

CHAPTER 160 – TERRIBLE PTERODACTYL

You defeat the [Shrieker (Level 34 – Copper)].

You gain substantial Experience for slaying a tough match monster!

“What was that?” Raiko shouted over the wind. Between the sound of the monster’s neck snapping and the Experience notification, Sam figured she’d piece it together shortly.

“Oh, hi, Raiko,” Sam shouted back.

“What, how did you—!?” Raiko stopped bothering with questions when the dinosaur’s talons released her. Rather than tumble free, she desperately held on.

“Hey Sam, how’s it going?” Komachi greeted him, upbeat as ever, paw waving out from under the brim of the Ninja’s hat.

“Good, good,” Sam said absently, trying to figure out just how he was going to get down without turning into a paste.

Though the dinosaur was absolutely dead, it still had wings. With no good ideas forthcoming, Sam went to the one thing that he could rely on.

His overwhelming Strength.

Using his knees to clamp onto the scaly back of the creature to secure himself to it, Sam roughly grabbed the beast’s limp wings. It took him a moment to find a proper grip, but when he did, he extended the wings awkwardly and fought against the immense turbulence to angle them out to catch the wind.

Raiko and Komachi had an awful time beneath the dinosaur.

Sam had no idea what the hell he was doing. If you asked him about Bernoulli's principle, he'd say he would like extra parmesan on it.

But what he did know, was that he had the Strength to force the dinosaur's wings to catch the wind and ride it down.

Sam never had the money or inclination to go hang gliding, but if he had, he would have realized that even though it may *look* like you're lazily drifting to the ground, the speed at which you fall is actually quite fast.

This was something Sam was realizing with alacrity.

"Oh gods, we're not going to hit the lake!" Raiko cried.

"Somethin' bad's happening!" Komachi howled.

Arcing to the side, Sam saw the [Source Chain] falling back to the Skyshard. He gave a great *pull* on the wings and angled the beast's corpse toward the landing spot of the chain with the belief that it would clear a path through the rapidly approaching trees and rocks.

Because, as Raiko said, they were not going to hit the lake. They were going too fast and though Sam could keep the wings angled out to catch the air and stop them from falling like a stone, he did not know how to circle the creature over the lake.

So he glided, angled the wings up as best he could, but his arms weren't nearly long enough and he had none of the instincts for flight that the creature would have had.

The [Source Chain] glittered in the sunlight and, like a breaching dolphin, dropped back to the Skyshard that was its home.

Sam could have stopped it. He had the ability to dismiss the [Source Chain] even though he wasn't *technically* on top of the Skyshard.

Let it ride.

It was the only option he had available that didn't see them crashing into the trees that bordered the brilliantly blue water.

Sam was confident he could keep the wings outstretched, but his arms were only so long.

If the wings broke—and they surely would if they hit those ironwood trees—then they might as well be trying to use a bedsheet to slow their fall.

“We can't stay under it!” Raiko struggled to climb the monster's body without interfering with his efforts. Safe within her hat, Komachi was unable to help other than begin to build up stacks and stacks of [Regen Paeon].

If the two of them were the first to hit the ground, then the monster's body might crush them. Not to mention Sam's weight, too.

Sam did his best to keep everything as straight and level as possible. As things went, he didn't do a bad job. They didn't spiral, flip upside down, or otherwise plummet from the sky as human-shaped creatures were wont to do in these situations.

Raiko thrust her glowing blade into the air and tore a trailing rent through the mana like it was cloth. The strain nearly ripped the weapon from her hand. Whatever she was doing slowed their descent, but not anywhere near enough.

Then there was a burst of air laced with dust and debris that buffeted them, slowing their ride down further, as the [Source Chain] crashed into the Skyshard and plowed a path for them to land.

“That [Source Chain] carrying hard!” Komachi shouted.

As landing strips went, Sam figured they could have done worse. Through the plume of dust, he could barely make out the chewed-

up ground where the trees had been cleared, and the ground churned to something approaching soft.

Provided you only judged it against trees harder than some metals and the numerous stone outcroppings.

Angling the dino was easier than he would have thought. It was just a simple means of leaning his weight and pivoting the wings a little. The real difficulty was not pulling so hard that he ripped the wings off with his bare hands.

The higher Sam's Strength became, the more he had to exercise constant self-control.

They dropped in line with the plume of choking dust and dirt. Sam was thankful for his helmet keeping the worst of the grit from his eyes.

"Might want to buckle in!" Sam shouted over his shoulder. He could no longer see the ground through the debris, but he knew it was close. They were well below the height of the trees.

Heartbeats turned to seconds and still Sam angled the creature's corpse down. *We should have hit already, right?* Sam knew he wasn't the brightest, but even he could tell the difference between 100 feet and 20.

They should have long-since crashed.

Sam dispelled the [Source Chain], only then thinking what it might be like to land on top of that thing. With its weight gone, perhaps they were going to land in a long trench of dirt.

The sky winked out above them.

Sam started to worry. That wasn't supposed to happen. He was pretty sure about that. There was a sensation of vast space that was, nevertheless, enclosed.

The rent Raiko's blade was carving into the ambient mana was the sole ribbon-like illumination marking their descent, and it wasn't much light to see the surrounding space. Her glowing glyph-sleeve did even less.

If anything, the light only served to showcase just how complete the darkness was around them.

Sam didn't like the sounds bouncing back to his ears and his Darkvision was taking its sweet time adjusting to the sudden disappearance of sunlight.

He made a snap decision. "Jump!" Sam shouted at Raiko.

After Raiko and Komachi had disembarked, Sam shoved away from the creature. The fall was less than he expected, but still more painful than he would have liked.

There was a small splash behind him, and that gave him a sense of comfort. A small sense, since his landing was significantly less soft and filled with considerably more rocks.

His only consolation was the pterodactyl's body crunching against the wall not too far ahead of him.

It sounded like somebody driving over a bucket of KFC.

Tucked into a tight ball, Sam's armor took the brunt of the damage, his new cuirass really putting in the work as he finally rolled to a stop and fetched up against a rather sturdy boulder that dug right into his lower back.

It was at that moment his Dark Vision decided to finally illuminate this new place.

Two things became obvious to Sam as he grunted and got to his feet. One, having high HP was absolutely the best thing ever, because although he should have broken *many* bones, he was merely badly bruised.

And two, the [Source Chain] must have broken through into an underground cavern system of vast size because even his Dark Vision couldn't see the walls of the far shores.

He could make out the expansive underground lake, however, and the figure swimming toward him.

At least somebody had a soft landing.

Cool water lapped at the rocky, salt-encrusted shore. Komachi paddled over to Sam from across a great lake, clusters of pillar-like crystals buried in its murky depths.

Distant pain blossomed in his senses from the [Linked Royal Signet Ring], directing his attention to Raiko, who was floating motionless on her back. Something else that was hard to see sank beneath the surface.

Sam dove in after her. He only thought after the fact that he should have taken off his rather heavy armor, but it didn't seem to impede him one bit.

Growing up on O'ahu, Sam took to the water like a fish.

Komachi went from being excited to disappointment as Sam began to pass her. "Dang, that harsh."

Sam swept out an arm, grabbing his cat and depositing her onto his head. Sam continued swimming without missing a beat.

It had been far too long since he'd last had a swim and it felt amazing—albeit very cold—to feel the water on his skin. Saltwater, as well, which was an even bigger surprise.

The water even had the same tang and scent that he was used to from his home. It filled him with an odd sense of nostalgia as he made his way to Raiko.

He looked over her, treading water easily by her side.

“Ow,” Raiko wheezed. She sounded like she had the wind knocked out of her.

“Let’s get you to shore,” he told her. “Can you swim, or do you need some help?”

“Want.”

Sam took a moment to think about that. “All right, that’s fair.”

Careful not to dislodge Komachi, Sam grabbed Raiko and towed her to the rocky shore. With his extra Strength, it was oddly effortless, and Sam made record time cutting through the water.

Depositing the pair onto the shore, Sam looked around at all the glittering points of light in the velvety darkness beyond his Dark Vision’s sight.

“Huh,” he said to the cavern at large. “Who would have thought all this was below our feet? It’s... massive. I mean, I know the Skyshard is pretty big, but this makes it seem like the whole Skyshard is hollow on the inside and that can’t be right.”

Sam found it hard to be anything but positive considering that nobody died or was seriously injured, and they had discovered a massive underground source of saltwater that he strongly suspected was from Hawai’i.

“Is it like our Inventory?” Komachi asked, prancing around the two. Even she was in a good mood from the ocean-like water. “I miss surfing, Sam!”

Raiko took some time to catch her breath. “Doubt it’s completely hollow, but it’s vast for sure. Our Skyshard has always been taller than it was wide too.”

“Are you okay to stay here a bit?” Sam asked her.

“I’m all right,” she said quietly. “Thank you. For all of that.”

He motioned to Komachi. “My pleasure.” And it had been. That was far more fun than Sam would willingly admit to. “Keep an eye on her, and holler if you see anything that’s not me moving around.”

Komachi gave him a thumbs up and strummed her harp softly to apply a few more stacks of [Regen Paeon].

As Sam went off to explore their new surroundings, he was in high spirits. Not only because he strongly believed there were ore veins down here, perhaps precious metals or gems were the cause of that distant glittering light, but because riding the dinosaur down had reminded him of surfing.

Perhaps there were no longer any oceans as such, but there *were* currents of a different kind.

Mana currents.

With some work, perhaps his Blacksmith profession could make a surfboard that would ride the mana currents. Even Raiko proved that with the right technique, you could interact with the mana all around them.

It was a dream worth pursuing.

And so, his head filled with images of surfing around the edges of the Skyshards amid the clouds and a very different kind of great blue ocean, Sam explored the edge of the massive underground lake.