

## Hunter 144

### Chapter 144: Not Again

The life of a Cloud Elemental was truly sad. Their only comfort being low intelligence, making them unable to comprehend exactly how much it sucks. For them, living more than a dozen hours was an outstanding achievement. Managing to actually fight back and slay an attacker even more so.

Birds hunted them every hour of the day. All of them long familiar with the elemental's attack methods and defensive measures. And now, even a winged human had joined the fray to hunt down the poor elementals.

Jake fired off the bolts of mana like never before. But not from floating orbs above him. Instead, he stood with his bow held high as he shot an arrow that exploded with the power of dozens of the old mana bolts.

Hawkie had been gone for nearly half a day. He wasn't sure what his feathered friend was doing, but Jake hadn't been idle during that time. With only himself and weak Cloud Elementals to fight, he had plenty of time to reflect on his method of attack.

He had come to realize that not using his archery was a real waste. So he came up with a new plan. To combine the two somehow. And after only a few hours of testing, he had come up with the current attack.

Taking out an arrow, he formed the shape of the mana bolt around it. He poured mana into and around it, making it crackle with energy - to call it a normal mana bolt was no longer accurate. After he had formed the bolt entirely, he channeled Infused Powershot and fired it.

It all added up to a mighty explosion of mana as the arrow pierced into the cloud elemental. Just in time, too, as the arrow was just about to break apart from the excess mana. The elemental that had been the target nearly broke entirely apart as it struggled to reassemble itself again.

He didn't wait as he nocked another arrow and began creating another mana bolt around the arrow. It took a few seconds to form it entirely, drew the string, and fired it off, resulting in another explosion.

In retrospect, it wasn't actually that much more useful than just firing off pure mana bolts. Jake could make more and fire them faster without first forming them around an arrow and firing them. Overall damage per second would likely even be higher just firing pure mana bolts.

But for the first arrow, it was well worth it to form it and use Infused Powershot to improve it further. Only against elementals, though, due to one fatal flaw with the method.

It didn't work with his poison. He had tried first to coat it in his blood and then form a bolt of mana around it but found that the poison eroded the mana. He then tried just using a poison he had concocted, but this time the mana interfered and made the poison less effective.

He then had the brilliant idea of using Touch of the Malefic Viper on an arrow to infuse it with poison. He even mentally slapped himself for not doing it earlier. That is until he actually tried to do it. The arrow barely made contact with his hand before it just broke apart and turned to ambient mana.

In essence, it didn't work. Besides, when Jake turned an arrow into a mana bolt, it exploded on impact due to how unstable it was. This wasn't exactly a good way to poison anyone and would instead just ruin the arrow's poison even if it worked.

So he decided to use his mana bolt arrows against elementals and poisoned arrows on everything else. Of course, he hoped to one day combine the two, but it seemed far away and something the system didn't particularly like. Maybe he could get a skill at 90.

He felt a bit in a hurry to level up, but on the other hand, he wanted to keep pushing the still unexplored potential of his newfound proficiency in utilizing mana in combat. At least until his current rapid progression petered off.

Also, he kind of didn't want to engage too powerful Cloud Elementals without Hawkie. He needed the bird to ensure he could actually kill them, considering his still lackluster damage output. He was an archer and not a mage, even with his mana bolts. It could get a bit dicey, and he had missed out on a few kills due to other birds swooping in and interfering.

Luckily Hawkie had returned when he made his way back to the cloud island. It was perched on the tree impatiently staring at Jake as he arrived.

With a slightly apologetic nod, he sat down and entered meditation to top himself off right away so they could return to their hunt. He didn't need more than half an hour to get back in top form once more. Mainly because of the potion he drank, but excessive consumption of alchemical products was a hallmark of his recovery process by now.

The next days were relatively uneventful compared to what Jake was used to. They killed Cloud Elementals, fought off asshole groups of birds trying to take advantage of them, acted like assholes by taking advantage of other groups of birds, and so on - the usual stuff that happens on a cloud island the size of a country.

Every day Hawkie would leave for anywhere between a few hours to half a day. Jake spent this time either experimenting with mana or solo hunting a bit. He was lucky that he had stocked up on so many potions that he didn't have to brew any.

His bolts of mana had improved hour by hour, and by now were far more potent than the ones he started with. Their shape now resembled small lightning bolts as they crackled with energy floating above him.

Their killing did unavoidably result in a lot of experience earned. Jake ended up gaining another three levels even if he didn't find the fights that interesting.

\*'DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 87 - Stat points allocated, +4 free point\*

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\*'DING!' Class: [Ambitious Hunter] has reached level 89 - Stat points allocated, +4 free point\*

\*'DING!' Race: [Human (E)] has reached level 79 - Stat points allocated, +5 free point\*

Just one more level, and he would unlock another skill. He was very expectant, of course. Two days ago, his progress in the mana bolts significantly stagnated as he began to run out of ways to improve them. For now, it would just take hard work and time for further improvements.

Compared to the first mana bolt he threw with his hand like a plebian, he now shot off crackling bolts of pure unadulterated pain like a true mage. The only minor issue with them being their innate instability

He wasn't sure why they were like that; they just were. Perhaps it was due to his desire to continually pack more power and destructibility in them, or maybe it was due to his starting point with forming the bolts, to begin with.

It was the thought process of turning mana destructive after all. Jake always had more focus on improving destructibility over stability. Not that he held any regrets towards that. That path felt more natural for him to begin with. The mana closer aligned to his so-called 'Jake-affinity.'

He hadn't noticed the small purple wisps of energy that had begun appearing in his bolts... the same kind that emerged during the Trial of Myriad Poisons when he sought to destroy and break down the poison in his body. Each of them far too minute for him or anyone but the strongest of gods to detect.

Hawkie had also progressed steadily, gaining only two levels, though. He didn't see any notable improvements in his hawk's fighting abilities, but it had gotten faster and a bit stronger. The underlying toolkit remained the same, consisting of wind attacks and swift movement.

Either way, he was satisfied with his progress, and the bird didn't complain either. The only ones that really had a right to complain were the cloud elementals, whose sole existence was to die within hours of being born.

They had traveled quite far into the cloud island too. Surprisingly that didn't really result in the levels of the elementals or the birds increasing; there wasn't even more of them. However, it allowed him to get a better look at the giant crystal tree that was the epicenter of the entire thing.

It was truly massive. Lightning crackled between its branches and the small trees below as it stood there menacingly. Using Identify on it didn't yield any result, meaning it likely wasn't a monster. It also felt far too big to be useful in alchemy.

The pressure it gave off was enough for the two of them to keep a safe distance, though. Neither of them interested in getting hit by a wayward bolt of lightning.

He was a bit surprised to see that some birds didn't have the same reservations. But upon further inspection, he came to understand why. They were monsters of the lightning-affinity and thrived in an environment filled with volatile energy.

This didn't mean that those birds were safe close to the tree, however. They faced powerful competition from other monsters trying to monopolize the powers found there. A few of these competitors making Jake and Hawkie retreat in a hurry. Especially two that seemed exceptionally competitive.

One was a giant bird, a commercial airliner's size - a wingspan tens of meters wide. Its body covered in feathers colored a deep black with small blue patterns here and there. Lightning crackled in its wake when it moved, as it kept away all other birds in the area by frying them completely. The pressure the giant bird gave off, making it clear it was a step ahead of all the other beasts.

[Thunder Roc - ???]

The second competitor looked a lot like a Cloud Elemental, but instead of the fluffy white body, this one had a dark gray one with thunder crackling within. Its body flashed with electricity every few seconds as it sat on one of the tree's larger branches. Absorbing the lightning mana as far as Jake could tell.

In size, it dwarfed even the gigantic Roc - a skyscraper of lightning and death. It too in the D-tier.

[Storm Elemental - ???]

These two were what dominated the center of the sky island. Throughout the week, he had seen the two face off a few times, but they appeared unable to properly wound the other. Both were relying on lightning attacks while at the same time being mostly immune to it.

So they had reached a semblance of balance as they kept to each side of the tree. Other birds and elementals were competing below, sometimes trying in vain to reach for the crown where most of the lightning mana was condensed.

He couldn't help but throw Hawkie a glance the first time they saw the two of them. Hinting if they should give it a shot sometime soon. To which he got a bewildered look back as if he was the biggest idiot the hawk had ever seen.

Not that he didn't understand why. The two of them were clearly far above their level. They should still both be in the early D-tier, but of course, that didn't mean they were something the two of them could handle.

As always, he couldn't help but compare them to the King of the Forest. He imagined how the King would fare against these creatures. The version of the King before being stabbed by a tusk, weakened by the bead from the Nest Watcher, and blown up by the corrupted moonstone.

And the conclusion he reached was the mental image of the Roc being torn apart by the golden claw. The elemental ripped into countless pieces by telepathy as a shockwave of mental energy crushed both of their souls to nothingness.

At least, that is what his intuition told him would have happened. He was perfectly aware that he had never truly seen the King in his prime; all the extraordinary items weakened him to a ridiculous degree. What he did remember, however, was his fully powered Infused Powershot being blocked like it was nothing.

Returning to the real world, he was currently flying back towards their little cloud island once more for a round of meditation and drinking potions. Their daily routine became more and more habitual as Hawkie didn't even have to ask for a potion anymore.

Just as he entered meditation, he was thrown out of it by a system message.

Quest Received: Contested Pylon of Civilization

City Lord Miranda Wells has initiated the process to take control of the Pylon of Civilization. If left unchecked, you will lose ownership.

Time Remaining: 29 days, 23:59:59

Quest Reward: Retain control of Pylon of Civilization.



Penalty upon failure: Loss of ownership of the Pylon of Civilization. [Nobility: Earl] downgraded to [Nobility: Viscount]

He stared at it for a while, bewildered. What the hell? He was confused. But the confusion quickly turned to anger as he stood up abruptly, startling Hawkie. But what startled Hawkie more was the aura he currently gave off.

Bloodlust filled the air in an almost tangible aura. His eyes were blazing with the yellow sheen from Gaze of the Apex Hunter. To say that he was pissed was an understatement.

He had been told to stay away for a week. Nine days had passed. Nine fucking days and they had tried to pull a fast one on him. Two days over their agreed upon time was all they had bothered to wait.

Only two scenarios were in his head. Either they believed he had died and had decided to claim the Pylon for themselves. Fine, he could accept that. He was still going to kill them, but he could buy it.

The second option was that they just didn't give a shit anymore. That they didn't care about Jake's rightful ownership of the Pylon and had come to believe that he wasn't powerful enough to defend it from them.

"I have some shit to deal with. Be back later," he said as he leaped off the cloud island and began descending. He could feel the Pylon and made a beeline for it. Hawkie just sat there frozen, unable to respond to the sudden wave of bloodlust he was giving out.

His anger was only growing further as he flapped his wings faster than ever before. He had believed in Miranda and his intuition that told him that he could trust her. He was angry at himself but even more

so angry at her. Even if she thought he was dead, did she have that little respect for him? That little trust? Even if he was dead, couldn't she be bothered to wait for a man a couple of days?

He had given her a powerful profession. A title. A future in this new world. She had seemed genuinely thankful... and this was his thanks?

He had saved all their damn lives not even two weeks ago. Not that he thought he owned them or anything, but he expected at least a modicum of respect - from all four of them.

It doesn't matter now, he thought as he sped up even more. Limit Break active at ten percent to go even faster.

He had shown trust, and they had thrown it right back in his face. He wasn't some meek person who would just let that fly. They had chosen their own fates.

His only regret being his own naivety. Hadn't he learned already? From Andrew and his first and only girlfriend. From Caroline and her betrayal in the tutorial. Every time he had chosen to trust someone, they had broken that trust.

Descending like a meteor, his bloodlust grew as not a single beast dared get in his way.