

## Hunter 128

### Chapter 128: Living with the consequences

That day had been like any other to Jake. Alchemy, meditation, skill testing, and mana practice. Everything was tranquil until he suddenly got a weird feeling. One he quickly identified as coming from the mana in the air itself.

Something had entered the area permeated with traces of his mana by the Pylon of Civilization. In the back of his mind, he had a vague feeling of the direction of the intruder. Or Intruders. He felt several responses, but he was unsure of how many or how powerful they were.

He hesitated a few moments before he stopped his mana practice and decided to go towards the disturbance. Whatever it was, he would have to deal with it eventually. Besides, his danger sense and intuition didn't ring out in warning even as he used One Step Mile towards the intruders.

There he found four humans under attack. One middle-aged man, two were teenagers or in their early twenties, and a woman around thirty. Their attacker, a tiger that actually reminded him of the King of the Forest, quite a bit. The bark-like skin was very similar, at least.

Of course... it was no King.

He didn't really think much as he just went and killed the tiger to save the humans. It was like one would naturally call out if they saw someone start attacking another person on the street. While many would perhaps just stand by, Jake was the type who would interfere and then deal with the consequences afterward.

In this case, the consequence was that the group survived, forcing him into an unwanted social encounter. It wasn't that bad, though, if a little awkward. He did learn that they were a family of three together with a family friend.

Jake hadn't been able to say no when they asked if they could stay. All of them were relatively weak, the man only a level 31 human. He didn't appear to have a powerful class or profession, judging from how he nearly died to a level 59 beast.

He had been level 43 when he killed the Alpha Venomfang Badger, a mini-boss type beast at level 71. The tiger did have some impressive abilities, but in the end, it was nothing compared to that badger. It would have been ripped apart with a single swipe.

Jake was pretty sure that he could have killed the Oakwood Tiger at level 31, though it would have been a tough fight. However, he did know that sending the four of them back into the forest in their current states would be no different from killing them.

None of the family appeared very interesting initially, besides maybe the boy since he was a healer. But he found out that the woman, Miranda, did have something interesting. He didn't know exactly what she did, but she clearly had some kind of negotiation or communication skill. He couldn't pinpoint what it did, but he was very sure that her words were infused with a skill.

Jake didn't wait for them as he made his way back to his makeshift camp. It was little more than a blanket on the ground beside the pond.

He wasn't afraid of them being attacked on the way. First of all, he could vaguely feel their positions when he focused on it, and secondly, no beasts appeared to want to enter the area.

Sitting down once more, he was lost in thought for a while. His daily routine had been completely interrupted, and he wasn't quite sure what to do now. It felt weird just to start doing alchemy with the four of them also there.

On the other hand, he couldn't just stop progressing out of social anxiety. He was only a single level away from getting his next Prodigious Alchemist of the Malefic Viper skill. On top of that, after reaching level 70, he could look for something new to do. Oh, it would be cool to go explore around the area a bit... those caves looked cool, and he wanted to go look for some herbs or something.

As he sat there thinking, the group of four arrived in the valley. They saw the beautiful waterfall and pond, with Jake sitting at the shore staring into the water. He looked like he was deep in thought, and the group thought that he was perhaps meditating on the wonders of the universe.

Miranda and Hank found a tree where they could settle down beneath. All of them were still on guard but had slowly begun relaxing now. To their surprise, they hadn't encountered a single beast on the way here - not even a weak one lurking in one of the trees or the underbrush.

The whole place just seemed so idyllic. Peaceful. There were no sounds of beasts fighting in the distance, only the chirping of birds and the churnings of the waterfall.

Miranda looked on as she saw the masked man summon something out of thin air. At first sight, she thought it was an old metal pot, but on second look recognized it as a cauldron of some sort. Like the sort a witch would use in old movies, just a lot smaller and with a lid.

She saw him summon a barrel and from it added water to the cauldron. The barrel disappeared as quickly as it appeared before, and the one behind it all placed both hands on the cauldron. The air

shimmered as if an invisible flame was lit beneath it. Soon after, plants and flowers appeared only to be added to the mixture. Finally, he placed the lid on it as he just seemed to sit there for a while.

Minutes passed as he sat entirely unmoving. Miranda had a skill that allowed her to sense mana easier, and with it could see that something was happening within the cauldron. Something far too complex for her to have any chance to understand.

Then finally, the lid came off, and she saw him bottle up a green liquid from within the cauldron. It took her a while, but she soon recognized them as stamina potions. Can he make them? she asked herself.

It would explain how he had gotten such a powerful healing potion to give Hank. It was surprising as she had never seen someone make potions before. She even had suspicions they were special items only for the tutorial.

Was it a profession or class? From the man's strength, he had to be a very high level in his class, she reckoned. But the creation of potions appeared more to be profession-related. Was he perhaps skilled in both?

She didn't know, and at this point, she was quite frankly too afraid to ask- they were already intruding as it were, and she feared that asking him could lead to him forcing them out. Or worse. Just get rid of them permanently.

They had seen their share of human-on-human conflict, and people were far faster jumping straight to violence than before the system. The strong often acted like tyrants or superiors towards everyone around them. Forced them to do their bidding. So far, she found the disinterest of their masked savior to be far more preferable.

Hank was sitting with his eyes closed, leaning up against a tree. His arm was slowly growing out, looking quite grotesque if she had to say so herself. As he had reached level 25 in his race, he had gained the meditation skill, which he naturally used to speed up his recovery.

Louise and Mark hadn't evolved like her and Hank yet, meaning neither of them had the skill. A shame as the low mana recovery without it was one of the big reasons why their progress had been so slow in the forest, as Mark more often than not found himself without mana.

Miranda herself wasn't handy in a fight at all, so she wasn't sure she could say she hadn't been the most significant burden of the group. Her class was only at a measly level 18, though her profession was at a respectable level 41. Sadly though, her profession didn't have many usages in combat.

It was a weird profession if she had to say so herself. Before the system, she had worked as a manager and had gotten a profession very closely related to that. It gave her skills related to communication, planning, and even some that gave her the ability to more effortlessly sense atmospheric mana.

In their tutorial, they had called her profession a 'social type.' One that didn't include any tangible crafting skill like builders, smiths, tailors, etc. But her profession did help those other ones. She got experience simply by guiding people and making sure what was needed during the tutorial was produced.

She could delegate work and get experience just from that. It even helped the ones doing the actual work as her skills passively helped them also if they worked following her instructions. It was a win-win situation.

It was far from the only social profession either. The tutorial had been relatively peaceful most of the time, only forcing people into these insane 'trials' once every week, each trial taking a day. Trials they entered in teams of five.

These trials included some kind of combat and many opportunities for those less suited for combat. Miranda distinctly remembered one filled with wooden puppets that she could guide to fortify their position, lay down traps and put up barriers. Granted, Louise and Hank did most of the killing, but she felt like she had helped quite a lot.

Ultimately this meant that professions were a big focus in their tutorial, and as they were, many support-type social professions also emerged. Miranda herself was perhaps the most prominent of all in her local group in her faction. Though there was quite a lot of different factions and groups, so she couldn't exactly call herself spectacular.

Their faction alone had around a hundred thousand people assigned by the system. Seven more factions were also around, each of them with around the same number. She called them factions because they were clearly set up to oppose each other.

Each team got shared rewards. But every trial would have a team from each faction. This naturally led to many conflicts as some teams came in to slaughter every other team besides their own. The cursed system even rewarding them extra tutorial points for it by giving them half the points of those they killed.

This meant that often entire teams were wiped out at a time. And those that weren't wiped out had it even harder as they were either forced to find a new team or continue on their lonesome. Skipping the trial was never an option.

After leaving the tutorial, she had found little use for her profession, however. It relied on others to level, and there being only four of them was far from enough. The only useful skills she had was her ability to sense mana and her intuition skill. It was what she had used to find this place.

This area was... different. Like a massive beacon on the horizon, it lit up, making everyone aware that this place was unique. However, only Miranda could feel it, so it appeared that having a skill to sense mana or an intuition skill was required to truly feel it. Moreover, she felt like this place was calling to her. Enticing her to come.

The intuition skill she didn't quite comprehend yet. It did as advertised and sometimes allowed her to get a 'feel' for something. A notion that a particular course of action would be correct, or maybe give her an aching feeling in the back of her mind when something was off.

On that note, the skill had done fuck all in front of the masked man. It was not a surprise as it hadn't done much during fights either, but usually, it at least did something... but towards him, it was utterly silent. It could sometimes help her prepare for fights by giving her an idea of what to do, but it didn't do much of anything when it came to actual combat.

She knew that her profession was influential, though. It also fit her very well and played to her already existing non-system-related skills. Like nearly every other human, she was trying to find her place in this changing world.

Sitting for a while, she just kept observing the masked individual as he worked. Sometimes he would craft potions that she recognized as health, mana, or stamina potions. Other times he made liquids she had never seen before.

Other times the flames fizzled out beneath the cauldron, and she heard him curse beneath his breath as he dumped the liquid in a barrel he had placed on the side. Then he began again.

She had observed many craftsmen and women during the tutorial. Led many of them. Guided them to improve their methods. But what she saw right now was truly above her paygrade. She knew it was incredibly complicated and that it required concentration at a high level.

Small aspects were also highly optimized. The masked man deposited all the pot's ingredients through some kind of telekinesis, all in a seamless motion. Items required simply appeared out of thin air. His methods were highly optimized, but there was one aspect she respected more than any other.

He didn't take a single break. Miranda sat there staring at him intensely for hours, nearly in a trance as he just kept working. Most workers would take a slight breather after concentrating intensely after every craft. It was human nature to never give 100% while working. At least not in her experience.

But he truly gave 100% at every moment. Even when he complained to himself, his hands and telekinetic ability didn't stop. He just kept going, like some kind of machine. It was admirable, to say the least, in Miranda's eyes. He must have been a good employee before the system.

Hank and his children had all managed to settle down for now. His arms were now regrown and as good as new. It was almost surreal how effective the potion had been. Louise and Mark had both found a spot where they now both leaned against a tree, fast asleep. The last two weeks had taken their toll on the two. Hank was also resting his eyes, despite trying to keep himself awake.

They had found a spot hidden behind some trees, out of sight from the masked man. Only Miranda remained, enraptured by what she was seeing. The crafting itself didn't interest her that much, but the skill and perseverance involved sure did.



After another hour, he stopped after a successful craft. After bottling the potions, he got up and stood staring at the pond for a while. Miranda was slightly disappointed that he was done working, but soon her disappointment turned to astonishment.

He walked out onto the water. Walking on it. Then he sat down in the middle of the pond and sat in a meditative pose. Seconds later, several big stones floated up from beneath the surface.

Her eyes twinkled as she saw this. She couldn't help but move a bit closer to see better. Her mana sense was clearly identifying that the masked man was somehow manipulating those stones with mana. But just as she had gotten slightly closer, the rocks suddenly fell, and the man fell into the water alongside them.

She didn't even have time to register what happened before a figure loomed over her. Dripping with water and two yellowish eyes staring down at her. She felt a shiver run down her spine as she quickly tried to come up with an explanation for her peeking.

"Could you stop staring..." Miranda heard a weirdly meek voice say, her mind completely blank.