

## Hunter 151

### Chapter 151: A Bit of Self-Reflection

Jake let go and looked at the corpse on the ground. Her bloodshot eyes still wide open, staring back up at him, with black veins extending from her face and unto her entire body.

Sighing, he turned his attention to the stunned observers around him. Many of them were still getting back up from the blast Abby had released not long ago. Some of whom would never get up ever again.

In an oddly ironic series of events, Abby had ended up killing even more of her own men than Jake had. He had finished off thirty or so, while her blast had killed nearly fifty, which meant that around half of the people that had invaded the valley were now dead. Another third of the survivors had already run off once he started glaring people to death. He had only killed those who kept attacking, while he didn't bother with those who ran.

Jake dismissed his scales as he deposited Abby's corpse into his spatial storage. She was bound to have had a lot of useful items. Next, he went and did the same to Donald's. He didn't care about any of the others, as he frankly doubted they had much he needed.

With that taken care of, he turned his attention towards the big barrier still covering his lodge. It was undamaged, and in a fortunate turn of events, had also protected the pond and waterfall behind it. However, the rest of the valley was a bit of a mess, primarily caused by the blast of space mana earlier.

Behind said barrier were Neil and his group. Neil's mouth was hanging wide open. On several occasions, he had expected Jake to die, but he had effortlessly thwarted the two's efforts every single time. The two people he and his group had failed to even fight for more than a few minutes had been dominated and killed in less than a minute.

The most overwhelming part was the sheer number of attacks he used. At first, he thought the masked man some kind of melee fighter. An evolved light-warrior variant or something. Then he launched powerful spells, both the disruptive mana blast and the mana bolts impressive in their own right. Then finally, he had taken out a bow and fired off arrows that each had enough power to shatter Abby's space barriers. Is he really human?

All of that was discounting the scariest thing. The masked man's ability to kill people out of nowhere. His ability to make people freeze up and become defenseless. He wasn't even mentioning the fact that he could grow wings, summon scales, or how he had killed Abby in seconds with some kind of powerful melee skill that only required touch from the looks of it.

He couldn't help but shift his eyes to Miranda. She had mentioned this 'owner' several times, but she mentioned she had never truly seen him fight. Neil had doubted his capabilities, but he would be a fool to do so now. He also couldn't help but question if coming here was indeed a good idea.

Speaking of Miranda, she too was very concerned inwardly. The creepy fuck and his devil spawn of a daughter were gone, but that still left the masked man's potential anger towards her. She didn't fear he would do anything like what Donald planned, but that he would just kill her outright.

Jake, on the other hand, hadn't even considered this. Instead, he stood solemnly contemplating a lot of things... but first, he had to finish cleaning up.

"Everyone, gather over here in front of the barrier," he yelled out to the still stunned people all around him.

Only around fifty people remained in total. The rest were now either dead or had run off, likely to die from the many beasts within the forest, which was also the reason why so many had stayed. Without

Abby and Donald, they weren't sure they could even survive the way to any safe place. Not that there was truly any safe place in this new world anymore.

"Yes, boss!"

The first person answering turned out to be Chris, who he had talked to just before. He had survived the blast of space mana and was one of the first to get back up. And the very first to run over and stand in front of the barrier.

Though Jake wasn't exactly fond of the whole 'boss' business, that was something to fix later.

With Chris taking the initiative, everyone followed his lead and went in front of the barrier. Many still very hesitant, but nobody dared to be too slow. They all were afraid due to the leadership-style deeply engraved in their bodies from following Abby. Chris was the only one Jake saw who was showing just a bit of defiance.

"So, how long will this thing last?" Jake asked the space mage.

"If no one attacks it, a few more days at least... but I can remove it at any time," he answered truthfully. Like most kinds of space magic that he practiced, it was very stable.

"Alright, can you take it down?"

Neil threw a quick glance at his party members before landing on Silas, giving him an idea.

“Can you swear you don’t intend to hurt us?” he asked. His goal was to use Silas’s lie-detector skill. Miranda had shared a lot of information about what happened, but it had been barebones. A detail such as the existence of that skill hadn’t been revealed.

“Right now, I don’t, but I can’t say that won’t change in the future,” Jake shrugged. “Nobody knows the future after all... well, maybe some people do, but I digress, and all that divination-stuff is mainly bullshit in my opinion.”

An answer that didn’t exactly put Neil’s mind at ease. Subtly, he threw a glance back at Silas, and Neil was surprised to see his friend stand there with a confused look on his face. Upon noticing his gaze, Silas shrugged and shook his head, utterly bewildered. It doesn’t work? Neil asked himself, frowning internally.

That was... a first. Every person they had encountered so far had worked in except for the disciple during the tutorial trials. Did that mean he was too strong for it to work, or that he had some other skill to block it?

In the end, he would have to try and negotiate their survival and future wellbeing without magical assistance. “I hope that we can reach some kind of understanding where-“

“Take that up with Miranda,” Jake interrupted, waving his hand dismissively. The entire reason she had gotten the role of City Lord was so that he didn’t have to negotiate anything.

Both Miranda and Neil were a bit taken aback, but both interpreted it as a pardon of sorts. Miranda was afraid of the consequences of her betrayal, and Neil was worried if he would be judged for leading a group of hostiles into his domain.

“Alright then...” the space mage tentatively said as he placed his hand on the ground and closed his eyes. A few seconds later, the space barrier shimmered out of existence, leaving only Miranda’s behind. And Jake had already analyzed that long ago.

Without waiting, he stepped forward and walked straight into it. His foot was not blocked by it at all as he phased through it uneventfully. Once more, surprising everyone there.

“What?” Jake asked before explaining. “This barrier is made of pure mana from the environment. Activated by Miranda by channeling the core, and as the owner of the city, it naturally doesn’t affect me.”

It felt pretty good to stun the people within the lodge with his deep understanding of mana... and totally not the other weird words he threw out.

“City?” “Core?”

Perhaps forgetting that the whole city-business hadn’t been mentioned to any of them yet.

“Miranda, you handle that too,” he quickly delegated. “And find out what to do with those followers of Abby’s that remained behind. Don’t bother hiding anything unimportant for now.”

“Yes!” Miranda nodded enthusiastically.

“Oh, and one last thing... I need a word with you in private. So could the rest of you leave this bubble?”

“Alright,” she agreed. “Hank, can you begin figuring out the situation outside? And Neil, can you guys act as support in case it gets violent?”

“Sure.” “Okay.”

The two answered as they began gathering their things - one of those ‘things’ being Levi on the ground who had been unconscious the entire time. He looked a bit weird with growths coming out of his lower body, forming his preliminary legs.

Walking out, some of them threw a worried glance at Miranda, who gave them a reaffirming nod in return. She then proceeded to reactivate the effect of the barrier that isolated sound so they could talk peace.

After they were gone, Jake sat down on the ground and let out a big sigh before speaking. “Sorry about before.”

“Huh?” she blurted out, confused.

“My outburst earlier. I have some bad experiences with betrayal, and as much as I hate to admit it, I have shitty control over my own emotions at times. I thought the worst despite knowing nothing. So, I apologize,” he said genuinely.

“I... I was the one who broke your trust first. It is reasonable enough to think that I may have tried a coup d'état. Speaking of which... how do we get rid of the quest?”

“Oh yeah. That,” Jake remembered as he rechecked the quest. Thinking for a bit, he asked casually. “Do you surrender?”

“Eh... sure?” she answered bewildered.

Quest: Contested Pylon of Civilization has been completed!

Quest Reward: Retain control of Pylon of Civilization

City Lord cannot initiate an attempt to claim Pylon of Civilization for 10 years. Ability to further punish the City Lord granted. Would you like to add further punishment?

“I just completed my quest,” Jake said with a smile.

“And I failed mine,” she added.

“Did you receive any punishment besides being locked out of betraying me again?” he asked a bit jokingly.

“No, just that,” she affirmed.

Jake looked at the ability to add further punishment for a while, and while just looking at it, the system made him aware of what he could do and... what?

There was quite literally no limit. Jake intuitively knew that he could add anything, and she would be forced to do it or lose her profession and City Lord role.

The thought itself was disturbing. Jake could add a punishment that forced her to stepdance fourteen hours a day or only walk on her hands for eternity if he wanted. Even directly remove her as City Lord. If he was cruel, he could do far worse. The only things he couldn't do was add to the durations she couldn't initiate the takeover-process for, or anything else that was 'impossible' like make her punishment to instantly get a level or something.

He couldn't help but imagine what a man like Donald would have done with this sort of control over someone. Nothing good, that's for sure.

Dismissing the thought of using it for anything, he rejected to add any punishment, but to his surprise, it didn't just go away. It was an open offer. He could add a penalty any time he felt like within the next 10 years, it seems. But at least he could close the menu itself, so he just had to close off the option mentally.



"All right, with that handled, I think you should go out and figure stuff out with Hank and the others. This should be a good opportunity to finally get some damn citizens in this sorry excuse of a city," he chuckled with a smile.

"Sure thing," she nodded as she got up and went towards the exit before stopping in the doorway and turning around. "Thank you."

He looked at her confused for a bit but smiled below the mask, and he answered. "Part of the contract, isn't it?"

"I still need to thank you," she said as she bowed towards him. "Without you, we would have all either died or suffered fates worse than death today. So from all of us... thank you."

With that, she left the lodge before he could respond, which was quite fortunate as Jake wasn't quite sure what to say. He had never experienced heartfelt gratitude like that before. Especially not from someone who was still, in many ways, a stranger. The feeling was odd but not unpleasant.

But her heartfelt thank you was why he had to close his eyes and enter meditation at that moment. Not to recover any resources, but to do what his Thoughtful Meditation upgrade was meant to help him with: Think.

Not just once, but several times he had lost control of his emotions. It was clearly something more than just a sudden angry outburst. It was like a flood of emotion overtook him. When he killed William, he experienced it, and today he had experienced it again.

It hampered his ability to think rationally and made killing be the only thing on his mind. Thinking back, he could barely remember his thoughts after he got the prompt from the quest. He did remember considering that Miranda must have done it out of sheer disrespect or thinking he was dead.

Which in itself was nonsensical. The mere fact that the quest was even available to her had to mean that the owner still lived. He hadn't considered that she had activated it due to some kind of emergency either, aka exactly the reason why she had triggered it.

So now the question was, why? It wasn't something he remembered experiencing before the system at all, and he had several moments where he encountered things that should infuriate him. Heck, he found his then-girlfriend and best friend in bed together, and he had managed not to kill either of them.

He felt himself grow angry just at the thought of them but quickly took a deep breath to calm himself. This was officially bad. And he had to admit to himself that it wasn't new either; he just didn't have the real need or desire to reflect on it earlier.

Had his emotions somehow been amplified? No, that wasn't it. His other feelings were clearly still the same; in fact, on the scale of being a beacon of emotion and a wasteland of apathy, he would put himself far closer to indifference.

Today was a good example. Jake hadn't really felt strongly about anything but Miranda's betrayal. Killing Abby and her creep of a father didn't exactly make him feel bad. So it wasn't his emotions that had been amplified. At least not all of them.

So was it only anger that was amplified? No... because he had felt anger before without it being so all-consuming. He was mad at Hawkie for harassing him when they first met, pissed at the King of the Forest and his arrogance, and had plenty of distaste for several of the foes he had fought.

Anger stemming from betrayal then... still didn't fit. William hadn't really betrayed him. Back then, he hadn't been angry at William at all, really; the one he was furious at was... oh.

It was a betrayal that triggered it, after all. Just not the treachery of others. It was himself all along. Jake had been angry at himself for trusting his girlfriend and best friend despite all the signs. With William, he had been angry at himself for ignoring the plight of his former colleagues. Today, angry at himself for trusting Miranda with something so important as the Pylon of Civilization without any kind of failsafe or at least an attempt to ensure she wouldn't betray him.

It fits, he sighed internally. Now the question was only why... why he reacted as he did. But... even that he had an inkling of an answer to. The source was lying in the trump card that had allowed him to get this far.

[Bloodline of the Primal Hunter (Bloodline Ability - Unique)] – Dormant power lies in the very essence of your being. A unique, innate ability awakened in the bloodline of Jake Thayne. Grants the Sphere of Perception. Grants an improved sense of danger. Enhances all instincts and intuition. +15% to Perception.

His bloodline. His greatest strength and ace. It wasn't something he thought about actively during the day as it was just a part of him now. Trusting his intuition over logic, trusting his sense of danger as if it was the epitome of objectivity. Relying on his sphere for everything, even that very moment as he sat in meditation.

But he knew the root of his bloodline was his instincts themselves. It didn't necessarily grant him anything others didn't have. It just cranked it to absolute-11.

Everyday spatial awareness transformed into a literal Sphere of Perception. Intuition made nearly a prophetic power - any living being's innate sense of danger made into something that could only be called precognition or just straight-up clairvoyance.

So didn't it make sense that the feeling most enhanced of all was his survival instinct - his sense of self-preservation. So when he felt his sense of self was threatened, every single cell of his body would strive to make the optimal decision to eliminate that threat. Thus invoking a strong emotion to act and find a solution as quickly as possible.

But as he couldn't exactly kill himself... he would have to eliminate the doubt. And with the reptilian brain in charge during those moments of rage, it could do only the simplest of things. Kill whoever or destroy whatever was associated with the doubt to 'fix' it.

Now, did it make sense to think that you could fix every problem by killing something? Absolutely not if you thought about it for more than a few seconds. But instincts weren't exactly known for being calculative.

He didn't know if this guess was right, but in an odd sense of irony, his intuition told him he was at least very close. And he also had a feeling that parts of his bloodline would lead to other... complications down the road. Intuition once more approving.