

Hunter 261

Chapter 261: Introspection & Self-Control

When Jake had asked if the hawk called Sylphie could join them, Miranda had naturally just agreed. Why would she not? It looked cute, and it could sit and listen in when they talked. However... she hadn't expected it to also eat with them. Alright, even if it would eat with them, then it would just get some meat or something and sit off to the side. That would make sense to her. The current situation didn't.

Jake cut off a slice of meat and ate it, having nice table manners. Miranda did the same, as she used her cutlery. The hawk too.

A third plate was at the table, and in front of it, a hawk sat on its butt. The cutlery was glowing green as it imitated her and Jake, cutting off small slices of meat and bringing them to its open beak. The hawk even made chewing movements, despite Miranda being absolutely certain birds didn't need to chew food.

Well, by now, Miranda should really just call the hawk 'she'... Jake talked to her like a person, and the hawk did act remarkably human. Miranda just had difficulty wrapping her mind around an animal being as smart as a person.

Besides the presence of the small hawk acting weird, everything was relatively normal. They talked about quite a few things, one of which was classes.

"I still find the concept of witchcraft interesting. I wonder how it allows you to attack through marking a target... I see possibilities there," Jake had muttered in between bites after Miranda had explained some more details about her current class.

She still hadn't evolved her class yet at level 100, so she wanted some advice. Jake's advice ended up boiling down to "pick what you like the most, just go with your gut," which wasn't the most useful.

Sylphie had just made a screech, which Jake had interpreted as her agreeing. How the hell he got that from a screech, she didn't know. Miranda was 50-50 on him just fucking with her, but the hawk didn't protest either, and clearly, she understood their speech to some extent. At least Sylphie could pass the salt when asked...

"With the Fort expanding, it won't be long before we reach six digits," Miranda said proudly, talking about citizens. "After the Pylon's influence encompassed the Fort, the vast majority of the people there automatically became recognized as citizens."

"I've been wondering, what are the benefits of more citizens? Does it make you level faster?" Jake asked.

"Only partly. It appears to be based on how much work I do as a City Lord. In the end, I only have that much time and energy to work, and as we expand, help becomes required. From what I know, Sanctdomo has an entire government structure set up by now, with the Augur only working as the leader of a cabinet of leaders. It's a far more efficient system and recognized as a correct path, but that doesn't make it more correct than being a city lord leading a smaller city more intimately," Miranda explained, adding. "The levels of the citizens only appear to have an impact on growth."

She left out one thing, though... she also got levels by engaging with Jake. A part of the reason she wanted these meetings with him was that she nearly always got a level during them. Clearly, the system believed her interactions with Jake to be a crucial path of her role as City Lord. Based on her new profession, that had only become more important.

“Interesting... I guess it makes sense. It’s like leveling through killing. Singular, powerful citizens under your employ will be viewed as equally valuable to dozens of weaker individuals, I reckon,” Jake commented, nodding as if deep in thought.

“I’m not quite sure it’s that simple. It depends on how much work I have to do. It’s about what issues I resolve or prevent. Or when I make good diplomatic decisions or create valuable relations with someone important. Even appointing employees who do a good job rewards me. Me dealing with a level 40 troublemaker will reward me more than a D-grade who just sticks to himself and doesn’t bother anyone,” Miranda explained. Leaving out that according to the system, Jake was likely the largest potential source of trouble for Haven. Or perhaps just the most important element to handle.

“That sounds complicated... I’ll just stick to putting arrows in things,” Jake joked, making Miranda giggle a bit. Jake did seem a bit different today. More confident. A bit awkward as usual to begin with, but the dungeon and time away seemed to have done him good.

“You do that; then I’ll handle all those issues you can’t just fix with an arrow,” she answered with a smile.

“There is no issue that cannot be solved with oil, duct tape, and arrows,” Jake stated as if it was a matter of fact.

Miranda’s smile only deepened as she shook her head. As much as she hated to admit it... Jake honestly could fix most issues with an arrow or at least the threat of an arrow. And those he couldn’t... it was her responsibility to try and make sure those issues never even reached him.

“I’ll drink to that,” Miranda agreed as she lifted her glass. Jake mirrored her movement, lifting his too.

“Cheers!” both Jake and Miranda said.

“Reee!” Sylphie joined in as she also lifted her glass. Naturally not with wine in. Jake had made it very clear Sylphie was still too young to drink alcohol... no matter how nonsensical that statement was. She was a magical creature that in no way could get drunk from regular alcohol. Also, what did her age have to do with being able to drink as a goddamn bird? Birds were never meant to drink to begin with, as far as she knew. It was one of those things that she had just given up asking about. She had learned her lesson long ago, and yet Jake kept surprising her with his incomprehensible logic of-

‘DING!’ Profession: [Mistress of Haven] has reached level 101 - Stat points allocated, +59 free points*

Miranda got the notification and stopped her train of thought, and she just took a large gulp of her wine. Yeah, this is normal.

Like that, the dinner between two humans and a hawk continued.

To Jake, this evening was a great display of him keeping it cool and casual. At least it was to begin with. After half an hour or so, he kind of just got in the groove of things, and everything returned to how it usually was.

While they sat there, he had a lot of time to reflect. The concept of him being afraid of the opposite sex was honestly ludicrous the more he thought about it. But he understood why he had been.

For nearly his entire life, Jake hadn't been a very emotional person. He never wore his emotions on his sleeves but preferred to keep them bottled up and be alone. Granted, he wasn't the best at hiding them either, which led to many awkward situations.

He had never pursued anyone himself. Yet, he never had any resistance either when he was pursued. He had his first girlfriend back when he was a teenager, and that only lasted for a few months as Jake was "boring." Which was probably very accurate. He was boring... and he was bored.

Honestly, before the tutorial began, he couldn't remember the last time he truly had fun. Sure, he had enjoyable times, but if he was genuine with himself, then the last half a year or so were the best in living memory. Of course, there had been hard times and difficulties, but all in all, everything had finally become... interesting.

The Minotaur Mindchief had wandered through his memories. Jake had wandered with it and experienced the mundanity that had been his life. Everything was black and white. Monotone. There was no color, nothing that truly interested him or made him happy. He now realized the reason for that had been simple... it was his own doing.

His bloodline had always been with him. It had awakened on the first day of the tutorial... but that wasn't the first time it had become fully active. His mom and dad had told him he was such a wild child. He was quiet as a baby, but when he became a toddler, he always had to push the limits. Climb trees, get in fights, and all that.

It was him pushing himself. Challenging himself. All of that was fine and dandy... until Caleb was born. Caleb was afraid of Jake. As his brother, Jake had a natural sense of competition with his little brother, and without being aware, he had utterly tried to suppress Caleb with his presence back then. It was childish and stupid, and all it led to was Caleb always crying. Always afraid.

Yet Jake also wanted to protect his brother - because while there was a rivalry, there was also a sense of family. So, in the end, Jake had begun subconsciously suppressing his bloodline. Suppressing his emotions and his real self. Perhaps his supernatural intuition had also made him aware even back then: this was not the world for the Primal Hunter. The bloodline was more trouble than good.

Until the tutorial, that is. When it awakened again.

This related back to his inability to interact with women he found attractive. Because it could lead to emotions. Emotions would lead to interest. Interest would lead to disappointment. Disappointment would lead to failure. And finally, failure could lead to anger.

Jake had never broken up with anyone. Every time they broke up with him. Even Madeline had agreed that the honeymoon phase was amazing until Jake began getting boring. Most relationships had been duds from the start. Lasting only a few months tops. Only Madeline from university had lasted over a year, and she was the first person Jake took a genuine interest in even after the first few months.

But... being emotional was still not something he could really do. It had led to her disappointment in the end. He didn't know how to act. Jake had to admit that most relationships were just ones of convenience. Whenever a woman or girl came onto him, he had no real reasons not to engage. So the first time he was with one he actually cared about, and she betrayed him, he did what he had to do to protect himself.

This was why he had been actively avoiding potentially similar situations since back in university. It was just easier. If he didn't let anyone in, they couldn't hurt him. It was a simple solution, and Jake truthfully never had any need for romantic companionship.

Now that his bloodline was fully awakened, everything wasn't gray and dull anymore. He also noted how his attraction to Caroline faded nearly instantly. She just wasn't interesting anymore. In the end, he only ever found her attractive... but that was that.

It was just lust. A purely instinctual thing that Jake had learned to control a lot better than most, he reckoned. Even with a suppressed bloodline, he had still had above average instincts. But just because he was attracted to someone didn't mean it would lead to something. He had gone through puberty with improved instincts without any incidents. That should be proof enough.

A part of him was fully aware that if Jake stopped controlling himself, he would turn into someone he didn't want to be. Some people didn't restrain or control themselves in this new world, and that led to fucked up individuals. It led to people like Donald. Jake would rather put a dagger through his own throat than end up like that fucker just because he couldn't keep his dick in his pants.

He was strong now. If he had walked in on Andy and Madeline as he was now, he would likely have broken Andy's nose and told Madeline to fuck off without breaking down. He wouldn't wallow in self-pity for years and drown himself in work. It had been the best choice back then—both for himself, Madeline, and Andy.

Because Jake did feel something when he walked in on them back then. Rage. Before the system, that was likely the time his bloodline was closest to reawakening. He wanted to get revenge back then when he saw them in that bed. The reason he just walked out was to control himself. Because if he had stayed... well, he would have killed both of them. No two ways about it. His only response back then was to avoid the situation. To hide and keep all his emotions bottled up. It was pathetic and cowardly, but that was how he had learned to handle life.

But it was all different now. Jake had grown a lot. At least, he thought so himself. Maybe the increased stats made memories more vivid and sped up brain functions and all that, but reflecting on himself as a person had become a lot 'easier,' if that made sense.

And right now, he was growing further as he managed to act completely normal with a woman he found attractive. If it had been Caroline back then, he couldn't do it. He would be awkward and be unable to think straight.

All of this isn't to say Jake liked Miranda. Well, he liked her, but he didn't like her. He was attracted to her, sure, but that wasn't the same. He had been attracted to Caroline too, and she turned out to be a shit-tier person. A guy finding a woman attractive was pretty damn normal, to begin with, and with evolutions making everyone into supermodels... yeah. If he couldn't act normal around women he found attractive; he soon wouldn't be able to be around anyone of the opposite sex.

He liked Miranda as a person and a colleague. Jake truthfully wasn't interested in a relationship. Not right now. He was still D-grade, and he had a long way ahead of him. A relationship would chain him down and create another weakness for him. He saw no reason to invite that into his life. Besides, he liked the dynamic he and Miranda had going on.

She was the brains of the operation, and he was the brawn. They were partners. Even if, for all intents and purposes, Jake was in the superior position. He held all the power. But he could handle it.

Jake was confident that he was a person who wouldn't find himself corrupted by power... because he had always been powerful. He had always suppressed himself. There were no two ways about it; Jake had been born superior to other humans. He had been forced to bury that superior aspect of himself to fit in and survive. Now, he just didn't need to do that as much anymore. But that didn't mean he didn't have the practice. But he could see others fall. Be corrupted by sudden power. For many more Donalds to be out there.

They would be wise not to visit Haven.

The man saw the city in the distance. It was an old medieval-looking building surrounded by houses. The man smiled as he had found his destination. He turned to his followers as he spoke:

“Looks like we’ve found Haven.”

He looked at one of the women with him as he gave her a pat on the head. “Good girl.”

She nodded and smiled. None of the three others with the man said anything either. They knew not to speak. For such was one of their rules.

The man took out his notebook, and a pen appeared in his hand. He turned to one of the pages and in it made a star. He heard the muffled groan of the woman who was in charge of scouting as she got her star. She had done well; it was only fair to reward her efforts.

“Now show your appreciation,” he said as he moved the cloth from her shoulder, revealing the star seared into her flesh and admiring his mark.

“Thank you, Sultan,” she said with a bowed head and a meek voice.

“You’re welcome,” Sultan said his smile widening. “Now, let us go forth. To Haven.”

The five moved towards what they thought was Haven.

Their mode of transportation was a nearly ten-meter long ship that levitated a few meters above the ground. One lined with gold and jewels.

Inside the ship, plenty of goods - on top of it, a man and four women.

All five of them D-grade.