

Hunter 76

Chapter 76: Lucenti Plains

The path up to the mountain wasn't as easily traversed as he had hoped. Unlike the badger valley, he didn't find any easily accessible way forward.

Instead, he was met with a wall of stone – a steep cliffside. He tried climbing it a few times but quickly found that his climbing skills, coupled with the smooth stone surface, made it improbable that he could climb up there. He tried to use his weapons to climb, but it was more than a little unwieldy... Venomfang was too strong, and the cold from his sword made it break the stone as it cooled down.

After walking back and forth for a few minutes, trying to find a spot to climb, he got an idea. Could he use his mana strings?

He had made several strings over time and even used it to retrieve dropped weapons and such. In theory, he should be able to make a rope of his strings and climb up the cliffside.

Thinking it was quite a shot in the dark, he was surprised when he quickly strung together an invisible rope of mana. After practicing for a few minutes, he managed to make it longer and sturdier and even managed to hoist himself up in a tree using it.

Damn, I am good, Jake thought to himself as he marveled at the immense progress he had made in his mana control. He had slacked a bit recently, but with his stat growth and alchemy skills improving, he had gotten quite good without even noticing.

It still hadn't materialized as a skill, discounting Spectral Hand. He remembered that his focus on the practice came from those few words given to him by the Malefic Viper during their first meeting. Those words had opened him up to the possibility that mana control was possible outside of using it for skills.

By now, he was sure that many others had also caught on, but he still felt like he had an early-starter advantage compared to many others.

With this new mana rope, Jake managed to attach it to small protrusions on the cliffside. Climbing to those protrusions, he made another rope attached further up and slowly made his way up the cliff.

Granted, it would have likely been faster just to go back the way he came and find a more direct path, but he believed that he hadn't wasted his time in the grand scheme of things.

Finally, reaching the top, he smiled triumphantly. The ropes had dispersed already as they turned to nothing whenever they lost contact with his body. He felt like controlling mana outside the body, without him touching it, should be entirely possible. He just wasn't sure how to do it yet.

Having gotten out of the valley, he didn't delay as he rushed to the dungeon entrance.

The layout was incredibly similar to the other mountain, and he quickly reached the long passageway leading into the hollow volcano. He had a sneaking suspicion that he was in for another mountain filled with long passages whenever he entered the dungeon itself.

Only a few raptors were in his way, but they were swiftly handled with a few barrages of Splitting Arrow.

Reaching the mountain's inside, he quickly spotted the door to the dungeon and wasted no time rushing to it, placing his hand on it.

Tutorial Dungeon Discovered!

Dungeons throughout the universe offer groups and individuals a chance to pursue strength and treasures through exploring the pocket dimensions known as dungeons. This variant is only found within the Tutorials provided by the system to newly integrated races.

Requirements to enter: N/A

Requirements to enter met.

WARNING: Only 5 challengers allowed per party attempting the dungeon. Only one party allowed at a time. Note that dungeons can be entered and exited at your own discretion.

Enter Dungeon?

Y/N

The message was exactly the same as when he entered the badger dungeon. He accepted the prompt and felt his vision and body shift.

Totally gonna be another shitty cave, Jake joked with himself.

His sphere was the first to register his new surroundings, and it made him aware he was in a rather large open space. The next thing he felt was... a breeze? In a cave? But as his vision returned, he found himself not standing in his anticipated cave but instead on a small hill surrounded by a broad plain.

You have entered the dungeon: Lucenti Plains

Objective: Defeat the Great White Stag

He was quite honestly taken aback. The change of scenery was far more extreme than he had anticipated.

Every dungeon he had entered so far had been enclosed spaces - one an ancient temple and another a cave. But this... this was a god damn open plain - the sky above, with a large open space before him.

On his small hill, he could see a large number of beasts running around. They were groups of deer with a stag or two generally leading each small group.

The plains themselves were a mix of tall grass and open ground. The grass was easily three meters tall, where it was tallest.

Looking behind him, he saw that perhaps this space wasn't as large as he had first imagined. While it looked enormous, it soon became apparent that it was, in fact, quite limited. He saw that only a hundred meters or so behind him, the plains suddenly stopped, and it turned to stony ground.

Activating Hunter's Sight, he peered into the distance and saw only nothingness. It was like he was in an oasis in the middle of a desolate world - an oasis consisting of a plain with herds of deer running around.

Turning his attention back towards the beasts, he used Identify on one of the groups.

[Lucenti Deer – lvl 61]

[Lucenti Deer – lvl 60]

[Lucenti Deer – lvl 62]

[Lucenti Stag – lvl 65]

Just like Badgers Den, it was the same beasts but with higher levels. The levels themselves were only slightly higher than the badgers had been, making Jake feeling quite confident.

But he quickly identified a few problems. The biggest of them soon entering his sight.

[Great White Stag – lvl ??]

The beast was... majestic. He honestly had no other way to describe it. It stood drinking from a pond in the middle of the plains. It had antlers that looked like they were made out of the most delicate ivory, the purest white color covering its entire body, making it appear albino.

A bit further away were tens of deer, all split into smaller groups. Each group had a few does and a stag or two in them. They all seemed to keep a reasonable distance from the Great White Stag.

But that didn't mean it was alone. Around it were three nearly equally beautiful creatures.

Also pure white, but without the antlers. They seemed almost to give off an aura of gentleness as they stood by the stag.

Identifying them, it became clear that they were also far from ordinary beasts.

[White Doe – lvl ??]

[White Doe – lvl 72]

[White Doe – lvl ??]

The levels were higher than any of the other beasts besides the stag itself.

On a side-note, this identification did help confirm a theory he had about the Identify skill. He had wondered where the line between it showing question marks and the actual level appeared.

He noted that he could see the level 72, but not any of the others. This made him guess that this was likely the maximum. His current level in his race was 48, making those with quick math realize it quite easily. He had already kind of theorized it before, but now he felt pretty sure.

Jake believed that he could identify things up to 50% above his level. Meaning 72 was his current limit. But he would have to test it further to fully confirm it. If he was lucky, then one of the other does would be level 73. Of course, he needed to level up for that to matter.

Which shouldn't be a problem considering the many meat-bags of experience populating the plains.

This abundance of prey, however, led him to a second problem. Or well, the quantity itself was not the problem; the issue was what they were doing.

As he saw right away, these deer were not stationary like in the Badger's Den. Instead, they ran around, making it far too hard to pin down a group. To make matters worse, there was a good chance he would get engaged by a second group after attacking the first.

Each group of deer did not strike him as particularly powerful. They were the same deer and stags that he had hunted many of before, save for their higher level, and even without his new Scales of the Malefic Viper, he felt like he was more than capable of hunting them.

But that didn't mean he was eager to engage an army of the beasts.

He decided to take his time to observe from where he stood. It didn't take him long to notice that there seemed to be a pattern to their movements. The same routes were followed, as paths had been made in the tall grass.

From where he stood, he couldn't see exactly where to and from they were running due to the damn grass.

He tried marking one of them with Mark of the Ambitious Hunter as he followed it. He noticed it going into an area he couldn't see due to the tall grass where it stopped. It didn't move for a good twenty minutes before Jake got impatient. He felt like he was wasting his time just sitting there.

Sneaking down from the hill, he decided to put his Basic Stealth to the test as he entered the tall grass.

He snuck towards the deer he had marked, as he made efforts to avoid the other groups as they ran around. However, this was a relatively short journey as he noticed that these beasts had a far larger area

of engagement than the badgers did. One had barely entered his sphere before it seemed to become alert and turn its attention his way.

The rest of its group also stopped up as they looked into the tall grass where he was hiding. Jake tried to make himself smaller as he stood utterly still. In his sphere, he could see the deer move its ears back and forth as its nose sniffed the air.

Jake controlled his breathing as the beasts stood there, still a good nineteen to twenty meters away from him. As the stag walked up to the edge of the tall grass, he closed his eyes as he focused on calming down his beating heart and held his breath while, at the same time, trying to suppress his own aura.

Slowly lowering himself to the ground, he made sure not to rustle any of the stalks of grass as he lay flat on his stomach. This turned out to be the right decision as a beam of light cut through the air where his chest had been only seconds before.

Through pure willpower, he managed not even to twitch an eyelid as the unexpected attack swept across the grass above him, cutting off the upper half. The cut-off grass fell down as it collapsed, covering the completely unmoving Jake.

Having not hit anything seemed to satisfy the stag that had fired the beam as it did a bellow to its followers, making them move on.

Jake, now entirely covered in the fallen grass, did not budge, but a small smile could be seen on his face. Not just because he had avoided a potentially shitty situation, but because of the system message he just got.

Skill Upgraded:[Basic Stealth (Inferior)] --> [Advanced Stealth (Common)]

He honestly didn't feel like he had done much to deserve the upgrade. Then again, his archery had a similar upgrade just because he thought about how to do archery for a bit.

Looking at the new description, not much had changed.

[Advanced Stealth (Common)] – The deadliest blow is the one not seen coming. A proven artisan in the arts of stealth, you have learned to stay undetected far better than a mere novice. You now find it even easier to blend into the environment, waiting for just the right moment to strike. Adds a minor bonus to the effect of agility and perception while successfully remaining undetected.

It was clear to him that it was just a straight-up upgrade. Upgrading stealth had not been on his to-do list, but it was welcome for sure.

Thinking back, he had actually done a lot of sneaking around in the tutorial. He had crept around the dinosaur-filled mountains, and his time in the outer area had consisted of him trying not to be found by other humans.

He also had a theory that prior knowledge did play in quite a bit. Just like with his archery, Jake did, inadvertently, have some experience on how to sneak. Something he suspected most people who liked to stay up too late in their parents' house had.

However, Jake's thoughts on the implications of the upgrade were interrupted as he was brought back to reality. The stag he had marked earlier had started moving once more.

Taking it as his cue to stop wasting time, he started sneaking towards the spot where it had been sitting still for a good half an hour.

Managing to stay undetected for the rest of the trip, he soon found himself overlooking a small downward slope into a mini-valley of sorts. The middle of the valley contained a spring and a pond not unlike the one the Great White Stag was at.

From where he was hiding, no deer was close enough to spot him. He, however, had a clear view of the pond and the animals around it. The stag that had nearly discovered him was currently drinking some of the water along with its compatriots.

Jake briefly considered attacking them but decided against it. It was too risky with the groups running around. Instead, he made a trip around the clearing, finding to his surprise that no deer was within a few hundred meters.

At the same time, he felt that his mark had stopped once more. It was a good kilometer to the north of the pond he was currently at, making Jake take a risk and rush towards it, still hidden in the tall grass.

It didn't take him long to get there, discovering yet another, almost identical, valley and pond. His marked deer was happily drinking the water, just like the deer at the other pond.

Once more, he decided to wait a bit when an idea of what was going on occurred. Which proved to be the right idea as the group stopped drinking and left once more - this time towards the big pond in the center with the White stag.

Less than a minute later, a new group of deer appeared, this time from the north. Which meant it was not the same one that had nearly spotted him earlier.

Jake decided to make his way back to the pond he was at before, at which he discovered a new group of deer. A few minutes later, they too left, running back towards the center pond. And waiting five minutes or so, a new group appeared.

Yeah, I think I got it, Jake thought to himself.

It was pretty simple. At any point, only a single group would ever be at a pond, and every time they would stay there for a good 20-30 minutes. Afterward, they would either move on to the next pond or return to the middle and then a new group would appear within a few minutes.

With each pond being isolated, this was without a doubt the intended design. The ponds were the killing area, and Jake was on a timer to take down every group before the next one would come. At least that was the theory that Jake was sticking to.

As the group left the pond, Jake waited patiently for the next one to arrive. It was time to put his theory to the test.