

Hunter 148

Chapter 148: Incoming

Everything was buzzing as she acted almost on instinct. A transparent barrier instantly covered the entire lodge, followed by another bubble overlapping with hers only moments later.

Silas charged forward with his healing already on full display to keep Levi alive. Hank quickly came over to the screaming man and forced a healing potion down his throat, quickly flooding his body with vital energy.

“Well done, Neil, I wanted to rip him apart from mouth to asshole. Nice tilting of the axis there at the end,” they heard Abby’s voice say as she walked up to the barrier separating them.

The calmness in her voice stood out, as she didn’t appear phased at the barrier’s appearance at all. But as she examined it closer, she noticed something a bit off.

“One of space, and another of pure mana? Great, good job wasting my time more than necessary,” she said with a bit of annoyance. She could detect the two barriers blocking her from getting to her desired orb, and while the one of space mana was manageable, the one of mana was quite a bit more tricky.

On the inside of the barrier, the outlook in their situation was far from favorable. Abby had even hoped for a second that the annoying magic swordsman would die but was surprised to see his wounds close instantly.

It was a bit eerie to see the entrails on the steps slowly retract themselves as new skin covered the lower half of his body, making him look like a bilateral amputee. That is until small bumps slowly began growing out beneath him, clearly indicating the regrowth of his entire lower body.

Abby just stared at it in fascination as she wondered exactly how powerful the potion they used was. That or the healer had gotten significantly more competent compared to their last meeting.

What was perhaps even more annoying than the swordsman not dying was that she could clearly see the guy still scream and the others in there talking, but she couldn't hear quack. But at least they could listen to her based on their reactions. It must be that damn barrier of mana.

They dragged Levi into the lodge, and all quickly collapsed on the ground. Only Miranda was staying outside, keeping an eye on Abby and her army of invaders.

An army that was quickly reorganizing. After the attempt to kill Levi failed, they didn't have any clear plan of action. Hundreds of people just stood looking questioningly at Abby and her father.

The bearded man began yelling out instructions, and it went more or less as they had anticipated. Everyone backed off, Abby included, as ranged attacks started winding up. Soon after, a barrage of spells, arrows, and other attacks hit the barrier.

This was where the two barriers' power became apparent, as every single attack was repelled, not leaving a single sign of damage on either. The two barriers were complementing each other just as much as Miranda and Neil had anticipated.

The barrier of mana made by Miranda blocked the magical attacks flawlessly. It could even take in a portion of the atmospheric mana to keep itself healthy for longer. And as the attackers were all relatively unskilled, they released a lot of extra mana into the air for the barrier to absorb.

Then there was the space barrier, which similarly blocked all physical attacks without any issue. It was a nearly impenetrable defense. Based on the furious look on Abby's face, it even quickly became apparent that she was unable to break the space barrier.

There was one problem, however... time. The many attackers outside didn't damage the barriers, but they were slowly whittling them down. It would disappear on its own after some time, but it wouldn't last more than a day or so based on the current rate of attacks.

Inside the cabin, the atmosphere was more than a little bleak also.

"I thought you said you could keep her busy for a while," Hank said to Neil as he also drank a healing potion.

"I thought I could... but she has gotten even stronger since last. At the end of the tutorial, she was only a bit stronger than me... if she had been this strong back then, we would have never escaped in the first place... damn it," he said, cradling his head as blood dripped onto the floor from his eyes and nose.

Hank just sighed as he sat down on the floor. Thinking it a bit of a shame that they were spilling blood all over the newly constructed lodge. A whimsical thought, considering that more blood would likely soon flow within. The second those shields go down...

Everyone looked listlessly at the ground, only the two healers doing much of anything. Neil especially looked utterly lost.

"I... I'm sorry..." he cried. "I got you all into this mess... if only I hadn't..."

"Oh shut up," Christen scoffed. "We chose to stick by you, so don't go all pity-party on us."

"But you forced us into this," Hank shot back. "We didn't need this shit."

Christen, despite her usually quippy mouth, didn't have any response to that. They had dragged Miranda and the family of three into it against their will.

On the steps outside the lodge, Miranda sat and stared at the ground, deep in thought. All of them stared back at her, too, as the others were hidden from sight within the lodge. Making her the center of attention.

"May I ask your name?" she heard as she looked up to see the bearded - Abby's father.

Miranda just shook her head, as she didn't care much for the man's words.

He said, smiling lightly. "I believe this entire thing can be rectified. My daughter is a bit wild, I confess, but she is not the monster you have in your mind. Neil is the reason she is like this. Once he is gone, things will get better."

Miranda once more just shook her head but couldn't help but look back towards Neil.

"You see, Neil has always been the wonder boy of the family. Perfect in nearly everything. This took quite a toll on Abby. She finally came to believe she was his equal only to lose in that final unfair test. It broke a small part of her to lose once more like that. We are only seeking to set things right here.

"So please excuse her crude words. As I said, she usually isn't like this. And I can promise you that if you choose to join us, you and your comrades will be safe. I am Donald, by the way. Widower even before the system."

Miranda didn't much care for his name but wondered why the hell he bothered to include being a widower. Seemed like absolutely useless information to her.

Seeing her remain silent, Donald kept talking. "Please don't waste your life on protecting someone you have only known for a few days. I swear that you can find a place with me. Find safety. You have seen what my daughter can do. I doubt she can find any equal among humanity in this world."

She was a bit taken aback at his words more than anything. The wording was just off, and she couldn't help but look confused up at him.

His smile deepened as he looked down on her. She once more felt the disgusting sensation of his gaze going all over her body. "I believe you would be pleasant company. That we could both find some happiness in this new world. Together."

At this point, warning bells would go off for anyone, no matter how oblivious. To call the vibe the man was giving off creepy would be an understatement.

As she was still thinking about what to say, her facial expression had clearly revealed her thoughts. The look of absolute disdain and disgust showed only a moment, but it was enough for the man to notice.

"I am offering you a good thing here," he said, a bit colder than before. "Don't throw it away for silly reasons."

Miranda made a faux look of apology, and that seemed to be enough for the man to do a complete 180.

"No problem at all," he said, practically beaming. "As long as you serve me well, all will work out. I am sure the heart shall follow."

He isn't even trying to hide it anymore... she thought, attempting to hide her disgust as much as she could. Where the hell did he get this confidence from? Oh... right. The threat of being able to have her killed at any point.

"Landed yourself another whore?" Abby asked, walking over. Her voice around a tenth as disdainful as the thoughts Miranda held for the man she asked.

"Language," Donald said, with a tone so bogusly stern it was insulting. Miranda was finding it more noteworthy how he only saw the words themselves and not the insinuation of the words the bad part.

Miranda stood up and went into the lodge as she heard Abby yell behind her to 'take down the damn barrier' but ignored it.

Once inside, she looked at the people there. Louise had poured all her mana into the mana barrier; Neil was just staring into the ground.

"Can we try to make a run for it?" Eleanor finally asked, breaking the silence.

"How far will we get? And if you haven't noticed, we aren't exactly in a state to run. One of us even less than the others," Christen sneered. Instantly feeling bad afterward for getting mad at her friend. "Sorry, I just..."

"I know..." Eleanor smiled sadly.

"Christen, Silas, and Eleanor," Neil said, looking up. "Try to escape. Take Miranda, Hank, Louise, and Mark with you. I will stay here and attempt to keep them occupied... I may be able to buy a few minutes if-"

"Ah, fuck it," Miranda finally said, disrupting the sad atmosphere. "We all agree that getting killed by that bitch Abby and her creep of a father is the worst, right?"

"Well, yeah, but," Christen said, confused.

“Great, all in agreement? Then I am going to do something idiotic.”

“What?” Hank asked, confused.

“I am taking a gamble. Chances are, even if it works, we will die anyway,” she explained. “I am going to do something that will very likely anger the ‘owner.’ Not sure what his response will be, but I doubt getting killed by him will be worse than what those animals out there want to do with us.”

“You had a chance to call him all along?” Christen asked, a bit of anger in her voice. “And will he even be able to do anything? If you haven’t noticed, there is an entire army out there, along with a pissed off overpowered space mage.”

“Hell if I know,” Miranda said, having already thrown caution to the wind. “So let’s give it a shot.”

She opened the menu with her mind and saw the prompt appear - the Pylon right beneath them.

Initiate the process to claim ownership of Pylon of Civilization?

Requirements to claim ownership: Slay the current City Owner OR be uncontested in your claim for at least 30 days while maintaining the support of at least 51% of the total population.

Warning: City Owner will be warned upon initiation of the process.

The last sentence was what she gambled on. Without hesitating any longer, she initiated the process, and a quest appeared as she expected.

Quest Received: Contested Pylon of Civilization

City Lord Miranda Wells has initiated the process to take control of the Pylon of Civilization. You must retain control of the Pylon for the remaining duration OR slay the current City Owner.

Time Remaining: 29 days, 23:59:59

Quest Reward: Become City Owner of [Unnamed]

Penalty upon failure: Unable to initiate a new process for control at least 10 years. The City Owner may determine additional punishments.

Smiling, she felt like a weight had been lifted off her shoulders. She wasn't sure if it was her intuition skill or perhaps just wishful thinking, but she was pretty sure the owner was on his way. The barrier protecting them would stay up for a while longer... hopefully long enough.

She had been so stupid. Despite the owner's words and the constant warnings from Neil and his party... she had still believed she could solve this situation diplomatically. That she could negotiate and reach a positive outcome for everyone involved.

Boy, had she been naive. There was just no negotiating with some people. In retrospect, she should have called the owner back days ago... I just hope it isn't too late. If he takes more than a day...

Walking out of the lodge once more, she saw both Abby and Donald standing in pretty much the same place as last. Abby still appearing to study the barriers while Donald waited patiently. Based on his look when she exited the lodge, for her.

Even before going to the edge of the barrier, she made it so they could hear her. Everyone inside the lodge had already quieted down - all waiting for whatever was to come.

"I am happy to see that you have come to your senses. You will not regret becoming mine," Donald said when he saw the smile on Miranda's lips. He had taken it as her surrendering herself. He could already feel the heat build-up in his stomach as his eyes went over her body.

A bit of a waste, he thought. He was going to enjoy her. Enjoy her, and once she was his, end her. Such was his path, after all.

Abby allowed him to act as he did because she was already used to it. She was the only one to know that he was not a widower by chance but by choice. No, she had helped him get rid of her. Half of the insurance money was hers, now wasn't it?

Now his determination had carried over to the new world. His path was recognized by the almighty system. His depravity turned to power. Through the death of others he had claimed as his own, he could empower himself further. Dozens of innocents having already fallen victim to his ways.

"I must apologize," she said with a mocking smile. "I already have an 'owner.' Wait, that came out wrong... a boss... yeah, let's go with that."

Her somewhat delirious words made him frown, and even Abby glanced over with interest.

"I told you, right? This land has an owner. And I just tripped the homeowner's alarm, metaphorically speaking."

"What the hell are you on about?" Abby said, having already forgotten the whole 'owner' talk. Taking it as hubris from the very beginning.

"Just ignore her and get the damn barrier down," Donald frowned. Disappointed and angry. Turning to Miranda. "I tried to be nice. But I guess you like it rough."

Miranda just scowled at the creepy guy. His face was becoming uglier to her eyes by the second. She would have to at least manage to land a punch on his ugly mug before she died. Just as she was considering if a kick would be better, she felt something. Everyone did.

A presence washed over the valley. Confusion overtook the invaders as their gazes flickered about, looking for the source - only Abby looking straight up into the air.

“Something is coming,” she spoke to herself, for the first time with a hint of worry in her voice.