

## Hunter 165

### Chapter 165: Taking Charge

Jake had asked a straightforward question before leaving to fight the Storm Elemental: “What’s in it for me?”

Now, in all honesty, Jake had kind of forgotten this after fighting the Storm Elemental and getting emotionally invested in helping with the egg and all that stuff. He had even gained an upgrade to his Archery skill and a few levels, so he’d already gained plenty.

This is why he was surprised when the two hawks offered him their payment...

Jake was currently flying rather slowly back towards his small city, carefully holding the small egg with both hands close to his chest as if afraid of dropping it. He was pretty sure it was more durable than a rock, but he didn’t dare risk anything.

He had a hawk on each side, following him nonchalantly while keeping an eye on him.

It turns out his payment was twofold, though Jake was unsure if either of them even qualified as payment. The first thing was the egg itself. The mother and father bird had pushed for him to pick it up and carry it. They would clearly still follow, but he felt like they were trying to push a parental role on him.

The second reward was the birds themselves, according to what he could gather. They clearly weren’t that attached to their nest as they both just motioned for Jake to lead the way once they were done with everything.

Jake wasn't quite sure what to do with all of this. A peak E-grade bird and an early D-grade were both willingly following him back to his small base of humans. A base where the strongest was Neil... and in all honesty, Jake had a strong feeling that Hawkie could give him and his entire team a run for their money... with Mystie naturally able to beat the living shit out of them.

The entire egg-situation was also a lot to handle. What did the two hawks expect of him? He couldn't just carry around the egg like this forever, and he couldn't put it in his spatial storage either as it counted as a living thing.

It was very close to hatching after the ritual, so... maybe they just wanted to relocate their nest to his city? Yeah, that makes sense. And as Jake was the only one of them with hands, he would surely be the best to carry the egg. Yeah, let's go with that, Jake thought, trying to delude himself.

The journey back was very relaxed. The two birds and one human had already spent a few hours resting after the ritual to regenerate some resources before heading off, so it wasn't that they were tired.

They all just enjoyed a relaxing flight, Hawkie still giving small pointers here and there but clearly not daring to peck Jake anymore. Not because it was afraid of his mighty power, mind you, but because he was carrying the egg.

Jake wondered how the small city had developed while he was gone. They had around 60 people when he left, and he doubted they had gained many more. It was located in a very remote location, and it wasn't like they were actually recruiting. Well, he didn't actually know if they were... he was a bit hands-off.

It had been more than two weeks since he left last time, leaving Miranda, Neil, and Hank to deal with everything. He wasn't afraid of some disaster happening with Neil and his party around... besides, his guts told him things were fine.

The entire city thing was very paradoxical. On the one hand, he was aware that having a bustling city under his ownership could earn him countless rewards, but on the other hand... it did sound like a lot of 'stuff' to deal with.

Well, a lot for Miranda to deal with... he chuckled, getting a glance from both hawks, who didn't even bother questioning the human's weirdness anymore.

He should probably be a bit less of a shitty boss and at least hear her concerns. Go the whole visionary/guru leadership style? Well, with less pretentiousness.

Jake already had his next plan made, and this one included staying put for a while, so he should have time to deal with some making-a-magical-city-in-the-middle-of-a-forest-stuff.

Jake spotted the familiar trees and the small hole in the canopies that marked his valley in the distance. He felt them enter the Pylon range soon after, both birds clearly also noticing the peculiarity of the area.

"Relax, this is my area," he explained.

While it wasn't a very elaborate explanation, they both just accepted it without further questions as they followed him down to the valley below. Jake saw that the barrier around the lodge was still active, and from the looks of it, no one had come there since he left.

Well, maybe Miranda had, but that was fine. He didn't know if some of her skills required proximity to the Pylon or something like that, but the fact there weren't many signs of activity meant they didn't have to take refuge in the lodge.

Jake looked at the lodge as he walked through the barrier without any issues. The two birds outside tried to follow but were unable to get through. Yet, just as Jake thought about how to let them through, they could suddenly enter.

Both of them looked confused at him, but he just shrugged. "System-stuff."

An explanation that even the birds bought wholesale.

Inside the lodge, Jake could see that he was mistaken about one thing... there had been people there. Several pieces of wooden furniture were placed around the lodge, such as a table and chairs. They had even moved the bookshelves he had placed inside to a better spot.

Jake saw that the chair close to the bookshelves had been used and reckoned it was Miranda that had come there to read and check out the books. She likely didn't dare take the books out of the lodge as it was his property... not that he would have minded.

The two birds jumped on the floorboards as they slowly made their way towards him. They looked around curiously, Mystie going over to one of the walls and leaning in real close. Jake was pretty sure the bird was looking at whatever magic Hank had used to reinforce the building, but he couldn't be sure.

“Well, if you two are settling here, I think the valley would be the best place. It’s meant to be my private area, so there shouldn’t be others coming in here that often,” Jake explained. “Make a nest somewhere, and... please take back the egg?”

Jake still stood awkwardly, holding the egg cupped in both hands. He hated feeling like he was carrying precious porcelain, but he couldn’t just put it down somewhere...

The birds gave each other a playful look before they jumped out of the house, completely ignoring Jake. You better make a nest, or I will make an omelet... oh, who am I kidding...

Jake went into the bedroom and sat down on the bed, carefully bundling up the blanket and making a nest-like shape to place it into. Does it need heat like a regular egg? It shouldn’t, right?

That and many other difficulties bothered Jake as he saw the two birds land on top of his lodge in his sphere. They appeared to look around while making bird-sounds at each other, both flying off in different directions.

The poor human stayed in the lodge as the two hawks found a nice spot to place down their new nest. Jake patted the egg with his hand, feeling how warm it was and the dense energy within it. It had changed slightly after the ritual but still looked like a normal egg in most ways.

Time ticked by as Jake sunk parts of his consciousness into the environment to inspect the area affected by the Pylon. He could only get a general feeling that the area affected had expanded and not much more. He reckoned Miranda had better skills to manage the city than him due to her profession.

And speaking of Miranda... the woman had just arrived at the entrance to the valley. He didn't know if she knew he was there, so he did the polite thing and got up. He bundled up the blanket and the egg as he carried them out the door.

Miranda had been meeting with Hank about the newly finished longhouse and who to assign to it. They had gained a small group of 15 or so survivors who had stumbled on their city by accident. Well, not entirely by accident, as they had a caster with a mana-sensing skill like her own, and he had noticed the peculiarity of the area.

That is when she sensed a presence enter the area affected by the Pylon. The massive presence made her shiver internally as she tried to keep her calm. She already knew from experience that she couldn't detect when the owner was there... so this was clearly something more

.

She wasn't sure if there were one or two... but she had to somehow not panic. The issue was... they were making their way straight towards the Pylon.

Are they trying to take it away?

Her first thoughts were logical. Whatever had entered was far stronger than anything before. Even compared to the combined aura of Abby and all her goons, this felt far more dangerous. Yet her intuition skill didn't react at all. Of course, it was entirely possible that whatever had come was too strong for her skill to work on, but she had to do something.

Steeling her emotions, she excused herself from the meeting, getting a worried look from Hank, who had clearly noticed something was off.

She rushed out of the building as she made her way to the valley. She felt that the presences were already there... right at the Pylon.

Carefully she snuck over as it felt like the invaders were searching the area. At this point, she was sure there were more than one. All she wanted to do was confirm that the barrier was still there... Neil and his party were out currently, but they should return in only a few hours. If they stay occupied till then, maybe we can... can...

She stood frozen just as the lodge entered her line of sight and she saw the owner sitting on the steps leading up to the lodge's small veranda. He was cuddling a blanket with a small egg in it, looking over at her.

Next, she saw two birds land on the roof of the lodge, their combined aura bearing down on her. She couldn't help but use Identify them, getting a much-expected response for the first one...

[Galesong Hawk – lvl ??]

But tensed up when she saw the second.

[Mystsong Hawk – lvl ???]

That... D-grade?

What the hell was happening?

“Oh, hey Miranda,” Jake said as he waved to the woman who stood frozen, just staring at him and his feathered friends. “Come on over; these two aren’t going to do anything. Right?”

He asked the last part to the two birds, who looked curiously down at the female human. They did the bird-version of shrugging before continuing to assemble a nest in one of the smaller trees close to the lodge.

Miranda slowly walked over as she saw the not-D-grade-bird summon wind magic to cut the tree into their desired shape as they slowly assembled a nest-like structure on top of it.

“What is going on here?” she asked, confusion clear on her face.

“Ah... well, the Galesong Hawk is my friend Hawkie, and the other one is Mystie, his mate. This is their egg,” he said, showing off the small egg in his bundle of blankets. “I helped them do some things, and now they decided to stay here.”

The woman stood a bit there, trying to process all of it. She took a few moments before finally asking. “Is the Mystsong Hawk D-grade?”

“Yeah?” Jake answered, a bit confused. Wait, was the question rhetorical... it didn’t sound rhetorical.



“Are you certain about this? Isn’t it... dangerous?”

“Why would it be? Unless people are stupid and annoy her too much, I doubt she would bother with a bunch of E-grade humans. Besides, she understands that this is my territory, and we play by my rules,” Jake explained.

“Shriek!”

The Hawk gladly affirmed this. Without noticing, both Hawkie and Mystie had truly recognized Jake as the superior being among them. The fact that he was the strongest, or at least able to kill enemies they couldn’t, helping to cement that.

“I... how?” Miranda asked, still trying - and failing - to understand the entire situation. Had he tamed a goddamn D-grade beast or what?

“As I said, I helped them. More specifically, I killed a D-grade elemental for the two of them, and then I helped them with a ritual for this little guy,” Jake said, once more displaying the egg.

“Al... alright,” Miranda said, rubbing her brows. She could feel a headache coming on but decided to focus on the matter at hand instead. “If the situation is safe, can we talk? Quite a few things have happened during your absence.”

“Sure, let’s head inside,” he said as he got up and led Miranda into the lodge, where they both sat at the table.

Miranda began explaining what had been going on while he was gone and informed him about the newcomers, her steps to root out potential troublemakers, and their current construction projects.

He was happy to hear that they had marked his valley as off-limits as he did like his privacy. He also didn't doubt that a D-grade beast and its mate now living there would also help keep people away.

Constructing longhouses was also a good idea for now, and he agreed wholeheartedly with leaving most trees standing to not ruin the foresty mood. It also helped the area in general by providing cover from above, and he was sure some classes or professions could use the trees for something beneficial.

Next, Miranda talked about their plans of expansion and their plans of contacting the nearby fort. Or well, she was more asking Jake permission.

"We don't know how many people are there or their levels, but it should be at least a few hundred... maybe even a few thousand. It could prove dangerous to have them integrate with us without our whole base just becoming assimilated. If they truly outnumber us by that many, it wouldn't be weird if they demanded some kind of leadership position, maybe even the title of City Lord, and if-"

"Miranda," Jake said. "I appointed you City Lord, end of the story. If you want to give them positions with influence, it's up to you, not me. Just don't abdicate your position without at least asking me first if you don't want it anymore."

"It isn't like that... I am just unsure how we are to deal with overwhelming numbers. We aren't even a hundred people, and they will likely have tens of times our number. If they oppose us they-"

“Then they can fuck off. Period. This is our city, my city. If they can’t accept that, they can just stay where they are. I am fine with allowing them to come... but it’s on our terms,” Jake said, not leaving any room for arguing.

“I think it will be hard for people to accept that...”

“Well, tough shit. The world has changed. And I have a pretty good idea how to convince them,” Jake said with a smile. “Tomorrow morning at dawn.”

“Huh?” she exclaimed, confused.

“We go and give them the offer tomorrow. Gather those you think should come.”

“Are you coming along?” Miranda asked, a bit expectant.

“Yeah, I am,” he answered with a slight chuckle as he looked out the window and saw the nest just about done. “And I think I’ll bring a friend.”