

Hunter 140

Chapter 140: A Cloudy Forecast

Jake would never claim to have in-depth knowledge of the happenings in the sky. He would never claim to be a meteorologist or a weather forecaster. While he had managed to get decent grades in physics and chemistry, he for sure wasn't an expert.

But, despite his lacking knowledge, he was pretty sure that clouds weren't supposed to have trees growing on them. About as sure as that one shouldn't be able to walk on said clouds. This is precisely why his current situation was a bit perplexing.

He was currently standing on a cloud. Looking out into the vast sky. Behind him sat the hawk perched on a branch from an ivory tree that grew on the cloud. Its leaves were a light blue, with dark-blue veins running through every part of the trunk.

The cloud wasn't even very big. It only had that single tree on it and wasn't even five meters across. Jake knelt down and scooped up a part of the cloud into his palm.

It felt fluffy. Not quite like wool, but more like a soft water balloon. Letting go of the piece of the cloud, it just began drifting through the air, now its own separate mini-cloud. Which was likely the same as what had spawned the current cloud they were on.

The two of them had flown up for quite a bit until they reached around 25 kilometers high. If Earth were the same as before the system, they would have well and truly entered the stratosphere by now. Heck, commercial planes didn't fly above 12 kilometers - less than half of where they were now.

And yet, the air didn't even feel any thinner. The mana density the same as closer to the ground too. The only difference was a shift in the affinities. Wind-affinity now being far more prevalent, with earth affinity, on the other hand, severely lacking.

Looking further above, he only saw the endless sky expand even further. Exactly how far one could travel before reaching space, or at least just the outer parts of the atmosphere, was a mystery.

But back to the equally as mysterious cloud. As Jake noted earlier, he believed it to have once been a part of a much greater cloud. His belief in that theory stemming from the absolutely massive cloud floating just a few hundred meters below them - One made of the same tangible type of cloud.

And when he said massive, he truly meant massive. It was too big for him to see where it began and where it ended. He reckoned it was the size of an entire country from Earth before the system. Just hanging up there in the sky, far above where his so-called city was located. Well, not directly above. A hundred or so kilometers north and 25 up, but hey... relatively close.

Sadly the area affected by the Pylon barely extended upwards even if it was directly above. Only a couple of hundred meters at most even now. This meant that even if the Pylon began extending upwards, it would be a very long time before he was able to claim a sky-city. If ever. Though he was pretty sure the cloud was moving slightly... so maybe it would just float away.

Speaking of the Pylon, he could still feel its location. Which was honestly quite lucky as without it, he was pretty lost. He had just followed the hawk as they flew. And with his sense of direction, getting back without a beacon such as the Pylon would prove more than a little difficult. As in, he would likely go in the direct opposite direction and never return.

He had only been gone for a few days, and that Hank guy said it would take a week to make the house. So he didn't plan on returning for that time at a minimum, which gave him plenty of time to explore the enormous cloud-continent in front of him.

Something the hawk was clearly on board with. In fact, Jake was pretty sure it was the reason it had brought him here, to begin with. Maybe because it wanted a companion for some added safety, or just because it wanted to continue leveling itself.

Either way, after a brief break and a potion each, they took to the sky once more. Flying down to the giant continent floating below, Jake felt an almost child-like excitement at the thought of exploring a freaking sky-island made of clouds.

It spoke to an adolescent part of him that wanted adventure. So far, the things he had encountered in this new world were rather... unimpressive from a spectacle-standpoint. It was caves, giant forests, plains, and so on. But a giant cloud... now that's something.

The entire cloud was extremely thick too. The hawk and human had flown up parallel to a wall of cloud as they ascended. It had to be at least three or four hundred meters thick. But it was nothing compared to the sight that met him when he got above the edge of the cloud.

Before Jake, he saw the sprawling world that lay upon the cloud. Countless ivory trees were scattered about, with a giant tree off far in the distance - a giant tree that he could only see because of the bright flashes it gave off every few seconds as it was currently night time.

Like a lightning conductor, it was struck by bursts of electricity from all other trees on the island, acting as the epicenter of the entire continent. It made Jake believe that these trees were the whole reason the clouds were even able to be stepped on in the first place.

After the massive tree and lightning, the next thing that struck him was the many sources of movement he saw. Countless birds flew above the island, which wasn't a surprise at all. What was surprising was the other type of creature.

On the cloud below walked several figures. Vaguely humanoid but clearly not. They were entirely white and looked to be part of the cloud continent itself, but a quick Identify proved they weren't.

[Cloud Elemental – lvl 56]

It was his first encounter with an elemental. He knew of their existence from books he had read on alchemy and from the description of his bow. Concerning alchemy, it mainly discussed how elementals were great sources of ingredients for many kinds of alchemical creations.

Once slain, an elemental will always turn into a small orb of its element. A Cloud Elemental, as an example, would drop a Cloud Orb. The orb would contain a highly concentrated amount of cloud-affinity mana and was thus highly suitable as an ingredient.

Jake didn't have any need for it, however. Mainly because he didn't know any recipes that required orbs. Secondly, because his alchemy branch didn't really use those sorts of items often, he doubted it would even be instrumental in the future.

Pure forms of a type of mana like that would most often be found in beneficial pills, flasks, or elixirs - not poisons. But of course, that wasn't the only reason to hunt them. Experience was a universal gain for any being with levels, after all.

Something the birds were fully aware of. The cloud elemental Jake had just identified was dived upon by a group of five birds. In its semi-intangible form, it ignored the purely physical attacks but took damage from magic.

In less than a minute, it dispersed and turned into a small fingernail-sized white orb. One of the birds, the largest one, ate it without any hesitation as the five of them flew upwards once more.

As he was observing this, he saw several other similar occurrences all around the island. Most ended with dead cloud elementals, but sometimes they turned it around on the birds and killed them instead. Enveloped by the elemental and consumed.

Despite the many deaths, it didn't appear to affect the population of the elementals, however. As Jake saw them die, he saw just as many emerge from the island below. Like climbing out of the ground, they came into being. Born from the vast cloud that was the island itself.

He was thrown out of his thoughts by a blast of wind from the hawk behind him. It tired of his useless gawking. He understood what it wanted, and he couldn't agree more. While observing the many birds hunt was entertaining in its own right, nothing was better than doing it yourself.

Sweeping down, the two of them split up slightly as they each went for a target. The hawk was going for another bird at level 93, while Jake aimed for an elemental larger than nearly all the others he saw. One that had just killed a group of birds being overconfident in their ability to face it.

[Cloud Elemental – lvl 95]

Jake smiled to himself as he landed on the cloud in front of it. He wasn't stupid enough to try and fight while flying. Jake knew his own limitations. On the ground, he was far more potent and far more comfortable.

The elemental towered over him, being nearly ten meters tall. It looked vaguely human but was way too bulky for it to be so. Its two arms were as thick as its torso, and it didn't have any legs but only a swirling mass of clouds that floated slightly upon the island below.

Looking upon it, he habitually used Mark of the Ambitious Hunter, took out his bow, and channeled and fired off an Infused Powershot without any hesitation. The elemental that was just floating there didn't even react before the arrow reached it - an arrow that pierced straight through it, leaving a big gaping hole.

Wait... he thought as the elemental now shifted its focus to him. His mark informed him that the attack had done barely any damage. Only a few remnants of mana had invaded the body of the elemental and actually harmed it.

It slowly extended its hand and fired off a compressed beam of steam towards him without making any sound. Its movements were slow, but the beam more powerful than he anticipated. It kicked up smoke as the cloud dispersed upon being hit, forcing Jake back.

It slowly hovered towards him as it continued firing out a constant stream of steam. Jake used his One Step Mile to create some distance as he tried firing a Splitting Arrow towards the elemental. He hoped the extra arrows from the skill counted as magical or something like that.

Once more disappointed, they too just passed through the cloud elemental. Not doing any damage at all.

He tried a few more times and even fired off an arrow coated in his blood in the hope of it having any effect. Unsurprisingly poison didn't work on a being made out of literal clouds. Having no blood. Or flesh. Or really a physical body to speak of.

By now, he was beginning to recognize that he may have a minor hole in his repertoire of skills. He was good at killing things mainly due to his incredibly useful Powershot and poisons, both of which proved useless against the elemental.

Then he thought he was brilliant as he used one of the functions of wings he hadn't tried before. He burned the blood within the wings, as the poisonous mist slowly seeped out. He smiled as he flapped his wings and sent a cloud of deadly mist towards the elemental. Eat this!

The cloud of mist floated towards the elemental... and then just swirled around it as it was slowly dispersed. Like a constant current of air flowed around the elemental at all times, his mist didn't even make contact. Well shit.

He also seriously doubted that swinging at it with his sword and dagger would do much good. Maybe Descending Dark Fang would do damage, but how many would it take?

From what he saw from the birds, they mainly used blasts of wind and pure mana to disperse and kill the elementals. Wind magic appearing especially useful.

The problem was that Jake didn't have a single magical attack. The closest thing he had was Touch of the Malefic Viper when it came to offensive magic. One could count his Gaze of the Apex Hunter as a magical attack, but its function was to immobilize against an opponent of his own level, not to deal damage.

On the other hand, the elemental didn't have a good way to attack him either. Its steam didn't hit, and its movements were way too slow to catch up to him. It was a stalemate where neither side could get any ground.

But Jake was reluctant just to give up. He knew mana-based attacks worked. So wouldn't he just have to attack it with that?

Spreading out his hands, mana began accumulating in them. His many hours of mana practice being shown off. This time he didn't bother to form strings, though. He simply gathered small orbs of pure mana.

Like back in the Forgotten Sewer, when he was exploring the dark-affinity, the mana in his hands begun changing color. From a transparent shimmer to two black orbs. The process took a few seconds, but it was far faster than it had been back then.

He threw the two bolts of mana at the elemental with hope in his eyes. While it wasn't a skill, he had still packed a few hundred points of mana within each bolt.

The two bolts hit the cloud elemental straight on and sunk into its body. Jake felt the mana instantly dissipate as it spread throughout the body of the elemental. And then it... disappeared. Or, more accurately, it was suppressed by the elemental.

Well, that was a bummer, he thought, disappointed. He could tell that it had done some damage, but he was pretty damn sure that he would run out of mana before it died. He needed something else.

The next few minutes were spent with Jake condensing balls of mana of different forms to attempt to kill it. He tried to condense the mana, shape it, and even test if he could somehow make it into another affinity, like earth-affinity. Failing in all these attempts, and even when he succeeded, the resulting attack did nothing to the elemental.

In the end, he tried to move in close and attempt Touch of the Malefic Viper. He wasn't keen on it as he had seen the fate of a bird being devoured by the cloud but felt like he had no other choice. It was either that or retreating.

Carefully approaching the elemental, he dodged the blasts of steam as he neared its lower body. It floated about half a meter above the cloud island, meaning he could only touch its lower section without flying.

But just as he was about to reach it, it smashed both its massive arms down towards him. He managed to dodge, but the attack didn't end there. An explosion of steam and mist pushed him back tens of meters while scalding his skin slightly.

With the giant elemental's arms still lowered, he took a step forward and appeared right in front of it once more. His hand was glowing a dark green sheen as he plunged it into the Cloud Elemental's arm. Instantly he felt like he had just put his hand into boiling water as he quickly covered his entire body in scales. It helped immensely, but it still hurt.

At the same time, the elemental churned as parts of its arm began turning greenish. Jake barely managed to smile triumphantly before the elemental countered him once more. Parts of its arm that had begun turning color exploded. Right into him as he stood with his hand inside the elemental.

Jake found himself blasted backward, his entire upper body and arms scalded from the hot steam. He flew back nearly five hundred meters before he hit the ground rolling. The scales had blocked most of the blow, but it had still managed to do immense damage to him.

Especially the hand and lower arm that had been inside the elemental was a mess. Jake's hand was entirely broken, with the skin and flesh melted. More bone than hand remaining. The rest of his lower arm not much better.

By now, he had to admit that he was countered. He didn't know what to do.

Which was the moment where a giant blade of wind cut into the Cloud Elemental. The hawk landed between Jake - who was still getting up - and the elemental slowly trudging towards him.

In the fight, he had nearly forgotten.

He wasn't alone.