

Hunter 285

Chapter 285: Treasure Hunt: No Flying Too High

Jake sprinted through the mist, Sylphie flying along with him. His Sphere of Perception was a bit over 300 meters in radius as he scanned the area at the ground level and even scanned to see if anything was hidden beneath. With his eyes, he scouted the area ahead, seeing movement here and there within the mist. It was incredibly subtle shifts in the background, a bit of mist not moving as uniformly as the rest, or it swaying in a too predictable pattern.

Yet, he wasn't aware exactly of what lurked within. It was clearly some invisible creatures, and they were hiding from not only his eyes but his other senses too. None had entered his sphere either but seemed to keep a very healthy distance. He didn't doubt they were aware he had seen them.

Not simple beasts, he thought. On the contrary, they were careful and calculating. Smart... but not smart enough to avoid Jake's curiosity.

He threw Sylphie a glance, and she seemed to get it as he took a step forward. Jake teleported, took another, and teleported again. He repeated this seven more times until he was at the shimmering form that was hiding. It knew he had found it, and instead of trying to futilely run, it attacked.

Jake saw four long claws reflect a tinge of light out the corner of his eye as it swiped for him. No, it wasn't claws; it was nails. Long nearly sixty to seventy centimeters long nails came for him, but Jake was ready. With one hand, he blocked the blow as a barrier of mana appeared around his hand, as with the other, he released a blast of arcane mana.

A high-pitched scream sounded out as his foe was blasted back, its invisibility now dispelled. He had naturally already seen its form in his sphere, but it was just something else when done with his eyes.

It was a thin figure with one large black eye in the middle of its forehead and a giant circular maw of teeth beneath. Its hands were disproportionately large and had what looked like useless thumbs and then four extremely long nails. Its skin color was grayish blue, and it looked sickly and thin. Unfortunately, his Identify didn't exactly help him understand what it was.

[Young Ekilmare – lvl 118]

I would ask what the fuck an Ekilmare is, but this appears to be it. Huh, Jake thought. He was honestly a bit more used to what was essentially just mutated Earth creatures. But this? This was something entirely else. Well, the Deepdwellers were also kind of weird, but they were mushroom-loving assholes so that at least made sense.

At first glance, it actually reminded him a bit of the undead, but at the same time, he clearly felt a strong sense of vitality.

The creature stumbled to its feet, but this time it didn't attack but just slowly backed away as it turned invisible again. This was totally okay for Jake as he wasn't really that interested in them. He did find it interesting how this was only a Young Ekilmarre, making him wonder what the mature version looked like. But alas, he wasn't in the mood to bully some lower-leveled creature to find out.

Sadly for the Ekilmare... Jake's bird pal was totally fine with it.

Sylphie zoomed past him as she headed for the creature. A domain of green wind spread out around her, and Jake saw the mist appear to almost be locked down as it stopped moving. simultaneously, the creature's invisibility was dispelled, forcing it out into the open where it had to fight.

Jake saw it shimmer again, but this time it didn't turn invisible. Just as Sylphie got close, it swayed and teleported to the side, and a fraction of a moment later, it teleported again, this time behind Sylphie, ready to cut up her small body.

Yeah...

A glowing wing met the claw as a blade of dense green wind cut forth, severing the arm of the Ekilmare.

That was dumb...

A sentiment the Ekilmare clearly agreed with as it hastily retreated. Impressively enough, Jake saw its arm already regenerating while it retreated. Alas, it was far too slow. The small hawk attacked again, and this time the Ekilmare didn't have a response in time.

In what would only be called a fly-by, Sylphie flew past in an insane dash, her wing extending like a lucent blade as she passed. Then, she did half-loop in the air and flew back, landing gracefully on Jake's shoulder.

A few seconds later, a severed head landed on the soft grass.

He looked at it for a moment before the body also collapsed. The flesh wiggled for a bit, but soon it died for good. Some kind of active regeneration skill... not like the Deepdwellers, Jake concluded.

In the end, the Ekilmare was an ambush predator and not a tank. It was fast, had a powerful attack power, and of course, the ability to be invisible and even teleport. Especially the invisibility was respectable. However, to Jake, it was far from enough. Even Sylphie could still detect them. As a hawk, she had high perception by default, and she also had plenty of magic to detect foes.

Jake walked over to the corpse and saw that it hadn't dropped anything of value, at least nothing he could identify. He did want to put it in his inventory anyway as he had decided just to take everything, considering he had the special storage for this event. However, first, he would ask the one who had actually killed the thing.

"Sylphie, can you store it?" Jake asked.

Sylphie looked at him a bit and flew down. She poked the corpse with her talon, and the entire thing disappeared.

While it seemed like a great success, it instead made Jake frown. Because he just felt the corpse enter his own inventory. "Can you take it out again?" he then asked.

She looked a bit confused for a moment, and after shuffling a bit back and forth, a corpse was dumped on the ground. This only made Jake frown even more. "Okay, Sylphie, I'll move back like 100 meters, then try to take it in the inventory and out again, okay?"

He only added to her confusion, but she did as he said.

Jake used One Step Mile to get back and signaled for the bird to put it in the inventory. She did without any issues and then took it out again just after.

Alright... shared inventory... I see no indication of a range limit... isn't this just kind of overpowered?

Jake frowned.

Making his way back to her, he talked. "It appears we share an inventory... do you know what that means?" Jake asked with an excited smile.

"Ree!" Sylphie screeched.

"Oh, yeah, good idea on that one," Jake acknowledged as he took out a bunch of potions from his usual inventory and put them in the Treasure Hunt one. "But, it also means we can split up and get twice the loot! Imagine how many tasty pellets you could get if you managed to collect some cool stuff?"

Sylphie's eyes went wide at the thought as she screeched in agreement. It was lucky they could split up, as, quite frankly, they weren't exactly good at fighting together. Jake sucked at fighting with a partner, and Sylphie also had many flashy attacks and stuff like that.

As for the risks of splitting up? If Jake had learned one thing about Sylphie during their time together, it was how difficult she was to put down. In fact... he would say she had a higher chance of escaping than he did if they met a foe he couldn't handle. Her fully stepping into D-grade had not been a small upgrade. Far from it.

"Ree! Ree?" Sylphie screeched.

“Yeah, of course, just pull on that bond if you need any help; I will make sure to do the same,” Jake answered with a big smile. It was something else both had easily noticed after their contract. Both could vaguely feel the location of the other, mainly just the general direction, but also if the other was still in good condition. It was nice to have, as Jake only believed he could get a warning if Sylphie was in bad trouble without it.

“Then, bon voyage, and may your booty be plentiful,” Jake said snickering, getting a confused head-turn from Sylphie, making him re-word it: “Good luck getting those shinies.”

With those words, Sylphie nuzzled a bit up to him, and he rubbed her head. Then, with a determined look, she took flight towards one of the hills in the distance, a green tailwind left in her wake.

Jake himself turned towards a more prominent mountain far off in the distance. Even the hill Sylphie had chosen was a far ways off, and this mountain was even further in... and damn did he hope there would be more worthy opponents the deeper he went.

He took off, focusing on his sphere the entire way. He did spot a few minor things, like a rock his Sense of the Malefic Viper picked up on containing a lot of mana, a herb here and there, and stuff like that, but nothing truly worthwhile. Well, he took everything he found as sending out a mana string or a quick sidestep on his path didn't slow him down much.

It shouldn't come as a surprise, but he noticed that the Ekilmare liked to cluster around these treasures, likely waiting for something to come by to try and claim them. Or were they just close because they themselves absorbed a bit of mana from the items? It was hard to say, and frankly, it didn't matter. The creatures ran whenever Jake got close, not a single one of them trying to ambush him, and naturally, he didn't bother chasing them either.

Throughout this time, he also made sure to completely ignore any other humans. Considering he was likely the one with the highest perception in this entire Treasure Hunt, he easily spotted them all before they had a chance to spot him.

Surprisingly enough, he didn't notice anyone having a scuffle. Maybe they just hadn't spotted each other... or maybe there was some collective agreement that it simply wasn't time yet. Jake did not hold doubt in his mind that the more time passed, the more humans would switch their goal from finding treasures to stealing from other humans.

In some ways, it was the tutorial all over again, except you would get all their treasures this time around. Even if the person were incompetent, over a week's worth of collecting would still add up to a lot. Certainly, more than one could feasibly collect in a short period.

Not that it was anything Jake particularly planned on doing. Though, of course, if someone wanted to rob him, it would only be fair to rob them back in kind, right?

His journey continued for nearly an hour as he ran at high speeds. He avoided using his One Step Mile to not miss anything with his sphere and also to give those invisible stalkers time to get out the way in time. Additionally, it gave him more time with his feet on the ground. And what did feet on the ground mean?

That's right, more time spent feeling his super comfy boots and their ability to feel earthbound herbs and natural treasures. This did expand his searching perimeter quite a lot, and Jake was essentially a one-man locust swarm, scouring anything of value in his journey.

He also checked the inventory and noticed many corpses appearing, progressively feeling more powerful as they grew in levels. Sylphie seems to be having fun, he thought with a smile as he pulled out an uncommon-rarity sword from the ground and tossed it in the inventory.

Finally, he reached the base of a mountain. He looked up and saw that the fog got denser at higher altitudes. It even began changing color from white to black further up. Even with his insane perception, he couldn't see more than a few kilometers up the cliffside.

All game logic told him the good shit should be up mountains like these. Jake had seen only two mountains and three hills from where he started, this being the smallest of the mountains. He honestly wasn't sure how tall it was as he couldn't see the top back then, and even as he stood before it, it was still a mystery to him.

Without further hesitation, he summoned his wings as he began flying upwards along the cliffside. He had noticed a while ago that the mist seemed to push him down, making flying harder but possible. Sylphie also constantly rebuffed this effect with her winds, making it not really affect her much.

Jake kept flying upwards as the mist got denser and denser. Soon, he spotted something above. An angle that wasn't natural. It was a half-circle that should not appear on any regular mountain. As he got closer, he noticed what it was.

It was a balcony.

As it entered his sphere, he saw it truly was a balcony leading out of the mountain. He also saw that it had been carved into the mountain, making him frown a bit. Was this entire mountain actually some kind of construction? Or was it carved out as a residence at one point?

This Treasure Hunt was meant to take place in a fallen world that still retained traces of civilization. This mountain appeared to be related to that, and beside those buildings down in the plains, the only sign this place had ever been anything more than a hunting ground for monsters.

Jake reached the balcony soon after and landed on it. It was substantial, nearly forty meters long and reaching out fifteen or so meters. He saw the entire edge was lined with what looked like plant boxes. Had they used this place to grow herbs and stuff for those within the mountain?

Looking up, he didn't see any other balconies. Why had they placed it this low down? Did it have something to do with the dark mist above? Jake decided to give a test, so instead of entering the mountain through the large gate on the balcony, he flapped his wings and flew upwards.

The first kilometer went fine, and he didn't spot any other signs of the mountain being inhabited beside his Sphere of Perception reaching inside, scouting it. He couldn't see much as it appeared they had only built far inside the mountain.

Two kilometers up from the balcony, he noticed how it really began to darken.

Three kilometers up, he, for the first time, truly noticed a difference. His skin began prickling, and he covered himself in scales when he saw himself begin taking a bit of damage from the mist. Yet, he decided to keep flying up.

The scales held back whatever damaged him as he sought to analyze it with Sense of the Malefic Viper. It was black, but he didn't sense any immediately familiar concepts in it. It wasn't dark mana or any kind of poison as far as he could tell, and Palate didn't seem to have any effect either.

Five kilometers up, he began taking damage again. The pressure from flying also increased, and he felt like he was swimming through water. No, it was like his body was covered in glue. The damage also only kept increasing, and it was about that time he noticed something even worse... it was accumulating. It wasn't just some purely environmental effect... something was invading his body, actively seeking to destroy him. Yet it also felt faintly familiar... like he had encountered something similar at some point. He stopped advancing and began slowly flying down towards the balcony again. Attempting to get any higher would just be needlessly reckless, and even he could only see a few dozen meters ahead of him with his eyes that high, and based on his sphere, he wasn't even close to the top.

When he landed back on the balcony, he took a knee as he inspected himself. He dispelled his scales and saw thin rune-like lines covering parts of his body, and upon further examination, he finally discovered what the energy reminded him of.

It was a fucking curse.

It was one of the worst kinds of magic. One that relied more on an odd, almost entirely metaphysical concept that Jake wasn't still entirely able to understand. One that relied more on emotions than raw power. One far harder to dispel than some average poison or nearly any kind of magic affinity.

Fuck me, he cursed as he entered meditation to dispel the foreign energy that had invaded his body, as he made a mental note to both himself but also one he sent towards Sylphie:

No flying too high.