

## Hunter 154

### Chapter 154: Clouds & Brimstone

Jake flew up into the air as he headed towards the cloud island once more. His mood was pretty good for most of the flight, but he ran into one tiny little issue a few hours later. He couldn't find it.

Now, how does one lose a giant cloud the size of countries with a tree on it the size of a mountain? Quite simple; you just need to have the same sense of direction as Jake. How it was possible for him to be that incompetent at finding things with his supernatural intuition was quite frankly a miracle.

During his descent, he had been a bit in a hurry and hadn't really bothered considering how to get back again. In fact, he had barely registered what direction he was supposed to go. He had a general idea and was pretty sure of himself, to begin with, thinking that heck, how could he miss it? Well, it turns out he could.

It was kind of impressive when you think about it. Especially considering that Jake's monstrous perception allowed him to see hundreds of kilometers away. Sure, many things obstructed his vision, but he could still see quite far.

Up in the air, it was a bit harder as countless clouds and a constant mist covered everything, making it hard to see more than a few tens of kilometers away, even with his perception.

And while he found that fact plenty worth complaining about, his perception did end up being what led him back once again.

A trip that should only have taken half an hour tops ended up being a half-day journey. But in the distance, Jake finally spotted it - a giant mass of clouds. Occasional purple flashes of lightning jumping between the trees was the first thing that caught his eye, and the rest of the journey was straightforward from there.

He had ended up being a bit higher than expected this time and was floating well above the island. But with it in sight, it wasn't hard to make his way down there. Now his next objective was just to find his and Hawkie's own private mini-cloud island. That was where they had parted, after all.

That part turned out to be super easy, barely an inconvenience. While many smaller islands were floating around the giant ones, the ones holding trees were very sparse. From the directions he had come upon the island, he also had an excellent general idea of where it was.

He still had the Pylon act as a compass of sorts after all, and he could remember that there weren't any large-scale cloud islands between it and the massive cloud country, meaning it had to be on that side.

This was then the point where he remembered one of his forgotten skills - Hunter's Tracking. As luck would have it, he had become quite familiar with the mana signature and general aura of Hawkie over their many days spent together.

Activating the skill heightened his senses as he focused on finding Hawkie. The skill did its work better than expected, and nearly instantly, it felt like a particular island lit up in his eyes. In the air, it was like several small mist-like trails came into existence. He instinctively knew these were trails left by Hawkie.

Flying to the island, he found it deserted. It was kind of expected, but still a little disappointing. In retrospect, however, it was likely for the best. He needed to meditate and refill his dwindling mana and stamina reserve anyway.

Sitting down with his legs crossed, he entered meditation as he thought back to his last talks with Miranda back at the city.

The plan moving forward was relatively simple. They now had more than fifty people and would begin construction of a place to actually live. The valley had been designated as a no-go zone, with the barrier around the lodge remaining indefinitely.

As long as it wasn't attacked, it would sustain itself solely from atmospheric mana. Jake and Miranda were the only ones who could walk through it by default, so it would serve as a great way to ensure no one getting close to the Pylon. To make things better, Miranda had figured out how to ping him with a bit of an exploit. She could offer another to take up the position of City Lord, but to do so would require an acceptance from Jake, meaning he would get a system-prompt. In other words, she could offer it to Hank, Jake would get a prompt, and Hank could then just decline it with Jake notified. The only issue was that she couldn't offer it to the same person within a period, but that shouldn't be an issue. She was also only to call him in case of emergencies.

With Neil and his party staying, a modicum of safety was also ensured anyway. Jake would guess that the five of them were pretty far up the earthling's power ladder. They also had the advantage of working well together and being a somewhat balanced team. Their lack of understanding of basic energy manipulation was a big problem, but he hoped they could learn it quickly.

Before he left, he also gave Miranda a few things. Some equipment he knew he would never get to use, some books with general knowledge, and the notebook Jacob had given him. Jake had skimmed it through already, and it mostly contained basic knowledge of the system as well as the man's own thoughts. But he also discovered that it contained knowledge of how a Pylon of Civilization worked and the role of a City Lord. Needless to say, it was beneficial for her. As to how Jacob knew Jake would get a Pylon... well, it was pretty obvious as the Viper had told Jake that him being a Progenitor wasn't exactly a secret, and the only way to become a Progenitor would be to kill a D-grade boss and hence be able to claim a Pylon. It was a simple deduction, so no divination-bullshit involved with that one.

He also gave her a bunch of potions. Which meant it was also time for him to begin making some more. He had spent two entire weeks just making potion after potion upon first returning from the tutorial, and now less than two weeks later, he already felt like he needed more.

It put his mind at ease, however, to have given them out. Many of them were for Neil and them to use during their leveling sessions, with the rest being saved for emergencies. He had also more or less ordered her actually to spend some time training and getting her class upgrade.

On that note, he had also remembered an old item he still had in this spatial storage.

[Akashic Tome of the Lucenti Mage (Unique)] – Allows the user to acquire the class Lucenti Mage if compatible.

Requirements: Lvl 24-99 in any class. Compatible user.

He had thought of offering it to her, but after a bit of questioning, he was pretty sure she wasn't compatible. And even if she was, she didn't have any light magic yet, making him suspect that even if she could technically use it, her affinity towards the Lucenti scroll of magic wasn't very high.

He did consider giving it to her anyway and finding someone who could use it among the survivors. That thought he also threw away, more due to selfish reasons than anything else. He had a solid feeling the class would be powerful, much like Neil and Abby's Disciple of Kallox. The Great White Stag had been strong after all.

Time slowly ticked by as he meditated, and soon a few hours had gone by. His tracking skill told him Hawkie had been there only a few hours before he arrived, making him guess it was either hunting on its own or on a trip back to wherever it went once in a while.

As he didn't really want to go hunt solo just yet, he took out his cauldron and began doing some good old alchemy. Stamina potions were the most pressing at the moment, so he started with them by taking out some common-rarity Green Lavender and Evergreen Grass. On another side note, he was finally below half of his storage of the three basic lavender types. And nearly entirely out of the Inferior-rarity ones. He would have to find a new source of ingredients at some point or actually begin gathering alternatives himself.

Five batches of stamina potions later, he detected a presence coming his way. A presence he recognized as his feathery friend.

[Galesong Hawk – lvl 94]

The hawk detected him a few moments later and threw him a questioning glance.

"Yeah, I sorted things at home. It luckily wasn't as bad as I feared," he said, putting the bird at ease. Not that he was sure it was actually concerned or just annoyed and surprised at his sudden departure.

He leaned a bit more towards the latter as the first thing the damn bird did was to demand more potions. Only reinforcing his theory that Hawkie thought of him as a potion dispensary first, comrade in arms second.

You're lucky I am slightly apologetic I just bailed on you like that, he grumbled inwardly as he coughed up a potion.

After drinking it up and resting on its branch a while, Hawkie threw him the 'let's go kill things' look, which he could only agree to. The fight with Abby and Donald could barely be called a fight. They were far too weak to truly pose any threat towards him unless he literally just stood there and let them go at him.

Jumping off the cloud with Hawkie at his side, he felt far more in his element than in the city down far below.

The Viper's plan had been set in motion. The warnings went out, and the surrounding factions were made aware of his return. Now a week had passed, and the promised day arrived.

Most forces had presented themselves and sworn loyalty in the allotted time. Others, mainly those with roots elsewhere, chose to leave. A real storm had been going through an area containing the millions of planets surrounding the Malefic Order.

Among the factions that pledged loyalty or proposed to vassalize themselves were also many gods and the factions they either served or ruled.

The only remaining Hall of the Malefic Order was placed in the first universe in the area around where the Viper was born and had risen to power. The planet he had made a desolate wasteland on his path to power was seen as a holy land for pilgrims, members, and those who came just to pay respect.

But over the years, many factions appeared in the area he once ruled with an iron fist - the Order confined to only a few thousand life planets in total. The only remaining Hall found on the only Great Planet in the area.

Great Planets were without a doubt one of the most wondrous existences in the multiverse - a planet larger than thought possible - one that dwarfed any celestial object in any pre-system universe. It was of such unimaginable size that it could contain entire galaxies within. Great Planets were rare, even in the vastness of space itself. To make them even more impressive, the mana density in some areas was large enough for even monsters with the power of gods to spawn naturally.

This particular planet went by the name of Primordial-4. The name posing no specific meaning besides being named that was because it was the closest Great Planet to the rise of a Primordial. A planet the Viper had wandered during his ascension and fought many powerful foes on. In fact, some rumors even claimed it was where he became a deity.

It wouldn't be out of the ordinary. All knew the Holy Mother had ascended on the planet now known as Primordial-1. A similar Great Planet, of course.

All the planets surrounding this Great Planet had surrendered or left - none of the factions large or powerful enough to dare stand against the Order and the Lord Protector that guarded it, much less the Primordial himself.

But one force refused to leave.

The Brimstone Conglomerate was a faction of the 11th universe that had risen to be one of the premier forces of the multiverse. Named after the Brimstone Hegemon, their headstrong and powerful leader. A man who had risen by leaving a mountain of corpses behind.

It was precisely the type of entity the Viper hoped would reject him. He couldn't help but chuckle as he heard the name.

Powerful. Influential. Just enough to believe the Malefic Order wouldn't be stupid enough to actually attack them. It would mean war with an organization with roots in several universes. Too large to strike down for the Order that was confined to such a small area, many would think.

But as with all organizations, even the mighty Holy Church or Malefic Order, it had one fatal flaw. Its namesake. The Brimstone Hegemon himself. If the Holy Mother or the Malefic Viper perished, so would their organizations. If the Brimstone Hegemon were to fall, so would his conglomerate.

This wasn't a fear for them, however. For in the same vein, then as long as the Hegemon lived, so would the organization persist.

And currently, the Brimstone Hegemon sat upon his throne within his divine realm. A throne made of the hearts of thousands of stars, in a land forever burning with the heat that would make even the center of the sun feel chilly in comparison.

Not a shred of fear was evident on his face. The threat from the Malefic Order but a farce in his eyes. A powerplay to bring them to the negotiation table for better terms. Even if the Primordial decided to make good on his threats, it wouldn't matter.

Within a divine realm, a god was far more powerful than anywhere else. It was their world, after all, created from their very essence. The mana within was theirs - every single speck of energy theirs to command. It was an insurmountable home-field advantage that made invading the divine realms of other gods either an act of futility or just straight-up suicide.



This is exactly why what happened next surprised the Hegemon so much. The god felt a presence forcefully enter his realm. One he didn't have to look long for as a figure appeared floating before him.

"For a Primordial to come personally... should I be honored or offended?" the Brimstone Hegemons voice echoed out in his entire realm as he stared at the scaled man before him. The Hegemon the size of a mountain, with the Viper staying in his human-sized form.

"Honored, of course. Few have had the privilege," the Malefic Viper answered casually.

"A privilege I most certainly could do without," Brimstone answered in a joking manner. His mind was working on overtime to figure out the intentions of the Malefic One. The thought of him coming for a fight never crossing him.

For if there was one thing harder than fighting a god in their realm, it was killing them. For as long as the realm held energy, the god would be able to siphon it off to sustain themselves. And the Viper wasn't exactly what he once was...

"Now, is there anything I can offer such an esteemed guest?" he asked, continuing from earlier. Maybe this could even be an opportunity to create closer ties with the Malefic Order, but more importantly, the Primordial himself?

True, he had been in isolation for oh-so-long, but he still had contacts. He was still respected. While his personal power had without a doubt waned, the mere fact that he carried the title of Primordial would bring great benefits.

"I have actually come for two reasons," the Viper said with a smile. "First of all, I would like to extend my thanks to you."

"Oh? What have I done to warrant the gratitude of the Malefic One?" the Hegemon asked with genuine confusion.

"I have been gone for a long time," the scaled god answered as he continued. "Many have either forgotten or become complacent towards me. Towards my Order. I have made it my personal quest to change that. To return my Order and my name to what it is meant to be. What I want to thank you and the Brimstone Conglomerate for is your help in accomplishing just that."

"May I dare ask how we are meant to assist you in this endeavor?" Brimstone asked with furrowed brows. Was he truly looking for a partnership?

"Well, that is where my second reason for being here comes in," the Viper answered, still smiling casually like before. "I have come to kill you."

The Hegemon was taken aback and could only ask, confused. "Pardon?"

"I said I have come to kill you. So yeah, I thank you for offering your life to help restore my Order to glory. Nothing has ever worked better than a big show of force, you know? And you fit the requirements to be the supporting character in this play," the Viper laughed.

"Don't jest," Brimstone scoffed. "What do you truly want?"

“See, this is exactly what I am talking about!” the Viper said, this time with a trace of annoyance in his voice. “Had this been back in the day, you would have already started running.”

The Brimstone Hegemon had had enough of the foreign god by now. At first, he had indeed held respect due to the title of Primordial held by the Malefic Viper, but he had never respected the god himself. He was a washed-up god who hadn't even shown himself in so long. By the time the 11th universe was integrated, the Viper had already long gone into hiding.

“I think it is time for you to leave,” Brimstone said as his realm moved.

Lava and fire exploded from the ground as his throne began shining a deep red. The entire realm's heat spiked as he mobilized all the power inside to expel the Viper. Either that or burn him to death.

The inferno appeared to consume the entire world as everything turned red - heat that could melt space itself, seeking to eradicate the lone foreign element within the realm.

At first, the Brimstone Hegemon was confident, but soon he began frowning as his attack failed to find any purchase. A frown that only deepened the more time went on. It appears I will have to get serious, he sighed as he stood up from his throne.

The Viper stood untouched by the flames within the inferno with his eyes closed - a light smile on his lips. Truly... it had been too long. It felt good to finally be in the heat of things again. Pun fully intended.

Raising his hand, he looked through the flames as his gaze landed upon the Brimstone Hegemon - a green glow spreading from his hand.

Touch of the Malefic Viper