

## Hunter 286

### Chapter 286: Treasure Hunt: Fire & Ash

"I fucking hate curses," Jake muttered out loud as he got up. It had taken nearly an hour to fully eliminate the energies in his body, and he had only been up in those dark clouds for a minute or two. Shit, he had even lost over a thousand health during the process. When he imagined what was further up, he shuddered.

Seeing that traveling up the side of the mountain wasn't an option, he went for just traveling inside it. Before that, however, he took all the plant boxes on the balcony into the inventory. None of them gave off any special aura, but they were made out of some kind of metal, so he reckoned they could prove useful. Also... the storage given seemed borderline infinite, so why not just swipe anything you could?

Walking up the entrance of the mountain, he inspected the large black gate. He frowned a bit as he put his hand on it. He noticed how it almost seemed to reject him, and when he tried to pour in a bit of mana to inspect what it was made of, it was just repelled.

It wasn't that the door was enchanted either. Perhaps it was once upon a time, but not anymore. Instead, it appeared to be made out of some kind of metal that completely rejected all mana. Jake also saw further inside with his sphere that another gate was only five meters inside the hallway leading into the mountain.

Considering that his danger sense was silent and he didn't detect any magic, he decided to head inside. Two handles were attached to the door, and he grasped one of them and pulled. The door was heavy as fuck, but he managed to get it open after a bit of struggling. He noticed some mechanism made it close by itself again, making it harder to open as it constantly wanted to stay shut.

Jake was pretty damn sure the door was opened by some kind of enchantment when this place was actually used. That, or they actually kept it well-oiled. Anyway, he went inside and had the door close behind him nearly instantly as it slammed shut.

Once inside, he noticed something, or rather, the absence of something. There was no mist inside, and what had entered with him was quickly dispersing. On a closer inspection... two gates... locking out stuff... yeah, this was totally an air-lock. Well, a mist-lock would be more accurate, as clearly it sought to keep out the mist.

Did those who used to live here fear the mist? Jake asked himself as he went through the second door, now truly entering the mountain. On the other side of the second door was just a long boring hallway with several etchings along the walls and floor. No doubt old inactive enchantments or something. He did test something, though.

\*BOOM!\*

The Pillar of Encumbrance was summoned, and he slammed it into the wall, feeling his arm hurt from the feedback. In retrospect, not the smartest decision. As for the wall? Well, he had taken a small nick out, so that was something. Needless to say, this confirmed the walls of this mountain were strong as fuck. It was like back in the Challenge Dungeon and the indestructible walls back then. Man, he couldn't wait till Hank learned to make invincible houses.

He put the Pillar back in his inventory as he began running forward, taking in the environment. After running nearly half a kilometer, he finally reached another door. All the enchantments or other tools to keep people out were long gone, it seemed, and now anyone who could open the door was free to enter.

Enter, and steal all their shit.

Well, at least he hoped they had a lot of stuff because the entire place seemed quite bare so far. Getting through the third gate, he now truly entered the mountain and what was hiding within, and inside he found... more hallways. But! These hallways also had rooms attached to them - a massive improvement for sure.

Sadly for him, what was inside the rooms was the opposite of interesting. All of them reminded him of those small shitty cabins you got on a cheap cruise ship, with only a single small mat in each and none of them larger than the smallest of apartments.

The only objects inside were a few pieces of old furniture, most of them made of stone. He did see some signs of what had likely once been wooden furniture, but all of those had long rotten away. Additionally, he did notice something else. Ash. Nearly all the rooms had ash, often on the mats that Jake assumed had once been used for meditation or maybe sleeping on.

An enlightened race for sure, Jake confirmed to himself.

Now, Jake did say there were no real objects of value... but that didn't mean he didn't take anything. For example, if a stone looked slightly shiny, he swiped it. Something made of metal? In the inventory you go! Glass? Inventory!

So far, he hadn't spotted any signs of living creatures inside the mountain. Jake didn't rush through but carefully tried to get an understanding of the area. He counted thousands of residences. If the construction within the mountain had as many floors as he theorized, then a million people could have easily lived in there. Probably far more.

Walking down one of the long corridors, he passed a few stairways and what looked like a lift. A lift that had long ago become unable to operate, but he saw no other reason to have a long vertical hole going up and down the mountain.

After walking a bit further, he finally spotted something out of the ordinary. There was a large hall ahead of him. A communal area? It was towards the center of the entire mountain, and once he spotted it, he rushed out.

Entering the room, he came to realize it wasn't really a room at all. Instead, it was a huge open space. Looking up, he could see pure darkness above... he could see the sky. The top of the mountain wasn't made of stone at all, but it looked like it had at least been partly hollowed out to make a huge skylight. The entire mountain was truly just a megastructure. More than fifteen kilometers tall, he now stood on one of the lower-middle floors of what he now rightly identified as an atrium.

This mountain... was a city. A large one. To explore it all properly would take a while even with his sphere, as picking up all the information from it at once was more than a little challenging. So instead, he closed his eyes and focused on Sense of the Malefic Viper and the ground beneath his feet at the same time.

At first, he felt nothing. The entire mountain felt... hollow. Not a single ounce of life or trace of mana anywhere. No... there was some mana. The natural mana in the atmosphere was always there. Always seeping into the natural materials of the world. Yet, he noticed some areas had far less mana than others, which meant that something else had to consume it or keep it out.

Jake jumped out over the balcony and into the open space in the atrium. His wings spread out as he began flying upwards. The lower floors appeared to be where the common people had lived, while the higher floors were where this civilization's rich or powerful had resided.

That, or it was just where they kept the good stuff.

When he was nearly at the top, he took a turn and landed on one of the over a thousand balconies extending all the way up the structure. This specific floor was slightly different from the others, as within, he detected what felt almost like a vacuum of mana.

He soon found the reason: another black metal door. This one wasn't leading into a hallway, however.

Jake opened it with a good push and stepped inside. He found himself in a large room a few stories high with many tall bookshelves lining the walls.

It was a library with pretty much no books. All that remained was dust where the books had once been. Everywhere... except for one place. Directly ahead of him was a single three-meter tall bookshelf different from any of the others in that it actually contained books.

Oh yeah, and a giant magic barrier sealing it in – no doubt the reason why this bookshelf still stood after this long.

It was also the thing that had sucked away all the surrounding mana. Jake walked closer to the barrier... and then finally, something actually happened.

Because what was a good Treasure Hunt without a trap-filled room?

The door behind him sealed shut, the barrier in front of him intensified, and the entire floor lit up with an orange color. Jake didn't know what he had expected. Maybe some elaborate trap that fired out many weapons and different mixed concepts or something. But what did he get?

Fire.

A lot of fire.

Jake pushed a hand out to each side as he activated Limit Break at 10%, and a bubble of arcane energy began forming around him. At the same time, scales covered his body, and he even used his already summoned wings to wrap around his body.

The entire room began glowing orange, and soon the bookshelves caught fire. Next, the balconies and everything else not either within a barrier or made of stone began burning with intense heat. Jake was counted as within a barrier.

At least for now, he was. The room became hotter and hotter, and sweat began dripping down Jake's brow as he tried to hold it back. His scales protected him, but they were far from perfect, and for every moment that passed, it only got hotter in the room.

That was the exact moment Jake learned something new. If the heat got high enough and the fire-affinity intense enough... even mana itself would burn. Everything would burn.

A dozen seconds later, the magic formation died down, and the fire stopped. The atmosphere ceased burning, and all that remained in the room was a single barrier covering the bookshelf. The barrier was

the only thing that was not black ash, but one other place was slightly different: a sphere of ash, looking almost like an egg.

An egg that cracked a moment later as two crispy wings fell to the ground, an ash-covered Jake below.

“Tha-“ Jake tried to say but ended up just making pained coughing sounds as his internals had taken some damage from him stupidly breathing in.

That sure was something, he just thought instead as he shook his body like a wet dog, sending ash flying everywhere, revealing his mostly undamaged armor beneath. The only thing that had really taken a beating was the cloak, and even that was fast repairing, courtesy of the Self-Repair enchant.

Jake had to admit it was quite the trap. Perhaps someone with skills made to detect the trap would have discovered it earlier, but Jake really wasn't good at those magic formations. What he was good at was listening to his danger sense... and throughout it all, it hadn't really activated. In other words, the trap simply wasn't good enough to be a serious threat to him. Which made sense. Because if this room were a legitimate threat to him, it would kill nine out of ten parties from other factions.

It would still kill half for sure. Well, not really kill them, as they would have plenty of time to choose to leave the Treasure Hunt.

Either way, the trap was gone, and now he just needed to find a way to open the barrier and-

Jake heard a sound around him, like a gust of wind, had picked up. He looked down and saw the ash-covered ground glow again, this time with an odd gray light. Oh... the formation isn't done yet.

All the ash in the room began swirling and gathering together in front of the door. Magic hummed to life as the formation transferred all its energy into the amalgamation of ash that soon took the form of a semi-humanoid with two long arms. Jake immediately recognized it as an elemental and used Identify.

[Ash Guardian – lvl 141]

The elemental was nearly twenty meters tall, and faint embers were visible on its body as it moved to attack. It raised its large arm to smash it down towards Jake and-

**\*BOOM!\***

An explosion sent ash flying everywhere as the arm was destroyed, and before the elemental could react, it was hit again.

**\*BOOM!\* \*BOOM!\* \*BOOM!\* \*BOOM!\* \*BOOM!\***

Five explosions nearly scattered the entire elemental as Jake stood with his bow out, another explosive arcane arrow already at the ready. He naturally shot it and made the arrow split into five in mid-air, exploding the elemental again.

It attempted to reassemble itself, and parts of the ash moved towards him to stop his assault. A tornado of ash kicked up around him with red glowing embers mixed in between, but Jake easily dodged back and avoided being surrounded.



He kept bombarding it with arrows. The only thing he would admit was that it was durable. Everything else was just terrible. Maybe it could hurt him if it managed to completely surround and practically absorb him into its ash, but with how slow it was, that would never happen.

The inevitable result was that the elemental died within five minutes of being conjured.

\*You have slain [Ash Guardian – lvl 141] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level\*

Jake saw the elemental slowly fall apart as the ash fell to the ground, showing no signs of moving again. He inspected it with his sphere and found himself disappointed at the lack of loot. God damn magical constructs. It didn't even have an orb like the Cloud Elementals as it was spawned by the formation.

With the death of the elemental, something else also finally happened at the barrier. Jake felt the mana in the entire room shift, and even the door open up, as it seemed like all restrictions on the room were lifted.

The barrier didn't disperse but instead coalesced into a figure of pure mana.

Jake frowned a bit as he saw it. It looked humanoid but a lot thinner and taller. He couldn't see any details as the figure was a dark blue color and more an outline than anything else. It didn't take a genius to know what this was as Jake prepared himself for the exposition dump that was to come. Alas, it was okay as any information about the Treasure Hunt area would be valuable. As for how he knew it was exposition time? What else would a damn library be for?

Almost on cue, the figure in front of him began talking:

“If you are hearing this message, it means you have broken through the defenses of the archives and that the last of us have either fallen or entered slumber. I do not know which world you hail from or if you are even sapient, but I hope for the Records of this world to live on. It may be a lot to ask, but if you listen to the end, I shall reveal information related to the greatest treasure this world holds.”

“Now that’s just playing fucking dirty,” Jake muttered out loud at the projection that just continued without any pause.