

Hunter 100

Chapter 100: The right way forward

The family sat gathered around the table, enjoying their breakfast. The rays of sunlight hit the table, highlighting the vast selection to choose from. Scrambled eggs, bacon, sausages, bread, whatever one wanted. Caleb had even convinced their dad to make pancakes that morning. Mom had objected, but Caleb had gotten his will. It was only his birthday once a year, after all.

Jake was enjoying one of the aforementioned pancakes, with perhaps a bit too much honey on. Which, of course, resulted in an admonishing gaze from his mom across the table. One he tried to ignore as he sheepishly put the fork into his mouth, the honey dripping down on the plate.

It was three weeks before the system arrived. Jake had gone back to visit his parents and brother to celebrate his brother's 27th birthday.

Also at the table were his parents as well as Maja, Caleb's wife. They had gotten married at what many considered a young age, but Caleb felt it was the right thing to do after she got pregnant. A pregnancy she was currently seven months into. Also... it made the loan on their new house a lot cheaper.

Maja sat at the table, her stomach clearly showing, as she spoke to his mother, Debra. Debra gave all the tips about having a first child, along with embarrassing anecdotes about Jake and Caleb.

"Jake used to be very quiet, while Caleb kept us up all night every night," she said, as she jokingly added. "Caleb was quite lucky we had Jake first, or we wouldn't have mustered up the courage to have another."

“Mom, come on, I can’t have been that bad,” Caleb protested, getting only a giggle from Maja.

“He still keeps me up all night even now,” Maja said without thinking.

The rest of the family all looked at her awkwardly for a moment with Jake’s dad, Robert, nearly choking on his coffee.

Maja seemed to realize the meaning of what she said as she turned red, and frantically tried to explain.

“Snoring! He snores!” she protested loudly, earning only a chuckle.

In an attempt to help his wife, Caleb swiftly changed the subject as he turned to Jake.

“So, how is work these days? Heard your company is quite busy after going public last month.”

Jake, getting the hint, helped dispel the awkward atmosphere and gladly answered.

“Yeah, management is all up in our asses about putting out the, and I quote, ‘biggest numbers to date.’ I am not even sure management knows what half of those numbers mean.”

“Can’t be all bad, don’t you get along with that Jacob fellow?” Deborah asked.

“He can only lift up the average intelligence of the management that much,” Jake joked.

“I agree; they can’t be all that bright,” Caleb said, nodding. “They were dumb enough to hire you after all.”

“Cal, be nice!” Maja said as she poked him in the arm with her elbow.

“Birthday boy using up his leeway fast,” Jake said, pointing his still honey-covered fork at his brother. “Going to have to take back presents if you don’t behave soon, young man.”

“I apologize, oh bringer of the big numbers,” he answered, holding up his hands in mock surrender.

It was the last time Jake had met his family. After that, he had been busy, and the trip back to his hometown was pretty long.

Caleb and Maja lived in the same town as his parents. It wasn’t big, but it was decently sized, having around 40.000 inhabitants. Caleb worked as a teacher at an elementary school, while Maja studied at the university half an hour away in a larger city.

Maja had practically been a part of the family forever. She grew up next door and was over almost every day. Jake had been the older brother, with Caleb and Maja being the two younger siblings due to their closer ages.

When Jake moved away for university, the two of them had started hanging out alone. Things developed as they do, and the two ended up going out, getting married, and were now looking to start their own family.

Jake didn't see his closest family as much as he should. He was always in the weird paradox that going to see them seemed like such a hassle, and he always looked forward to just relaxing alone after a long week of work.

On the other hand, he enjoyed being around them. They were the only people in his life he was truly close to. The only ones he could openly joke and have fun around. He didn't feel like he had to put up any walls or to filter himself. He could just be him.

His parents were just average folk - the supporting and loving kind, who had never put him down for any decisions he had made but helped push him forward towards making the best ones.

His mother had worked as a bookkeeper and his dad as an engineer. They had neither been rich nor poor, growing up solidly in the upper-middle class. The classical family unit, if you will.

To Jake, these four people were the most important in his life.

"When does your plane take off again?" Caleb asked as they were cleaning up the table.

“Need to be at the airport before 5,” Jake answered as he put the plates in the dishwasher.

“So, any plans for the day?”

“I have already prepared everything for that stupid conference, so not really.”

“Well, now you do,” Caleb said as he put on a sinister smile.

The rest of his day was spent walking around carrying heavy furniture. The two newlyweds had gotten a bigger house a month or so earlier, and they had waited for Jake to get home to provide his free moving service. At least he paid him back by making his brother offer a free taxi-ride later that day.

Taking off to the airport, he gave his mom a hug, his dad a slap on the shoulder, followed by also giving his old man a hug. With that came a promise to return home for his mother’s birthday the next month.

Caleb and Maja drove him to the airport as promised. With only his carry-on bag, he didn’t need to be there much in advance, but he was still kind of in a hurry. Not too much in a hurry for a proper farewell, though.

“Take care of Maja, Cal,” Jake said, as he gave his brother a hug. The manly kind. Turning to Maja, he also gave her a light hug.

"On a side-note, Jake," his brother said, "Any progress on the Caroline front?"

"None at all."

"Gotta get your shit together."

"I am pretty sure it never will turn to anything," Jake answered, quite assuredly. "Take care, you two. I hope we meet again."

"Of course we will. I am not one to croak that easily," Caleb answered, as assuredly as Jake.

Jake smiled as he waved the two of them off. He started walking onwards, but instead of a gate, he saw a portal leading into a forest.

"I hope you are right, Cal," he said to himself as he walked through the portal, the dream dissolving around him. "I really do."

Jacob sat quietly as he read the oversized tome in front of him. The faint frown and the serious look in his eyes, coupled with his handsome features, made it look rather picturesque. At least Inera thought so as she kept throwing glances his way.

It hadn't been long since she had come here. Inera's father had at the behest of the higher-ups arranged for several ancient and expensive tomes to be transported here, and she would personally act as a teacher for the young man.

His presence was... different. Almost ethereal. He was weak, yet he gave off an aura and feeling that made one unable to ignore him. Inera had been with the church since birth, yet she had never felt a man as holy and at the same time weak as Jacob.

The Holy Mother herself recognized him. An Augur, a class she had only ever read of in old scriptures but never actually encountered. A rare variant class with requirements still unknown, possessing skills and powers eluding the scholars even today.

Always beside the young Augur was another interesting one - the one called Bertram. Another mystery to her, as he too was a type of entity she had never encountered before.

A guardian bound to the Augur through karma, conviction, and personal belief - his class reforged upon becoming a guardian, now possessing one just as mysterious as the Augur himself. And while the Augur himself could not fight, his guardian was another thing altogether.

Bertram had shown tremendous growth from the teachings her father had given him. He was even praised by the Grand Master, acknowledged for his foundation and ability to grow. His semi-immortality from his connection to the Augur was only making him all the more peculiar.

Rather than man, perhaps he would more easily be compared to a summoned familiar. But even that was wrong, as such entities very rarely reached the level of sapience, and they all were more comparable to monsters rather than the enlightened races.

All in all, Inera found it equally puzzling and enjoyable to interact with the two of them. They were very different from anyone she had ever met before. Not just due to their classes.

Their common knowledge of the system was close to non-existent. They asked questions even small children knew, and her father gladly explained everything to them. She had a hard time wrapping her head around anyone living in a world without the system, which the two of them apparently had.

But what surprised her the most was the blatant blasphemy the two uttered without a care in the world. They questioned the pantheon's goals openly, questioned their methods, and the very root of their belief.

Yet the Grand Master didn't react to it once. Almost as if he expected it. Inera also knew that her station was not one to question the Augur either. His level of recognition from the gods was far above her own, maybe even her dad's.

Her father held the title of Grand Master of the Templars of Morning Bright. One of the many orders of templars under the church. As a man solidly in the B-rank, he had great renown and recognition within the church.

Even with his great title and honor, he hadn't met any of the higher rank gods. He held the blessing of one of the subordinate gods in charge of their part of the church, a blessing far less honorable and impactful than one bestowed by the Primordial herself.

Inera herself had yet to receive a blessing but hoped to one day get one. She instead had something called a Baptism on her status screen in place of the blessing, and it did nothing more than open up new paths. She was a priestess in the order and had recently been transferred to this area to help train new

acolytes. What she hadn't known was that the only ones she was meant to help train would be Jacob and Bertram. And that her father would do most of the vital teaching himself.

And speaking of teaching, she did learn quite a lot. One of their earlier conversations had especially interested her.

"Augur, the church has many hopes for you. Not just for your own planet, but even beyond it," the Grand Master said, as he sat across the table from Jacob.

"Oh? Would it be wise for me to divide my attention away from my homeworld? Does the church not have more suitable individuals for such a task? As a human, should my focus not be on my fellow humans?" he answered with a bunch of questions.

Inera had to agree on that. Preachers, diplomats, pilgrims, and missionaries were not a thing the church lacked. They could always use more, but out of all, only the Augur could spread the holy word in his own universe.

He was essential to get a foothold before the universe truly opened up to the rest of the multiverse. Getting a solid foothold on one civilized planet would carry far more weight than merely spreading the word sparsely to many different places.

"While that is true, you forget one of your greatest advantages," the Grand Master said, as he continued. "Upon being initiated into the system, you received three gifts. One was the tutorial, and all the benefits found therein. The next a title to give you a small bonus and forever enhance your Records, allowing you to more easily unlock variants at lower grades. The final one a skill."

“Endless Tongues of the Myriad Races.”

“Exactly. This skill is perhaps your most significant advantage over all other holy men. It allows you to communicate and understand all beings in the multiverse capable of advanced communication. No matter what means of communication, even those with methods you cannot even begin to comprehend. Even new languages will automatically become a part of you. It is the type of skill one can only ever hope for.

“The only time it will not work is if the words are purposefully made to speak in code. It even applies to the written, hence why you can read all the tomes here without any struggle. Of all the gifts the system has given you, this one is by far the most valuable to an Augur.”

“I see, that is certainly food for thought,” Jacob answered, nodding. “I will still, however, argue that Earth shall be my primary objective. To guide my fellow earthlings towards a better future is what I truly wish for.”

“While certainly, Earth is important, so is the rest of your universe. Earth will have many contending voices, and it is limited how much support we can provide with the restrictions of the system in place.”

“Which is exactly why it is so important I focus on it. The voice of the Holy Mother must not be drowned out,” Jacob argued.

The Grand Master didn’t seem to agree, however. “A voice is only as powerful as the one making it. Without the necessary strength, none will listen. It is risky for you to make yourself a target. Oftentimes, natives are not as susceptible to our beliefs as they should be.”

Inera had simply observed the two men speak, as she acted like she was still reading a book. After their discussion, which had ended inconclusively, Jacob had taken the tome he was currently reading, while the Grand Master and Bertram had entered one of the training rooms.

She couldn't help thinking about why her father had made sure she transferred here. He had clearly pushed for it hard with the higher-ups and managed to get her here. She honestly couldn't see the reason...

On the other end of her stare, Jacob sat reading. He had, of course, noticed the young woman throwing glances at him. Despite her clearly being far above him in levels, her ability to be subtle was about as good as a kid's.

Unlike her, Jacob was far from new to politics and had already begun to put things together. But he did wonder why she had been the one chosen. He assumed it was due to the Grand Master's personal meddling and desires. Despite the appearance of purity in the Holy Church, it was clearly not empty of politics.

For now, however, he would keep focusing on his preparations for the return to Earth. He was genuine in his desire to spread the word of the Holy Mother. He believed it could help his fellow earthlings unite around something greater than themselves.

But even more so... he was looking forward to meeting old friends. Through the Pantheon's knowledge, he learned about Jake and his role in the tutorial. Or, more accurately, his lack of a role.

Jacob couldn't help but wonder how different it could have gone if Jake had been with them. If they hadn't betrayed him. And after that, he had overly relied on his abilities as an Augur and not even considered asking his friend to help them. If they had just killed William and Jake had stayed there with them...

He had made many mistakes, and his decisions had been flawed, no doubt due to Jake muddling fate so much. Not that it was Jake's fault, Jacob just regretted how everything had gone down.

Yet Jacob was happy for his friend. He had found a path that was his own. The former manager had known Jake for many years, and he had always seemed... lost. Like he didn't have any long-term goal. He never cared for promotions or raises, he didn't personally invest himself in the company's growth, he just did his thing, and went home.

But now, he had a purpose. One Jacob couldn't see or begin to augur, but perhaps that was for the best. As an augur, his role was to make people realize their ideal destinies and the whole's ideal destiny. Yet, he still had certain qualms.

Returning to Earth after the time of the tutorial ended would be a tumultuous time. Jacob had also resigned himself to having enemies then, but one thing he was sure of was that Jake was not his enemy. Not because of some divine ability or grand interpretation of fate, but because of one simple fact: Jake was his friend.