

## Hunter 142

Chapter 142: Look at Me, I'm the Mage Now!

Power crackled in the air as three blue bolts appeared - all of them looking like small crystals as they floated above his head. He fired them towards the Cloud Elemental with a thought as it was still struggling to reform the parts of its body that were already missing.

But his bolts weren't its only problem. Just as its arm reformed and tried to counterattack, a blade of wind cut it off, and a gust dispersed the cut off arm. And right in time for another three bolts to hit it square in its chest, forcing it back even more.

Jake could only cackle at the ease of the fight. It had been going on for nearly ten minutes now, but it had been entirely one-sided. The hawk and himself worked in concert to keep the elemental suppressed and in a constant state of recovery.

Less than two minutes later, it failed to heal itself, likely having run out of mana or whatever resource it used to keep itself alive.

\*You have slain [Cloud Elemental – lvl 91] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level\*

\*'DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 85 - Stat points allocated, +4 free points\*

Jake smiled at the level, happy to feel the sense of progression not just in his skill level but stats too. He was looking forward to his next skill selection for his class very much - his recent progress as a mage sure to be reflected.

He wasn't the only one that leveled up. Hawkie had also been blessed with a level at some point since their meeting a couple of days ago.

[Galesong Hawk – lvl 91]

"You good to keep hunting?" he asked, taking out a mana potion to chug down. The hawk glanced at him before motioning with its wing towards the now empty potion in his hand.

Not sure which one it wanted; he just took out both a stamina and a mana potion. It selected the mana potion by blowing it out of his hand and into its talons like it did every time he fed it.

"I am beginning to suspect you just keep me around as a free potion-dispenser," he laughed as he put the two now empty bottles away in his spatial storage - Hawkie neither confirming nor denying his heinous accusation.

The two of them quickly found their next target, this time not going for an elemental but a group of birds hunting one. While it wasn't very honorable to interfere in a fight in progress, Jake had come to accept it as commonplace in a place like this.

He and Hawkie had been attacked plenty of times already in the middle of their fighting. And they were even considered pretty lucky with their high levels scaring off most potential attackers - their ability to deter opportunistic beasts growing with Jake's proficiency in magic.

It hadn't even been half a day since he killed his first elemental solo with his bolts. A few hours in, he questioned himself why he even formed them in his hands. With the help of his ever-present Sphere of Perception, he could easily see all around him and better observe the mana in the air.

This also meant that he could easier form mana wherever he could 'see.' So he began forming singular bolts of mana in the air while at the same time making them in his hands. Over the course of the day, it became him only making free-flying bolts that he kept suspended above his head.

It meant that he could keep his hands free. His initial genius plan being to fire off bolts of mana while also using his bow. A plan that looked fine on paper, but in reality, proved more than a little challenging to pull off. No matter how much he tried, he couldn't focus on doing both things at once, so whenever he attempted to fire an arrow, the mana bolts would fizzle out.

He could still fire an arrow, summon and shoot bolts of mana, and then fire an arrow once more without any issue. The problem was that gathering a mana bolt still took a few seconds. And while that doesn't sound like long, he could quickly fire off several arrows in the same period. It also wouldn't exactly serve as any type of surprise attack when the enemy could clearly see the bolts form.

Which is why for now, he stuck to going full mage. Besides, he hadn't stopped working to improve his attack method even after summoning three bolts at once. He wanted to do more and do them faster. As well as a plethora of other improvements, all at the same time.

Mana bolt was a basic form based on a basic skill. An excellent starting point for sure, but it was just that: a starting point.

The only reason he stuck to the bolts, for now, was because of their simplicity. It allowed him to focus on substance over form. Focus on the nature of the mana within each bolt instead of the structure of the attack itself.

He carefully kept refining the offensive mana within to make it more effective. He wasn't sure exactly how the bolt's power was determined, but he was confident that the mana's quality mattered. Other than that, the quantity of mana used clearly played a part too. The intelligence stat also had to play a part somewhere if his guesses were correct. Which he was pretty sure they were.

So far, he had felt his bolts continuously improve - even with the same amount of mana spent for each bolt. It was due to how well he used the skill, the methodology behind the bolt. Like how he improved his ability to craft potions to make one of better quality, he could make a mana bolt of a higher quality.

The improvements had been constant so far. Jake's mind was entirely focused from start to end. The only breaks being his one-sided banter with Hawkie while consuming mana potions to keep him going.

Moving his attention back to the present, he summoned his bow for the first time since his failed attempt to use it in concert with mana bolts dozens of fights ago - their target the aforementioned group of birds.

Quickly he smeared the arrows in his own blood to poison them. The birds were fighting an elemental at a level that even Hawkie and he hadn't tried yet.

[Cloud Elemental – lvl 99]

The birds were three nearly identical ones - all of them only slightly larger than Hawkie. They looked like crows except for one minor detail: they were all on fire, and vortexes of flames spun around them as they whittled down the elemental. Their levels not to be scoffed at either.

[Flare Crow – lvl 92]

[Flare Crow – lvl 95]

[Flare Crow – lvl 94]

Jake exchanged a glance with Hawkie before he began channeling his Infused Powershot. Mark of the Ambitious Hunter already applied to the target in his sights.

He focused on the skill and the build-up of stamina and mana. He tried to think of a way to improve it but found that whatever the system helped the skill do was already better than his current comprehension of offensive mana.

Besides, the way it supported Infused Powershot was different than a mana bolt. It served more to 'buff' the bow during the attack than the attack itself. The arrow would naturally be affected during the process, hence increasing its power even further.

How he had managed to upgrade the skill while in a pinch back in his fight against the first Alpha Badger was still a mystery to him. A confluence of enlightenment, luck, and talent had formed the skill that became the cornerstone of his victory in the tutorial.

A cornerstone the unlucky Flare Crow was about to become very familiar with. Now even further enhanced by another skill in his repertoire.

The level 95 crow - chosen as it was the strongest - picked up on the incoming Galesong Hawk but didn't appear very fazed by it. That was when it suddenly felt itself freeze. It felt the gaze of an Apex Hunter pierce into its very soul.

In the middle of flight, it just began falling in the direction its momentum was already taking it. But it barely managed to be affected by gravity before an arrow soared through the land of clouds.

Jake stood surrounded by mist kicked up from when he released the arrow as it penetrated the crow. Its small size was only serving to worsen the damage. It pierced straight through its body, leaving a hole the size of an arm. Which is to say nearly half of its body had just been obliterated.

It fell down as Jake was already charging his second shot. All of the other crows were now fully aware of the danger that had just set upon them. They had been aware of the hawk but hadn't realized the real threat was the lower-level human in the background.

They were ready for the second arrow to come. But their readiness was meaningless before Gaze of the Apex Hunter. The attempt to dodge by the weakest crow thwarted as it too found an arrow embedded in its neck. The shot's power significantly weaker as Jake hadn't had time to charge it for as long. Weaker, but still lethal.

At least he thought it was lethal. What happened next forced him to reconsider that assessment, however. The first crow that he had believed dead for sure exploded in an inferno of golden flames - the flames scorching the area over a hundred meters around it.

The one hardest hit by this wasn't Jake, who stood at a safe distance, or the Hawk that had yet to make it into its range, but instead the Cloud Elemental. The other crows didn't appear affected by the flames at all.

Less than a second later, the second crow that he had shot also exploded in flames. He had thought it was some kind of suicide skill for a moment, but when he saw a figure rise out of the inferno, he understood it wasn't.

The crow was now no longer a small bird but had grown tenfold in size. Its wings were blazing like a phoenix reborn as it soared into the sky. Swiftly followed by the second crow that had undergone the same rebirth of flames.

Both were now heading towards Jake, completely ignoring both the elemental and hawk. Hawkie tried to intercept them but was instead attacked by the third crow's breath of flames, forcing it to erect a barrier of wind around itself.

He was on his own, with two giant flaming behemoths flying towards him, leaving everything in their wake scorched. The clouds below being burned by the golden flames as they lingered and spread. The fire clearly not ordinary as they even could set the clouds and Cloud Elemental on fire.

Jake wasn't fearful as he covered his entire body in dark green scales. His sense of safety immediately increasing as he raised his bow once more. No way he would make their attack easy on them.

He fired another Infused Powershot at the highest-leveled crow in the lead. Despite its body appearing to be made of pure flames, it was still flesh and blood below the inferno. The arrow penetrated into its body and went out the other side, leaving a wound behind that closed itself as quickly as it had come - the damage caused by his initial Powershot also nowhere to be seen.

Whatever the skill that caused their transformation did, it included healing their body at an incredible pace. Their size and flames both buffed to a great degree.

One more arrow was all he managed before the first crow reached him – this arrow also penetrating through the beast and leaving a wound that healed as quickly as it had come. It was as he expected.

Dismissing his bow, he pulled out his dagger and sword. The air shimmering around him as Limit Break activated at 10%, all of his stats instantly experiencing the boost. He was ready.

He felt the heat before the impact. The licks of the golden flames upon his body moments before the massive beast smashed into him beak-first, trying to impale him as he burned up. But it didn't go as the crow planned.

With a swift sidestep, he dodged the beak narrowly. Its flames seared his clothes but failed to burn them entirely. The scales beneath keeping out the heat as his entire person caught on fire.

His shortsword was cleaving a long wound along its side as it passed him, nearly dismembering one of its wings. This was also the time where he confirmed another of his suspicions.

The beast had grown in size and overall power, but its body was significantly weaker. Its toughness lowered as his attacks all did far more damage. The crow may have felt like that didn't matter due to its flames healing it frequently, but Jake knew it couldn't be sustainable.



Its mana was constantly draining - every wound taking a considerable part of its limited pool to heal. The constant consumption of mana would have likely not been an issue against most foes as its damage output was high. But to fight Jake was another story.

Barely ten seconds had passed since Jake's initial attack. The crow had been too caught up in its counterattack to notice the issues its own body was currently experiencing. Its mana drained far quicker than the damage it took warranted, and a rotten smell began spreading in its nostrils.

Rot. It was rotting on the inside, forced continuously to expend mana to heal itself. A nefarious poison had taken hold of its body, and no matter how much it tried to burn it away, it failed over and over again. The first arrow introduced the poison into its entire body in moments, and by now, it was too late already.

With fright in its eyes, it struggled to quickly kill the winged human. Its comrade having now also arrived. The second crow had been inflicted with less poison than the first, but the effects would begin showing soon.

Perhaps they held a hope that the poison would lose its effectiveness with the death of Jake. Something he had no intention of allowing them to find out.

He, too, had noticed the poison spreading within them. Sense of the Malefic Viper informed him that while they were attempting to purge their bodies, it spread nearly as fast as they did so. Maybe they would make it if they disengaged now and focused on healing, but the thought didn't even occur to them based on their reckless attacks.

A third explosion of golden flames was seen as the third crow was forced into using it by the hawk in the background. Yet even with its transformation, it failed to land any attacks on the hawk. It tried to, but every time it even came close, the hawk flew away while continually bombarding it with blades of wind.

Both fights had turned into ones of endurance, and Jake and Hawkie were both winning. The only outlier being the Cloud Elemental that was still waving its giant arms around from the golden flames consuming its body.

Jake too burned, the heat building up. He saw even the energy his body emanated due to his consuming stamina catching on fire. The golden flames being way different than simple flames.

An explosion forced him back once more as the first crow was in full desperation mode. It consumed mana like crazy to make the inferno surrounding it larger and hotter. Upon landing on the cloud, Jake took another step backward, teleporting tens of meters out of the fire.

He quickly took out his bow once more and fired another arrow, splitting into a dozen in mid-air. Being clumped up and massively grown in size, the two crows were both hit by a handful of arrows each. Only one of them carried even more poison, but all of them exacerbated their desperation.

The two beasts retaliated, one with a breath of fire and the other a colossal fireball. Jake stepped to the side, tens of meters passed with a single footfall, as he fired another Splitting Arrow. He had no intentions of facing them in melee any longer as he had enough issues dealing with the fire still lingering on his body.

This kept up for a few minutes as the two crows desperately tried to lock him down and burn him up. He was repeatably dodging and firing an arrow here and there.

In the end, the second crow turned out to be the first to succumb to the poison. After a final attack that forced Jake to sacrifice one of his wings to block its attack, the crow died - the flames dying out with it. Less than a minute later, so fell the other crow.

At the same time, Hawkie was beginning to struggle. Without any poison, the last crow appeared to be outlasting his hawk friend. Jake saw that a few of its feathers were now burned at their tips, and he had a feeling Hawkie wouldn't like making too much contact with those flames. It also looked like both its mana and stamina were running low from the constant need to dodge and fire off attacks.

Jake came to the rescue with a fully charged Infused Powershot. Freezing it with Gaze of the Apex Hunter to make sure the blow landed where he wanted it to.

With the fight now a two versus one, the last crow died in less than half a minute. Hawkie using a skill to lock it down in a dome of wind as poisoned arrows pelted it to death.

The only remaining enemy was a Cloud Elemental at death's door. The flames of all three crows having burned it during the fight after it was already severely weakened due to the fighting before he and the hawk interfered.

It still took them a few minutes to finish it off, with Jake doing most of the damage using his mana bolts. Hawkie was taking a breather, only occasionally firing a few blades of wind here and there to keep it down.

After it all, they both took to the air and returned to the same small cloud island they had come from. Exhausted, Jake entered meditation as the hawk also closed its eyes to rest.