen frowned as she got a bad feeling - one confirmed right away as a red mist began being emitted from within the room they had just opened. Walking closer to get a good look inside and hopefully avoid fighting in the tight corridors, she saw the cause of it all.

[Viscount of Blood – lvi 135]

“Hey, Sylphie... let’s take this one together, eh?” Carmen said as she chugged the stamina potion the hawk had given her and then smashed her fist together, both now glowing with energy.

“Ree!” Sylphie agreed as she entered the room, a green aura already spreading from her body.