

## Hunter 262

### Chapter 262: Sultan

"Based on current estimates, Haven should enter the Treasure Hunt with eight to ten D-grades. Neil and his party make five, then, of course, you, Phillip, and myself. I have no idea if Arnold will participate, and Phillip can't get a straight answer from him either. I guess even he doesn't know," Miranda said, giving Jake an overview of how many they planned on bringing to the Treasure Hunt.

There were a few other potential prospects, hence the eight to ten, but it was rocky at best. If they could bring the hawks, it would be great, but sadly the system didn't allow them to. Thinking about it, if beasts could enter, humanity would just be screwed. Jake was certain beasts existed within the forest that he couldn't handle. And even if he could, he doubted there were more than a dozen on Earth who stood a chance. Something like the Prima could roll over most of Earth's "elites."

"Arnold isn't simple at all. I reckon all those drones aren't for show, and he has quite a few tricks up his sleeves. The dude is a damn solid craftsman, and he isn't afraid of taking risks. He even made my new gloves for the most part and is working on my sword," Jake explained.

"Yeah, he's most certainly... wait a second," Miranda said as she put up a finger. Her frown grew for every passing second until she looked back at Jake.

"The Fort just had visitors. A group of five D-grades. Lillian sent a message, and they may need assistance," she explained. "There aren't any issues yet, and while Neil and Arnold are there, Phillip is not feeling too safe about it. They haven't engaged yet, and they are stopped in some vehicle outside of the city. Phillip is approaching."

Jake frowned. He had just come from the Fort, and now they were visited by a bunch of D-grades. "Well, let's go," he said as he got up. Sylphie also got up with them, and Jake saw no reason against allowing her to come along. Besides, he doubted he could stop her from just following them in secret.

Outside the Fort, a levitating ship sat docked as a man on the deck was drinking tea. The four women also stood tentatively off to the side as they waited. Finally, a person came to the ship not long after and was invited up.

It was Phillip, and to be perfectly honest, he hated his job at that moment. He was sweating a bit at the auras of five goddamn D-grades. It was worse than when he went to visit Arnold and just damn stressful to deal with them as he didn't know their purpose. For all he knew, they could be there to kill him and claim the city. At least he had already gotten the message that Lord Thayne and Miranda were on their way. So all he needed to do was buy time and hopefully not piss off whoever was on the ship.

Getting up on the ship, he truly saw how lavish it was. The entire ship was wooden with jeweled decorations. In the middle sat the man Phillip assumed to be the owner of the ship. He was a man who appeared to be in his late thirties to late forties and in what looked like a nice gray tuxedo from before the system. The man looked at Phillip as he got up on the deck and opened his arms in welcome.

"Come, join me at the table. Oh, and do tell me, this is Haven, is it not?"

His tone was friendly and welcoming. He turned to one of the women to the side: "If you would, dear."

She moved over and prepared a cup of tea as Phillip took a seat. He knew he was utterly outmatched, so it was better to just play nice. It was a bit weird to have a D-grade pour tea for him, though.

"Thank you," the man said as he nodded to her again. She took a step back, giving them some space. Yet, she was still close enough to move in if anything happened. Phillip had a hard time getting a read on the situation. It was very clear that the man was in charge, though.

"I guess this is technically Haven," Phillip answered. "I'm Phillip, the man who tends to take care of this part of the settlement. May I know your name and your purpose for coming?"

The man looked at Phillip, and he felt a shiver run down his back.

"I go by Sultan. I am a merchant, and I have come here not to speak with you but the leader of Haven," the man named Sultan answered.

"So you're here just t-"

"Phillip, please," Sultan answered, holding up his hand. "Drink your tea and wait with me. The important details are for Mr. Thayne and me to discuss. He is coming here, no doubt? I sense your impatience. There is no need; I do not come to cause trouble."

Phillip opened his mouth but decided not to say anything. Instead, he just sat back and tried to relax. To be polite, he even took a sip of tea.

He hated to admit that it was exquisite.

Floating ship. Now that was fancy.

Jake got a brief briefing from Miranda about what was going on and headed off first by himself. Miranda and Sylphie would follow, but they were quite a bit slower than him. For the record, Sylphie was faster than Miranda but was still slow compared to someone like Jake or Hawkie. Over long distances, Jake would leave even Hawkie in the dust due to One Step Mile.

When he got close, he once more took to the air to see where his goal was. It didn't take long as there was already beginning to be a lot of intrigue around the area. Jake even saw a few drones checking it out. The ship wasn't exactly small either, so spotting it wasn't difficult.

He began flying over, and halfway he was noticed. A woman on the deck looked in his direction and made the man who was sipping tea with Phillip aware they had a visitor. A dozen seconds later, Jake landed.

"Welcome," the man said with a bow as he stood up. "You must be the Lord of Haven. Lord Thayne, correct?"

"Sure. Who're you, and who are they?" Jake answered back as he walked towards the man, also motioning towards the man's companions. He felt the four women tense up, but the man threw them all a glance, making them back down. Jake also took this chance to identify all of them as he waited for the man to respond.

[Human – lvl 113]

"I am Sultan, a proud merchant, and these are my bodyguards of sorts. It's a long story," Sultan said with a smile as he waved it off.

Jake was a bit surprised at his level. 113 was not simple. Not at all. It likely meant that both his class and profession were up there. The four women, on the other hand, were a bit easier to get a grasp on.

[Human – lvl 101]

[Human – lvl 101]

[Human – lvl 100]

[Human – lvl 102]

All of them had only barely reached D-grade. Jake also got a distinct feeling none of them had achieved the Perfect Evolution. Meanwhile, he was absolutely certain Sultan had.

“A merchant, eh? So you’re here to peddle your stuff? Quite the unnecessary entrance for that,” Jake pointed out, shaking his head.

“Ah, quite the contrary. Now, all know that Sultan is here. Do you not see the crowd gather? The fascination of the masses? Alas, I am not here for them, but you,” Sultan stated, walked closer to Jake.

“Why?” Jake just asked, looking down at the man who met his gaze. They stared into each other’s eyes before Sultan looked away as he spoke.

“Truly, I have not gone wrong... I come to offer my services to you. I seek trade as much as I seek valuable relations. And who is more valuable than you,” he said, turning back to Jake. “A Primordial’s Chosen. Progenitor. Possibly the strongest man on Earth. For someone like me, who seeks out all of that which has value, tell me, what is more valuable than you?”

Jake stared at the man. He frowned before saying: “Phillip. Get out of here.”

Phillip looked confused at everything that was happening but didn’t have to be asked twice to leave. He had just been sitting there awkwardly from the beginning, and now he happily jumped down from the ship with a brief nod.

Sultan, without any prompt, waved his hand as a disc of metal appeared in his hand. He poured some mana in, and a bubble appeared around the entire ship, isolating Jake, Sultan, and the four women inside. Jake felt that it was a one-way barrier. As in, he could leave, but nobody could enter - a basic privacy barrier.

“So I’m right,” Sultan said, a huge smile on his lips.

That is when Jake realized. The man didn’t actually know about Jake. At least he didn’t know it was truly him. But the reaction to his question confirmed it to Sultan, making Jake frown. He wanted to ask how he knew, but Sultan answered without being asked.

“Like many others, I have been granted divine patronage. The gods chat, you know? They are aware that the Malefic Viper has returned, and there are even rumors he has a Chosen. One who is a Progenitor and from the newly integrated universe. One who is even on a planet with an Augur blessed by the Holy Mother. This naturally makes many wonder if some conflict could potentially arise from that. It just took putting two and two together from there,” Sultan explained casually.

“Good for you,” Jake said. He didn’t really care that he knew. It wasn’t some grand secret that he was blessed or a Progenitor. It really shouldn’t be that hard to put things together. There was one thing bothering him, though.

“I didn’t see you at the World Congress.”

“Because I didn’t attend. I was preoccupied at the time. Besides, I prefer to stay unbound. Ah, but that doesn’t mean I am not open to a partnership. I have many things to offer you, and I am sure you have plenty to offer me too,” Sultan said as he went over to the table and sat down, adding: “Please. Join me for tea.”

The man waved at one of the women, and she went into the small cabin of the ship. To prepare a new pot of tea, Jake reckoned. He saw no reason not to join him as his dinner had been interrupted anyway.

“You call yourself a merchant. What wares do you sell?” Jake asked as he sat down.

“Whatever valuables I come across. Herbs, ores, weapons, armor, whatever I believe I can make a substantial profit on, I will peddle. Please, you are more than welcome to browse later on. I am sure there are things that may interest you,” Sultan answered.

"I guess I'll see," Jake said, before just asking a question many likely wouldn't answer: "How did you reach your current level so fast? D-grades aren't that common yet, and you waltz in here with a party of five."

"A lack of rest and a willingness to do what I deem necessary. I got a good start as I went through the usual cycle. Lucky challenge dungeon in the tutorial got me a powerful class while my own old-world experience proved useful when it came to my profession," Sultan explained patiently.

As he finished, the door to the cabin opened again, and a woman walked out with a tray. It had two teapots on it and two new cups. Jake instantly felt something was off with the teapots. He felt the herbs within, but in one of them, he also felt something else. Poison. Jake frowned, but before he could say anything, Sultan addressed it.

"Please do not think me a moron. To attempt to poison the Chosen of the Malefic Viper sounds like the stupidest and most pointless thing one can do. I had my dear bodyguard here add some poison to it as I know those of your particular brand of alchemy tend to enjoy that. You are an alchemist, right? I saw the potions on the System Store and determined they had to be from an alchemist way ahead of the curve," Sultan said with a small laugh.

That... was honestly reasonable. Palate wasn't some grand secret but likely the most famous skill related to the Malefic Viper.

The woman poured from the poisoned pot into Jake's glass and took the other teapot to pour into the other new cup. But Sultan stopped her.

"No, dear, just use my current cup. That one is for you," he said with a kind smile, referring to the second clean cup.



For a moment, Jake thought it was just a nice gesture to have her join them, but he saw her face pale a little, even if her facial expression barely changed. After she was done pouring Sultan's tea, he motioned for her to pour for herself too – from the poisoned pot.

With slight hesitation, but no complaints, she did it. Jake wondered what it was about... did she have some immunity skill too? He was under the impressions skills like Palate were rare...

"Now, let us drink," Sultan said as he raised his cup. Jake did the same and took a sip. Damn. The tea was seriously delicious, and the poison within was also interesting. It was undetectable to anyone but someone like him with a skill specifically to sense it, and it was damn potent. About as potent as his best common-rarity poisons even. It did come with the requirement of the target having to consume it without resisting for the effect of the poison to take hold and activate. This type, compared to his poisons, was far more suited for... assassination. Wait.

The woman who had consumed her entire cup of tea in one gulp began sweating and shaking. Jake looked over to see her collapse to one knee as she began coughing out blood and dark veins appeared on her face. Tears of blood began dripping out of her eyes as she heaved for breath and appeared to be in immense pain.

What the fuck is going on? Jake very reasonably asked himself.

"Don't worry, it won't kill her, just hurt her a little," Sultan explained nonchalantly, looking over at Jake. "I would prefer to talk about the upcoming Treasure Hunt and about me possibly working with someone to access your System Store, but I reckon you have questions?"

"What's up with that?" Jake asked, referring to the woman. He was seriously considering if he should hand her a healing potion... but... she had willingly consumed the poison?

"As I said, a long story. But I shall give a bit of background," Sultan said with a bit of resignation as he began his lengthy explanation. "She went by Gabi and was a talented young alchemist and healer. A nature healer, even. She was powerful for her level and excelled in all areas; thus, her level skyrocketed. Gabi went to Sanctdomo after the tutorials, and there she signed up at their party-finding offices and found comrades. She did great and kept progressing, yet she had a peculiar issue. Her parties kept dying. Odd coincidence, was it not? So thought others. She was found to slowly poison her party members and then kill them when they got too weak. Her class and profession ended up both revolving around this. She thought herself clever but did not know she was already under suspicion. In the end, she was found out and put in prison in Sanctdomo. But... Gabi was too valuable. Sanctdomo does not like killing those who have potential; she was only punished because she caused more harm than good. She was made to simply work as an alchemist in perpetuity to create potions. That is when I came along and offered a deal. I needed another bodyguard, and they needed rid of her. So, they sold her as a prisoner of war of sorts. And now... now she serves me and is bound to my will till the day she deserves freedom again."

Jake sat there taking it in, not entirely sure if the man was spewing bullshit or telling the truth. There was one part of it he was rather sure about, though.

"So, she's a slave?" Jake asked curtly.

"Not the word I would use, but effectively, yes. That is her punishment for her crimes. It was either death or servitude, and she wanted to live. I also believe she has more worth alive than dead," Sultan answered.

"And the three others?"

"All have similar stories, some worse than others. They are the scum of this new world who deserve no mercy," Sultan stated, his demeanor still unchanged.

“And they all just happen to be women?” Jake asked, pointing out the obvious.

“Well, yes. Ah, but don’t misunderstand, that is not a fetish of mine. I prefer a willing participant. I am a merchant; I could just pay for a professional in any of the larger cities if that is what I was after. No, I keep them around solely for my own sense of vanity and childish fantasies while naturally also needing powerful bodyguards,” Sultan said without a trace of shame.

“The torture?”

“Ah, that one is easy. I am also a narcissistic sadist who enjoys inflicting suffering upon those I believe deserve it, and I find it incredibly entertaining and ironic to torture them in similar ways to their crimes,” the merchant answered with a big laugh before turning serious. “There is no reason to pity those undeserving of mercy.”

The woman named Gabi was still cramped over on the floor, moaning in pain and coughing out blood throughout this entire conversation - the other three women just looking down at the deck.