

Hunter 184

Chapter 184: Divine Influence

Jake had to admit that it was actually quite impressive he could have so many talks with Miranda without ever bringing up the subject of gods. He had honestly just come to assume everyone knew about gods being a real tangible thing. Maybe his view on the topic was a bit skewed, though. Just maybe.

So, when Miranda came to his lodge for their weekly meetup, and she brought up the topic, Jake just listened as she ranted a bit about someone wanting a temple. Apparently, a follower of some god had come, and Jake's first question was upon hearing this was just:

"Oh, who?"

Which got a perplexed look from Miranda, who clearly hadn't expected that to be his first question.

"What do you mean?" she asked, trying to get him to reclarify.

"The name of the god. Or title; a lot of them prefer to go by titles over their actual names, I heard," Jake tried to explain, as Miranda just looked more and more confused. He didn't help the situation by casually rubbing the belly of the bird on his head.

"I... didn't get a name... do you know something I don't, about this so-called god?"

At this point, Jake realized there was quite a knowledge-gap when it came to divine stuff. Thinking back, he never mentioned anything about gods to her before, and without meeting one herself, it was quite natural she didn't know about it.

He reckoned many people had met factions or people associated with gods... but Haven only had citizens from limited areas. Abby only recruited people from her own tutorial, Neil and friends coming from that same one, and Miranda's tutorial didn't have any divine involvement as far as he could tell. At least not on the surface.

The same was true for the fort. Jake had yet to hear anything about gods from them, and clearly, Phillip wasn't blessed by any. I guess it's time to bring her up to speed.

Jake could see many issues arise in the future if Miranda remained ignorant about the fact that a bunch of bored gods likely fucked around behind the curtain and had many followers on Earth doing their bidding.

"So... here's the deal..."

The entire night was spent with Jake giving her a bunch of exposition that would make everyone complain if written in a novel and dumped all at once. He didn't really bother hiding anything, which got many confused looks and questions when he said that he was blessed by a god but wasn't really a follower of a god. He didn't give any too personal details, just saying that he was on good terms with a few gods, which in itself was enough to screw over her understanding of divinity.

"Gods are just people who got extremely strong. Some are assholes, some are nice. Well, from what I gathered, most tend to be arrogant asshats towards mortals, but I guess they did kinda earn it. I got lucky with the ones I met, I guess," Jake said, shrugging.

That was just his understanding of gods... and he had a feeling he wasn't wrong, even if his interpretation was a bit simplified. Villy honestly was just a dude - an extremely strong and immortal dude, but still a dude. And as Villy had said: one doesn't become a god without at least having a bit of arrogance. The audacity to believe that you of all people can achieve godhood was just inherent to divinity.

"I... this changes a lot... the ideological differences between gods will trickle down to their followers and inadvertently lead to conflict... if we keep recruiting as we are now, there will without a doubt come parties with opposing religious views... wait, what does the god you follow, eh, I mean befriended... what is this god's faith?" Miranda asked, after sitting in contemplation for a while, taking it all in.

She didn't believe that Jake was lying for even a second. He had no reason to. So either he was some delusional fanatic himself, or he was actually telling the truth. And while she did think he was pretty weird, she also saw him as relatively sane.

"Eh... not much? He said faith isn't really a big thing for him... but he does have an Order..." Jake answered. Had Villy told him what his whole Order was about? Jake didn't remember...

Miranda, sensing Jake was unsure, swiftly moved on with the conversation. "Back to the whole temple-construction business. Should we allow it then? What if others come and ask for the same?"

"Well, from what you said, the temple sounds more than a little... gaudy... and not really fitting in," Jake said. She had described the monstrosity of ore and stone that the man wanted. Not really something going well with the whole forestry aesthetic they currently had.

“Hank doesn’t like the idea either and is adamant about not making it. Personally, I am also against it, but it could be dangerous if we offend some divine being with a slew of followers,” Miranda said, with a bit of hesitation. She could already imagine a crusade against their small city for blasphemy...

“Have someone bring him here,” Jake said, after thinking a bit. “I’ll handle this one myself.”

Miranda made a big smile as she nodded. They talked for a few more minutes before she went to get that Kenneth fellow.

Jake just leaned back in his chair as he spoke out loud: “Hey Villy... any input? I know you said you aren’t much into faith, but since I have this whole city-thing going anyway, I would be fine with making a church or something. Or at least a statue... just don’t expect any sermons.”

He waited for a few moments, and just when he questioned if he caught the god at a bad time, he got a response:

“Up to you, mate. I told you, I didn’t give you the blessing expecting anything in return. A statue or a church or whatever on your tiny planet won’t help me much at all. Even if you conquered your entire planet, a few billion believers would just be a drop in the bucket. So unless you can see it benefitting yourself, don’t bother.

“But as for dealing with other gods wanting to encroach on your territory... just tell them to fuck off. If their believers get annoying, kill them. If they insist, wipe them out. Not like they can bring outside help to your universe, and when you leave your universe or yours is fully integrated, no one will give a flying fuck about you killing a few weaklings. And if the god they follow raises an issue, well, I’ll enjoy handling that one on my end.

“In conclusion... do what you want. You were asked about my faith or beliefs earlier... those are my beliefs. Might makes right, and power gives freedom. I like people who try, and I despise those who don't. I hate those who surrender to fate, and I give a big thumbs-up to those that tell fate to go fuck itself. Actually, you are quite a good Chosen now that I think about it. Oh, and if you really want to do something religious for me, I am still open to mass ritual sacrifice. I could even provide you with the schematics for this formation to sacrifice an entire planet; it actually isn't tha-

“Anyway, thanks for the answer, Villy. Talk to ya later,” Jake quickly interrupted the god with a snicker before turning a bit more serious. “But seriously... if you ever need anything, just ask. I feel like I owe you a lot already.”

“You owe me nothing; at least I am not keeping a score. But I'll keep it in mind. Cya around, and good luck with that glorious Indigo Fungus!”

“See you around, mate. Good luck conquering the multiverse or whatever you're up to,” Jake answered with a sincere smile. Soon after, he felt the presence of the Malefic Viper fade, and everything returned to normal.

Jake did feel like their friendship was quite one-sided... Jake hadn't done anything for the Viper, really. Besides talking to him a bit when they first met, it was just Villy doing him favors over and over again. It felt like having that one friend that always brought you out to do cool shit and gave you the best presents, but you could never figure out what to do for them.

Honestly, I am just too weak to be of any help, Jake admonished himself. He didn't feel like he was slow. The gap was just absolutely enormous, to begin with. But it wasn't like he could do anything but soldier on. Actually, the divine messages have gotten longer and way clearer. Probably something to do with the blessing upgrading or something like that.

He didn't need to sit there in his own thoughts much longer before he felt Miranda and a man enter the valley. Jake took the little bird off his head and put her on a pillow on the table. She gave a small chirp to complain but otherwise stayed put.

Jake exited the lodge and saw the one who had entered with Miranda. The man looked to be in his late fifties to early sixties, with finely combed hair and a big fake-looking smile on his lips. He instantly rubbed Jake the wrong way, but he didn't let it show. Mainly because of the mask that now covered his face.

The first to speak wasn't Miranda or Jake, but the newcomer as he loudly exclaimed: "Honored City Owner, I am delighted that we could finally meet. I shall not waste your precious time but come with an offer. I represent a congregation of more than four hundred people, and we would be more than happy to welcome the City Owner if he would--"

Jake just listened to the guy babbling for a dozen more seconds before he raised his hand, indicating for him to stop. Kenneth reminded Jake of a discount-Jacob without any of the charisma. He was closer to some traveling salesman than a priest or preacher... and he had the audacity to try and openly recruit Jake to join his faith too. It was honestly laughable.

Seeing Jake raise his hand, the man paused briefly before asking: "Pardon, did I do anything to offend?"

"Besides using an offensively pathetic mental skill to try and sway me while being insufferably annoying... no, not really," Jake answered, instantly seeing the man pale a bit. "As for your whole preaching shtick... who is the one that blessed you?"

"It is no shtick, I hones--"

"Name. Of. God."

"... I am a follower of Terauasniom, the great shaper, he who forms the mountains and raises the-" Kenneth began before Jake cut him off again.

"So, Tera-something. Tell your god that he can take his shitty temple elsewhere. I don't give a shit what you practice in your own time, but don't go around preaching like a lunatic. You can find somewhere else to do that. This is my territory, not that Tera-something's."

"It is Terauasniom, and I don't think you comprehend the situation. Terauasniom has tasked me with bringing this Pylon under his great name and-" Kenneth began again, before once more getting cut off.

"Oh, I comprehend perfectly. I just don't care. This is my city, not yours, and definitely not Tera-something's. I don't give a shit about your god, and I don't give a shit about any task he has given you," Jake said, honestly getting annoyed.

Kenneth just stood open-mouthed for a bit, not saying anything as Jake let his aura press down on him before finishing with.

"And if your god has any complaints, he should bring it up with me directly. And if you have any complaints, then you and your followers can just fuck right off. I don't need you, and I most certainly don't need some shitty god that isn't even in-the-know about whose Pylon he wants to claim."

The preacher only managed to stammer out a few more words; it sounded a lot like apologies, but not to Jake but to his god for Jake's blasphemy. Honestly, he couldn't help but consider giving the guy an arrow in the knee at that moment. He didn't, mainly because it would make the man leave his valley slower and get blood all over the grass.

When he was gone, Miranda turned to him with a hint of worry. "This is going to be tough dealing with..."

"No, it won't. I gave the guy a simple choice. He can choose to leave now, get in line, or he can become an example of what happens to those that don't listen to the soft approach," Jake said, making his face visible again.

"I doubt he will just leave or give up..."

"Then throw him out. And if he refuses to leave, we can just remove him. One way or another."

Jake didn't hear anything else about Kenneth Copefield after that, besides Miranda coming by to tell Jake that the man left with his followers. Jake couldn't help but think he would likely become an issue in the future... but he just couldn't bring himself to care. He didn't fear the man, and he most certainly didn't fear his god.

He just returned to his alchemy and bird-sitting. A day after the preacher left, the Malefic Viper contacted him unprompted with quite a peculiar question, not from the Viper himself, but some of his followers. Jake just agreed to it... he honestly found it a bit weird that they even asked for permission, but he was kind of their boss's friend, so it made sense. Still a bit strange, mainly because of who was asking. They were gods, after all.

Meanwhile, Miranda was working hard on finally getting her class to 25 and evolving it...

Miranda fired off another mana bolt that easily tore into the beast, causing significant damage. She kept barraging it by throwing bolt after bolt until it finally died. It was honestly too easy... with her profession so high, killing these beasts only around level 35 was just simple. Simple but rewarding when it came to class-experience.

Honestly, it was almost criminal that she hadn't gotten it done before. It had taken less than two hours for her to gain the last three levels she needed, and she finally got the prompt with an evolution. She quickly began heading back to Haven before evolving, Neil and his party in tow. They had functioned as bodyguards to make sure nothing happened and hadn't needed to do anything.

But just as she entered the office and was about to begin choosing her class... she got another message.

The Ladies of the Verdant Lagoon have invited you to their realm. Accept?

Miranda stared at it for a bit, unsure what it was about. She then remembered Jake talking about how gods had realms and how gods sometimes blessed mortals. He had also put a lot of emphasis on how accepting blessings was entirely optional.

She had to be honest... she was curious. Jake had told her so many things that she found unbelievable. She just couldn't stop herself from accepting the prompt as her vision shifted.

"See, I told you she would accept," one of the women said confidently to the other.

"No, you guessed she would accept. And no one disagreed with you either," the second woman said with a sigh.

"Hm, I think we should address the mortal soon?" the third interjected, finally turning their attention to Miranda, who had just appeared there.

For Miranda, she suddenly found herself in what looked like a small island in the middle of a massive swamp. At the same time, she felt pressure bear down on her, unlike anything she had ever felt before. She thought the aura of a D-grade was bad... but this was on an entirely different level.

She failed to hold herself back from falling to her knees. The worst part was... the figures in front of her clearly weren't trying to make her submit. Their mere existences alone were enough to make every fiber of her being want to submit.

But just as the feeling became overwhelming, the pressure suddenly amplified manifold as another presence appeared... before she felt something even worse. She felt her entire existence was being thoroughly searched in both body and soul. As quickly as the presence had come, it disappeared again, leaving Miranda shaking.

"Relax, child," one of the women said as she teleported over and placed a hand on Miranda's shoulder. She instantly felt the pressure on her lessen, and she felt like she could finally breathe again.

"...W... what is this? What was that?" Miranda managed to stammer out. Were these gods? What was that scary presence before... it made her feel like her mind was crumpling just by feeling its gaze upon her... what kind of monster could do that...

The first woman proudly introduced them, “We are the Ladies of the Verdant Lagoon, and that presence before was our magnificent Lord, the Malefic Viper.”

The last part was said with stars in her eyes, as her cheeks even reddened a little. “As for what this is, well, we thought that if our Lord has selected your Lord as his Chosen, doesn’t it only make sense that we also bless you so you can be of better use to him?”

“What?” Miranda asked, still confused.

“Oh, but you won’t get a True Blessing. Can only have one of those, and if you died too soon, it would suck for us. You still get the second best, so it isn’t all bad... what do you say?” the third sister butted in with a bright smile, making Miranda only more confused...

What the hell kind of religion is this?