

Hunter 133

Chapter 133: Delegating (avoiding) responsibilities

Jake had been more injured than he had first thought. Then again, he did have quite a few giant needles pierce into his chest and attempt to suck him dry of any and all vitality. Nevertheless, it wasn't something a healing potion or two couldn't fix. He quite honestly felt bad for all those out there without the ability to get themselves healed.

If he had to rely on his natural regeneration, it would take days to heal the last bout's damage. To restore his entire 10000+ health pool would require more than a week. Maybe more, as health regenerated slower, the lower it was.

His armor was also pretty damn broken. His chest was exposed entirely as the mana beam had burned his chestpiece to tatters. Luckily the Self-Repair enchant made the armor virtually unbreakable unless utterly obliterated, and even then, it might not even disappear if it was completely destroyed as it was "bound" to him.

The problem was that it would take some time for it to repair itself, so he would have to go shirtless once more for a while. Oddly nostalgic in a sense, as he remembered his many shirtless days.

Getting up, he began making his way back out of the cave and back to his small basecamp once more. He had only been gone for several hours, but it had been more than worthwhile. He discovered a D-grade entity, got some experience, and picked up many different mushrooms and moss to play with.

Miranda and those three others should also have left by now, he thought. Their parting had been less than ideal, but sometimes that is how life is. She was a good conversation partner, but they clearly had different goals when it came to this new reality of theirs.

He had also determined for himself to not just aim to survive but strive for greater power. He wouldn't fault others for merely wanting to survive, as he genuinely understood where they were coming from. Before the system, he hadn't had any real ambitions but was just happy with what he had.

His only real motivation to improve was external. It was to make his parents proud, gain social status, and earn enough money for a comfortable life. Now that had changed. His motivation was entirely internal. He wanted to grow stronger, not for anyone else but himself. It was without a doubt selfish, but he honestly didn't care. One of the perks of power being that other's opinions stopped holding power over you.

Only through power could he attain total freedom. But he knew he had a very long way to go. Even an overgrown mushroom had beaten the crap out of him. But as long as he stayed true to his path, he firmly believed that he would one day reach the pinnacle. Or at least die doing something he loved, no matter how cliché that sounds.

As he thought, the exit of the cave finally came into sight. The bright light was now replaced with the orange glow of the evening sun. He wasn't in a hurry as he walked back, still a bit sore. Likely due to the aftereffects of Limit Break.

The trek was short, but as he got closer, he was surprised to hear voices. Going low, he used Advanced Stealth as he snuck closer to his camp. Peeking out from behind a tree, he saw Miranda and Hank together with the two teenagers - all sitting at the pond.

He had thought they would leave. Miranda had been quite distraught when he left... but that wasn't the real issue.

Jake had walked off with the thought that their parting would be final. Now... he wasn't quite sure what exactly to do. Would it be awkward to just stroll back to the pond, intruding on the four of them?

Fuck, this is my pond, and the Pylon is buried right there. Stop being a wuss and get in there. He tried to hype himself up. Yeah, he was a goddamn Progenitor of this universe, a Kingslayer, a Prodigy, and all that shizzle. There was no way he would let social anxiety beat him like this!

So he only waited around passively for 10 more minutes before realizing they clearly weren't going to leave the pond any time soon. That is when he remembered his ultimate weapon: the mask that was hiding his face. Steeling his will, he entered the fray, trying to look as confident as ever.

Walking out from behind the tree, he walked casually towards the pond, not trying to hide whatsoever, instantly drawing the attention of all four of them. Their reactions differed wildly.

The young man Mark looked slightly frightened, Miranda a bit concerned, Hank frowned, and Louise's face turned bright red.

The first to speak was Miranda. "What happened?"

Jake, a bit taken by surprise by the question asked. "What do you mean?"

"Your condition... what attacked you?" she reiterated.

This was the point where Jake remembered how he currently looked. Tattered armor, dried blood covering his bare upper body, and several still healing scars where the needle-like thorns had pierced his chest and stomach. In other words, he looked like he had just walked out of a life and death battle. Quite accurate, actually.

“Oh... that. Nothing of importance, and don’t worry, what I fought cannot come here,” Jake said, adding mentally, at least I don’t think it can.

“I meant, are you fine? Is that your blood?” she asked, the concerned look not directed at the potential danger but his own wounds’ - something he hadn’t expected.

“No worries, nothing a healing potion or two couldn’t fix,” he answered with a smile. Not that they could see it for the mask, though.

“That is good to hear...” she said, relieved.

Jake, at the same time, kept an eye on the three others. While none of them was a threat, he didn’t exactly know them at all. He hadn’t even spoken a word to them before, Miranda taking charge of their group.

“I didn’t think you would stay,” he said, breaking the silence.

“I... can’t we?” she asked, clearly a bit afraid. Jake also saw Hank and the young man tense up. The young teenage girl was still staring at him weirdly for some reason.

“Nothing’s stopping you. But my requirements from before still stand. I want peace and quiet for my alchemy,” Jake answered. While the forest technically belonged to him due to the Pylon, it wasn’t like he planned on forcing anyone who entered out of it.

“Thank goodness,” she smiled, relieved. “We honestly wouldn’t know where to go. And for some reason, no beasts want to enter this area, so it is the safest area we have seen so far.”

“Yeah... about that,” Jake said, as he got an idea. “Can I speak with you privately?”

Miranda looked a bit surprised at the request but accepted it. Hank also appeared totally okay with leading his two children away. Mark happily followed, while Louise still kept staring at him with a red face and weird expression.

Hank eventually just yanked her by her collar as the three left, leaving Jake alone with Miranda.

“Chairs are still here,” he noted, indicating for them to sit, which they did.

This time Jake took the initiative as he made his mask invisible to reveal his face. He felt a bit proud of himself for remembering that one – a sense of pride that was crushed by Miranda’s next words.

“How come you are half-naked, by the way? Did that armor break completely?”

“Fuck me,” he said accidentally out loud, quickly trying to explain himself while admonishing himself for forgetting his current state again within 5 minutes. “Eh... well, it’s in my spatial storage while it’s repairing itself.”

As he said that, he took out one of the many shirts he had swiped from the challenge dungeon. They were shitty quality and far less comfortable than his armor, but at least they covered him up a bit.

“Spatial storage?” she questioned, hiding a smile as he put on the shirt.

“It’s something an item of mine can do. I can store items within it. Mine even has the function of keeping all kinds of alchemical ingredients frozen in time to keep them fresh,” he answered truthfully. He didn’t see any point in hiding it with the plan he had formed.

“Interesting...” she said, as she kept asking. “But can you tell me what exactly you fought that caused your armor to require such repair?”

“There is a cave nearby that leads deep underground, wherein I discovered a huge biodome of sorts. Therein I encountered a D-grade entity and was forced to retreat,” he calmly explained.

“D-grade... aren’t those above level 100?” she asked, shocked.

“Yeah, at least. Each grade is quite a qualitative upgrade, too, meaning the difference between level 99 and 100 is huge. I am sure you remember the difference between 24 and 25, so think of it like that but much more extreme.”

"That is... quite something. To face such a thing... I can't even imagine fighting something like that tiger," Miranda sighed powerlessly.

"Actually, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. What is your goal in this new world?" Jake asked.

"My goal?" she asked, a bit confused at first, but soon began thinking. "To survive, I guess?"

"How do you plan on surviving?" he pressured her.

"I know what you are getting at... but I am not a fighter. I can't face down beasts and monsters every day like you and Hank," she answered, a bit ashamed at her own perceived weakness.

"It isn't like fighting is the only way to survive," he said. "But in either case, you do need power. So I ask again, how do you plan on surviving?"

She sat silently for a while until she resolutely looked him in the eye. "By making someone powerful like you protect me."

"For that to happen, you have to offer something that makes it worth the hassle. And even then, it's a fragile thing if you don't even have a modicum of strength yourself," Jake said, pleasantly surprised by her honesty. It made this entire conversation easier.

“You asked me earlier why no monsters enter this area. It is because of what lies buried in the earth right below our feet. A thing called a Pylon of Civilization. As the name suggests, it is an item made for founding a civilization, or in this case, a city,” he explained.

Miranda just sat there listening while peeking down on the ground.

“I have no desire at all to make a city, much less rule one. But at the same time, it would be a waste not to use the Pylon properly. So my proposition is this: become the city lord of this Pylon and found a city here. I will stay as the on-paper ruler while you pretty much do everything.”

“What would I-” she began saying before she got interrupted by something Jake couldn’t see. He smirked to himself as his prediction proved true.

“Principal City Lord?” she asked him questionably.

“Had my suspicions that the system wanted someone to take it. So, do you want the job?” Jake smiled. He could vaguely feel the system offering it and his own ability to stop it from doing so.

“It says I need to have at least the title of Lord to get the profession...” she sighed.

Jake barely managed to frown before he got interrupted by a new message.

Do you wish to grant Miranda Wells a nobility title? Note that as an Earl, you can only appoint 5 Lords (0/5 used), 3 Barons (0/3 used), and 1 Viscount (0/1 used)

He was a bit surprised at the message but not overly much. The only truly surprising thing was the number of titles he could grant and wondering why the system so clearly used the old British royalty system. Not that he was complaining.

"I can give you a title. But before I do that, we need to come to an agreement," Jake said as he summoned a pen and paper from his spatial storage.

"A contract?" she asked, actually smiling at the thought of how 'normal' writing down a contract in what was essentially an employment-situation was.

"Easier to remember if we write it down and agree on the terms. Besides, I have a feeling this method is more comfortable for the both of us," Jake said. While he hadn't written any legal contracts before, he had signed and read plenty.

Not that this was a legal contract. No laws really bound them but their own words. But then again... perhaps words and promises themselves held power beyond human understanding in this new reality of theirs.

"I agree. I can see the profession's description, but as always, it is comprehensive... but the stat points per level alone are shocking. It's more than pretty much all other classes or professions I have encountered so far," Miranda said, clearly probing at Jake as to why he was willing just to give it away. "Also, what exactly do you expect of me?"

After that, the two of them spent the better half of an hour discussing the contract. To sum it all up, Jake wanted not to be burdened by the responsibilities and downsides of being a City Lord, but at the same time still wanted the benefits of a high-level noble who was technically in charge of a city.

Miranda wanted safety and a promise to have his backing if she was supposed to run a city. She would also get a powerful profession and a lot of organizational power as she would effectively be in charge of everything. Jake did stipulate a veto, though, and that he was at the top.

While it all may seem a bit overboard for a city that is only five people in total currently, both of them knew it wouldn't stay like that. Billions had survived the tutorials, and it was only a matter of time before more found their way here. The fact that this place was a safe haven due to the Pylon would undoubtedly make it a beacon of sorts. Not many would come due to its isolated location, but some would.

She also had to confess that the prospect of running an entire city did appeal to her. While she didn't have much confidence in fighting monsters, she did have faith in her ability to handle politics and management.

So, in the end, they agreed on a four-page contract, which they both signed to no great fanfare. Both knew it was a contract based only on trust, but then again, in many ways, so were contracts before the system.

With that, Jake granted her the title of Viscount. While she only needed to be a Lord, he had already decided to make her his partner in this endeavor. To hold back and give her a worse title didn't make sense and would possibly only lead to problems down the line. Besides... who else would he give it to?

Accepting the profession, Miranda was momentarily overwhelmed as the knowledge entered her mind. Knowledge she would take a while to truly comprehend. At the same time, Jake felt the shift in the mana in the air. Not only could he find wisps of his own mana within it now, but hers too.

They said their farewells as Jake stayed to do his alchemy, and Miranda returned to Hank and the others. On the way, she couldn't help but smile as she got a bit giddy. Maybe... just maybe, she could carve out her own little space in this world.