

Hunter 174

Chapter 174: Minotaur Mindchief

Jake landed on top of the barn as he looked through a broken rooftop window. He saw even more bovines inside, but they weren't the first thing he noticed. It was the huge creature standing on top of an elevated platform, looking straight back at him.

"So, you are the one who's been tracking me?" it asked in a rough voice.

Jake saw no reason to hide as he leaped through the window and landed just inside – standing in mid-air.

He saw a hulking Minotaur standing on what looked like a small stage, wearing simple garbs and wielding a staff. It was a bit over three meters tall, with curling bronze horns extending from its head. It looked quite familiar to the creature he had imagined, and his Identify made him aware that this was very likely the creature he had been tracking.

[Minotaur Mindchief – lvl ???]

"That would be me," Jake answered as he stared down at the monster. He could feel its presence and get an estimate of it as he considered if he could fight it... stronger than the Thunder Roc and Storm Elemental... but differently.

But his intuition and danger sense didn't scream at him or warn him like when he faced truly powerful enemies... yet he still had some reservations.

"Did you enjoy my work? It was... liberating to do," the Minotaur said as it smiled up at him. "I sincerely hope you can appreciate it. It is rare to find one who walks the same path."

Jake looked confused down at the monster but decided to play along. He felt like there was some kind of misunderstanding, and if he could exploit that, he was more than willing to.

"It wasn't exactly my style," he answered.

"To crush the humans is something one should take pleasure in, is it not? Those accursed monkeys are now but prey to us," the Minotaur chuckled as he motioned towards the back of the room.

Jake had already noticed them before, but looking at the cages at the back wall closer still made him frown.

There had to be at least a hundred people stashed into small cages, lined up neatly. All of them stood, sat, or were on the ground, their eyes totally blank as they just stared into empty space - all under the mental influence of the Mindchief.

"A bit crude and unnecessary," Jake answered, a bit of contempt leaking into his voice.

"Hah, one of efficiency I see," the Minotaur chuckled, not at all offended. "But what other reason but pleasure is there to slay these monkeys? They are inferior now, remnants of the past to be crushed and forgotten."

Jake frowned a bit again as he finally put two and two together. It thinks I am a monster, one that kills weaker humans as it does.

It... honestly shouldn't be that surprising. While Jake did look humanoid, the only actual body part visible was two beastly eyes. The two wings on his back were surely not helping him look human either. He couldn't even be identified, making it even less obvious what race he was.

As to why it believed he hunted humans... well, because he had plenty of human blood on him. The girl he carried earlier hadn't exactly been clean, and he had also come into contact with plenty of blood as he chased down the monster in front of him.

I can use this, but...

"Awfully talkative," Jake said, wondering quite a bit about that part. While it didn't exactly fall into the trope of the evil villain explaining his plans, it was pretty damn close.

"Ah, I apologize. It is not often one encounters other sapients, much less ones able to speak. Even fewer again, those that do not attack at first sight," the Minotaur said, shaking its head. "It can be isolating to be the only one of your kind smarter than a stupid animal."

The Minotaur looked around at all the bulls inside the barn with pity. They were all just standing there, sometimes bumping into their neighbor or looking at the ground for signs of food. They didn't act differently from normal bulls, and the normal cows outside conducted themselves rather cow-like too. Without a Herd Leader, Jake guessed these creatures would be mostly harmless.

As a very antisocial person, Jake couldn't really relate to the constant need some people felt for companionship many had, but he could understand it. People were just built differently, and while he could do fine alone for a while, even he got sometimes wanted companionship.

Bovines were also social animals. So... had the poor genocidal Minotaur really just gotten lonely?

"Why are you keeping humans in cages?" he asked the Minotaur. If the overgrown cow wanted to kill them, he could kind of understand it, but why keep them alive?

"I am glad you asked," the Minotaur said, and Jake was already regretting his question as the monster began monologuing.

"This place was used for auctions before the initiation. Auctions of what you may ask?" the monster began, as the Minotaur's mood suddenly turned murderous as he roared. "MY KIND! SOLD AS ITEMS TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER! TO BE SLAUGHTERED OR FORCED INTO PERPETUATING THE PURGATORY THAT WAS OUR EXISTENCE."

He breathed in calmly as he tried to relax. "After I awakened, I finally understood - and I remembered - every second of every day. I was forced to breed; my life and the life of my kind treated as if we weren't even alive. Born with our only fates being to bring more offspring and then be slaughtered and devoured."

The Minotaur smiled as he motioned towards the cages. "So is this not fitting? The roles reversed, with the humans now the cattle and we the lords of their lives and deaths. The humans are weak now... while we are strong. Now is the time to strike fear into their hearts and claim our place at the top!"

Jake looked at the insane Minotaur for a while. Okay, yeah, he kinda got its need to kill a few humans and farmers based on how the farming industry tended to treat cattle, but on the other hand... Jake didn't really care.

He had never been one to bear grudges, and even if he did, the worst he would do was to kill. He didn't need to humiliate or torture. This Minotaur was clearly different, as it seemingly wanted to crush the entire human race... an ambitious goal for sure, if shortsighted.

"What's up with the human settlement in the plains then? Plenty of them there to go kill, but instead, you have sent your kin there to die," Jake asked, genuinely interested to know the answer to that one.

"Well... did the monkeys not feed us and fatten us up before slaughter?" the monster smiled. "I need them to be big and strong before it is time to reap the benefits and put them down."

"By killing your kin?"

"They are the failed ones. Those who reach their limits and can no longer progress... their fates are to wait for death anyway, better for them to help the next generation. A herd too large can be detrimental, and it is only right to weed it out for the entire group to grow stronger."

The Minotaur looked out towards the many Herd Leaders outside as he spoke with sadness.

"For my kin to ascend as I have has proven... difficult. I am merely helping one of them do so. Let the human settlement become the feast that shall be the birth of another D-grade. The first of many to come."

Now, it finally turned towards him.

"Now tell me... why come here? I welcome you to join my herd, even if you are not of my kin."

"And why would I do that?" Jake asked.

"I see that you have yet to cross the crevice... is it not an honor to serve those more powerful? I sense your power, but that final step is not easy. I would be more than happy to have a sapient companion join me."

Jake looked down at the monster. It was hard to compare the creature that created the gruesome scenes in the farmhouses and the polite cowman that stood in front of him. He had yet to show even a single sign of aggression, and while he wasn't sure how it would react if he rejected, its offer at least seemed sincere. Heck, it hadn't even tried any weird mind magic as far as he could tell, despite that being its specialty.

It could even recognize that Jake was still in E-grade, and all logic dictated that the Minotaur was stronger than him. Jake felt like at least giving the creature a proper answer... knowing what was to follow.

"I am a hunter; my path is too far removed from yours. You find pleasure in taking revenge on those weaker than yourself... without going into moral classics and arguing how you are becoming that which you hated; I am just going to make it easy for you. I am a human," he said.

Was it the smartest thing to do? No. Would it be way smarter to get in a good sneak attack? For sure. But Jake had decided to show the monster the basic fucking decency that it hadn't shown anything else. Besides... he didn't feel any fear.

"Huh?" the Minotaur Mindchief said, looking up at him with a confused expression. "Impossible... humans are weak, feeble creatures. You carry the presence of a predator and a monster - not that of a hairless monkey."

"See, that's the thing about us humans... we are a race with quite a high level of variance. Some humans are weak; some are strong. Some are cruel; some are kind. To blame the entire human race is just stupid; quite a few humans in the old world were even fighting for your kind," Jake said, as he made a light smile and made his mask invisible. "Veganism was on the rise, ya know?"

The Minotaur just kept staring at him in confusion before its facial expression changed. From the rather kind-looking smile and welcoming demeanor, its eyes got a red sheen as its entire face contorted into one of rage.

It didn't even speak before Jake felt it. A stream of energy came towards him, and Jake swiftly dispelled the mana on his feet, and with a flap of his wings, soared up through the window he had entered through.

You created a path revolving around hunting down weaker prey... pursuing revenge against them. A limited path with no future, far too confined. You don't need more power to do what you wanted... satisfied to stay in this small area. It was a path with only one ending... stagnation and death.

Flying upwards, he stopped only a hundred meters up as he began channeling Infused Powershot. He had marked the monster with Mark of the Ambitious Hunter before he flew up and knew exactly where it wa-

A figure suddenly appeared in his sphere from behind – the Minotaur. His Mark told him it still stood unmoving inside the building below... but he trusted his sphere more than any skill.

Jake dodged to the side as a staff swiped down, as he turned and saw... nothing. With his eyes, that is. He dodged another swipe from the staff as he fired a blast of mana from his gloves towards the invisible monster.

It flew back a bit, as suddenly it was revealed. At the same time, Jake's Mark also snapshotted to the figure in front of him... making him aware it indeed was the same creature. Mental magic of some kind?

"Why struggle when the fight is already over?" a voice echoed in his mind.

Jake felt the pain moments after, as he felt his insides boil and several holes opened up all over his body, spewing out blood like geysers, and Jake remembered how the staff that penetrated his body several ti-

He ducked under the staff and grabbed hold of the monster's arm, using Touch of the Malefic Viper. It quickly wrested his hand away, but Jake was already upon it with a dagger coated in dark mana. It managed to dodge and move back, but the blade extended at the end, leaving a gash on the Minotaur's chest.

"How?" it spoke, this time not using any shitty mental shit. It stood in the air, not unlike how Jake air-walked, though it did seem quite a bit more skillful at it than him. He assumed it had a skill to do it, primarily to make himself feel better.

"Instincts."

Jake flew forward to keep the creature within his sphere. It disappeared from sight again but soon appeared at his left side and swung its staff. Jake ignored it as it passed straight through him, and he instead ducked under a swipe from the right.

He closed his eyes as he ignored what his other senses told him and only relied on his sphere. He suddenly felt like his leg cramped up, followed by intense pain, but he knew it wasn't real. The pain was as real as it could get, but it didn't come with any actual damage – it was all in his head.

The Minotaur was fast... but not compared to the other D-grades he had encountered. What made it dangerous was its insane mental magic that even Jake couldn't even correctly detect, and it did have some ridiculous strength. Sadly for the Minotaur... it could fool his mind, but not his body.

His dagger stabbed into its leg, and this time it was coated in his own blood too. The monster screamed in pain – his intuition telling him it was not fake in the least. For a moment, he felt the creature slip up as its hold over him disappeared, and his phantom pains disappeared.

But it was enough time for him to land his eyes on the creature. It froze up as Jake charged it, stabbing his dagger into its chest just as it became able to move again. His blade penetrated quite a bit before the Minotaur exploded with mana, sending Jake flying back hundreds of meters before he was able to stop himself.

He had blocked with his arms, and they were both now burned, his armor not doing that well either. It wasn't an illusion, as his sphere and intuition confirmed the damage.

Not that it mattered. Jake just looked at the heaving beast in the distance with pity.

The Minotaur Mindchief was a lot stronger than himself, and the strength behind every swing was enough to crush him. But he was also slow, and his moves obvious, proving he clearly hadn't fought many other powerful foes before.

When you could just make your opponent unaware he was even being hit, you didn't need to be fast or even good at fighting; you just needed enough raw power to crush someone into a paste.

"Is this the power you hoped to challenge an entire race with?" Jake asked the monster, shaking his head.

"I don't know how you avoid it... but your mind is utterly undefended... no, it does affect you; you just ignore it," the Minotaur said, frowning. "Instincts, you say... but isn't it instinct to not hurt your kin?"

Jake looked confused for a moment before his eyes opened wide. A massive wave of almost tangible energy washed over him as he felt the entire world around him shift. He felt his head hurt as he looked at the Minotaur.

"What were we doing?" he asked his old pal in confusion. He remembered that they were chilling just before this, talking about going out how to deal with a nearby hive of enemies, but now he suddenly found himself fighting. It didn't make sense; it was... what?

"Having a duel," his pal said. "I won, so-"

"No, you didn't," Jake said, shaking his head as things snapped into place and looked up at the damn monster with deadly intent as the energy within his head was swiftly dispelled. "Alright, fuck you."

"Worth a shot," the Minotaur said, taunting him as it smiled, seemingly having gotten an idea.

Fuck this mental magic bullshit; what the fuck is this?

Jake began closing off his mind as he tried to stop thinking about anything and just move. He had just begun when the Minotaur turned to him and said with a smile – clearly having gotten an idea it believed clever.

"I believe it's time for the auction to begin!"