

Hunter 264

Chapter 264: Executive Decision

Miranda had been working at high speeds as she made her way towards the Fort and while waiting outside. Lillian fed her information as she traveled with the hawk, and she and Lillian managed to put two and two together after Phillip came back and told them the merchant's name was Sultan. He was one of the people they had become aware of already, as he had made quite the name for himself in some of the surrounding cities.

A ruthless man with a massive ego, but one incredibly good at his job. He had bought and sold things in Sanctdomo and two of the other cities the Holy Church controlled and many other settlements. Some Pylon cities, some not. The ship he traveled on was quite speedy, explaining how he could get around so much.

No one could really do much to him either. Sultan himself was powerful, and he had two slaves already near D-grade the last time he went to Sanctdomo. In Sanctdomo, he had 'acquired two more who were swiftly approaching D-grade. A woman who had poisoned her former party members and was apprehended after one of the victims ended up being a close friend of a council member. Miranda guessed that is when the leadership of Sanctdomo decided she was too much trouble.

The second woman was even worse. She was a pathfinder – an evolution of archer – specializing in some odd magic she had acquired from the tutorial store. She imprinted magical sigils on people and objects and used them to track things. It was an ability a lot like what Miranda herself could do with the Verdant Mark, except this woman could see through the eyes of the people she marked.

And what did she do with this? Well, she scouted. She was a premier scout of Sanctdomo for a while and used her sigils liberally. No one questioned them as they seemed so harmless. They spread to many people, and soon she had hundreds of them. Finally, she became so good at the skill she got a substantial upgrade to it ... which is when she began becoming an issue.

Her mark allowed her to always see. Now even without the consent or the other knowing. She became addicted to the knowledge and the feeling of control. She lived the lives of others, and especially one man she became infatuated with. She had been in a party with him, and they had gotten along great. All was well until they returned... and she learned he had a wife and kids.

That day she killed his family so he could be with her instead. But when she tried to get with him, he wasn't the same anymore. He wasn't his same bubbly self... so she got bored and switched.

Nine more families within the span of a month. Six wives, three girlfriends, fifteen children. She had a type, and that type was the man who already had everything. When she began stalking her tenth victim, she was captured. After her capture, they did some digging and found out she had been locked up before the system as a serial stalker that had turned violent at times. The system had only made her worse as now she could truly express herself.

As fucked up as it was, the month she had spent stalking men had given her more levels than anything before. As a pathfinder, she gained massive amounts of experience from constantly avoiding detection and suspicion and stalking the men without them even knowing. She often also went without looking through their eyes – she liked to watch them sleep. Of course, the carefully prepared killings themselves gave quite the experience boost too.

These two women were monsters, yet Sanctdomo wanted to use them. So they had them imprisoned to continue serving the greater good through the use of their professions, but when they approached D-grade, Sanctdomo had an issue. They had no way to keep them trapped after the evolution. No D-grade with the skill-set required to enslave them either.

That is when Sultan came along and offered to take them off their hands. The current warden at the time, who was in charge of keeping them from committing more crimes, agreed with permission from his higher-ups after Sultan paid a hefty sum.

This was all the research Miranda had time to do before Jake 'invited' them in. It was about time too. The majority of the time had been spent juggling the influx of information from Lillian and an annoyed bird that wanted to break through the barrier right there and then.

"Mister Sultan, your reputation precedes you," she said with a smile as she entered. The man was an egomaniac, so stroking that ego would be wise. Miranda also noted that Jake hadn't killed him yet, but clearly, the 'negotiations' weren't exactly going well either. The sweat on Sultan's brow was visible, and the four slave women were tense.

If Jake were the scary bad cop, she would be the good cop. She had chosen to read Jake not killing the merchant outright as a sign he at least wanted to extract some benefits. Did she doubt for even a second that Jake could kill the five D-grades? No, not at all.

"Ah, Ms. Wells," Sultan said, seeming almost relieved at her entrance. She assumed it was because he was. He also threw a glance at Neil and Silas. Neil had been brought along because... well, he was there with Silas when Miranda asked to have him brought around. His lie-detecting skills would be useful. There wasn't any fear of them resisting the skill either, as that would just make the judgment even easier if they chose to do that.

While Miranda did have some trust in the information from Sanctdomo, she still chose to confirm it. A large part of her hoped that the women turned out to just be innocent and blasphemers of the Holy Church or something else silly like that. She doubted it, but at the same time, would verify.

"Silas and Neil, please take those four into the cabin and check their stories. Ladies, be aware that all it will do is make our decision here easy if you try anything. Mister Sultan, as the formal leader of Haven, I shall represent Lord Thayne as the liaison of Haven and try to reach a beneficial conclusion to this whole endeavor. But be aware that you have already broken the law as slavery is illegal in Haven, so I expect a proper response and recompense," Miranda said as she summoned a chair from her spatial storage and sat down. On second thought... she would just be the second bad cop.

Sultan looked a bit taken aback but chose to apologize right away as he waved off the four girls. "That must be my mistake; I was not aware it was outlawed and was not informed upon my arrival either."

The four girls followed Silas and Neil away. At least the man was reasonable enough not to argue. Jake staring at him the entire time sure didn't help his situation either. Miranda smiled as she responded to the veiled question.

"Naturally, you weren't aware. The law was just established a few minutes ago. We haven't needed it yet, and have chosen to have the law work retroactively," Miranda stated, not leaving much room for any counter-arguments. "Now, please state your full purpose for coming here. With proper cause, we may be able to reach an agreement and a solution that does not result in receiving the capital punishment the law dictates."

Sultan had made another major miscalculation. Miranda didn't like the guy at all either, and Jake had granted her the power to do whatever she wanted as the city lord, which included randomly creating laws. As long as he agreed with them, there wouldn't be an issue, and from her quick assessment, he seemed to be a-okay with outlawed slavery. Considering his hour-long rant on how fucked it was to enslave beasts during one of their dinners, she had assumed as much.

Miranda joined Jake in staring down Sultan as a new drop of sweat appeared on the man's forehead.

Jake gave Miranda a mental thumbs-up. He should have just waited for her from the start to have her deal with all this shit. It all seemed so damn complicated when it really shouldn't be. Killing all five of them would be the simple solution, but would it be the best one? He wasn't only making decisions for himself but Haven as a whole.

Now at least I'll have the law on my side. Also, I should really ask Miranda about what the laws of Haven are, Jake thought.

If he had met Sultan out in the open while traveling or something, Jake would probably just have ignored him or killed him if he became an issue. If Jake got confirmation that even one of the women was innocent, or even if Sultan had lied a little about their circumstances, Jake would kill him. If Miranda ended up concluding killing Sultan would be the best cause of action, Jake would kill him. Right now, he honestly didn't care either way until he was certain about things.

Let's say the women were as bad as Sultan claimed. Well, then they truly didn't deserve his pity. If he just went around killing anyone who did stuff he disagreed with, he would be busy killing people who ever thought putting canned cheese on anything was acceptable.

Didn't mean he didn't have lines people shouldn't cross. The torture part was just not okay, no matter how you spin it. That Jake would make sure that the four were taken away, freed or Sultan made to stop that shit was a given from the very start. Also, dependent on what the women really had done... it wasn't certain if he would respect their choice of slavery.

"I came to Haven for primarily four reasons. Firstly, to find a home base to operate out of. I am aware you are among the leaders in building a spatial network, and Haven will no doubt become a well-known city throughout the planet due to Lord Thayne's presence. Secondly, I will naturally join the Treasure Hunt, and I feel like I need an affiliation with a faction to do well there. I have made many enemies on my path already; I need some backing too. Thirdly, the benefits offered from a Pylon, including the System Store, are just too valuable to give up as a merchant. Fourth, I wish to simply do my work as a merchant here. Even if I am made to leave, I still hope to at least trade first. I do not doubt that Haven has many valuables to trade, just as I have many valuables to offer. To summarize, I want to work for and with Haven," Sultan answered, holding nothing back.

Jake didn't doubt for a second Sultan knew he was in some deep shit, pretty much surrounded by enemies on all sides. To be honest, Jake was surprised he wasn't just looking for an exit strategy. Did he still want to stay after just being threatened with capital punishment?

If he just left, that would also be a solution. Jake didn't care enough to hunt them down, and Sultan didn't strike him as the vengeful sort. He was a coward. There was no way he would risk his life for something as petty as revenge. The most he could do was attempt some economic damage, but Jake reckoned he was too cowardly to do even that.

"This is a horrible way to try and join a settlement," Miranda said, shaking her head.

"I very much realize that now. My antics don't fit in as well here as I had come to believe through my research. You have my genuine apology for that. As I offered prior, the four women can be given to you as a form of apology. However, I am curious... how has Haven managed to deal with criminals so far? As far as I know, dealing with prisoners has caused many issues and debates in most other settlements. Conventional prisons aren't exactly feasible anymore. Even Sanctdomo isn't able to contain someone at D-grade yet," Sultan answered.

"We don't have many of those issues. Currently, we only give out smaller punishments, and those that would result in incarceration result in exile or simply capital punishment. So perhaps we've been lucky that we haven't had that much crime. Worst were two cases of rape, and that one was an easy and swift death sentence as the guy tried to run," Miranda explained, waving it off. "Besides, how is that any of your business?"

Oh yeah, I remember that one. Some guy who got sniped when he tried to flee, Jake thought, having no sympathy. Of course, by old-world standards having capital punishments for most "serious" crimes would be excessive, but in this new world, it was just quick and efficient.

"I guess it isn't for me to snoop... I was simply curious if--"

“Ree!”

Sultan was interrupted at Sylphie screeching when she got annoyed; Jake stopped rubbing her feathers. He looked over at Jake, and Jake just stared back at him as he slowly scratched the bird that was now nuzzling up to his hand again. Neither spoke, and Jake fucking dared him to.

“A beautiful hawk... I am sorry if I disturbed it, an-“

Jake threw him a glance when he said ‘it’ giving the guy one more chance.

“If I disturbed... h-“ Sultan watched Jake’s eyes closely “-er. Please, take this as an apology.”

Sultan summoned a small round marble-looking thing, and Jake used Identify on it right away. He also checked it for poison and anything else. What he had summoned was something Jake had encountered before when he researched making food for Sylphie.

[Beast Pellet (Common)] – A beast pellet made by a talented cook using monster materials and herbs to create an artificial natural treasure. Consuming this will have no effects on an enlightened species but is highly beneficial to monsters.

As for Sylphie’s reaction? She looked over at the pellet for a bit and jumped down on the table, knocking over every single teacup and the two teapots - on purpose as far as Jake could tell. Sultan still didn’t dare react even when the tea dripped down on his pants. Sylphie went over and picked up the pellet incredibly slowly. She put it in her beak and ate it, making it crunch as she did so. Then she just wobbled off the table and leaped back to sit on Jake’s shoulder. Never regarding Sultan a single time throughout it all.

But... Jake could tell she liked the pellet. He had to admit; Sultan was smart. He had identified and tried to bring one of the most influential people in Haven to his side through bribery. And it worked because now Jake couldn't kill him before figuring out where he got the pellet or if he had more.

It was at this time Neil and Silas walked out of the ship's cabin, both of them frowning.

"So?" Miranda asked, looking at Silas, but just looking at him, it was obvious.

"Fuck the lot of them," Silas said, disgust visible on his face. "Sometimes, I really hate these shitty skills. I don't... I need some air..."

Silas didn't stay but walked off the ship. Neil looked concerned after his friend as he sighed. Jake was also a bit surprised as Silas always seemed like a meek guy.

"Neil?" Miranda asked. Sultan just sat back with his eyes closed.

"Two of them were as you said... but the other two... they're worse," Neil said, shaking his head before he continued hesitantly. "They were partners... and..."

"They tortured and killed 582 people, including 172 children, all in an attempt to upgrade an item through a curse-ritual that harvested resentment and pain. It took them a month where they kept them all alive and in constant agony. It only ended when the last person killed herself after her child's soul broke," Sultan said, shaking his head. "While I wouldn't argue I am a good person, even I have

standards. They were the first I ever took control of after they tried to ambush me on my travels, and I will understand it if you question me for keeping them around.”

Jake looked up and over at Miranda and then back at Neil, who gave him affirming nod as he muttered: “And they seemed damn proud of themselves too...”

He threw a final glance after Silas, who was already far gone, but Jake could still see him shaking slightly. Jake decided there and then to make an executive decision as he put Sylphie down on the table. She read his mood and allowed him. Miranda looked over at him, and she understood as she made a subtle nod. He got up and got a few confused glances when he walked into the cabin where the four women were.

A loud noise.

Two people were sent flying out through the side of the cabin and into the plains – a figure chasing them.

An explosion.

Yells and curses.

And then... silence.

A single person returned not even two minutes after departing and jumped back on the ship.

*You have slain [Human - lvl 101 / Crudelis Hexer - lvl 109 / Experienced Silk Seamstress– lvl 89]

*You have slain [Human - lvl 101 / Crudelis Hexer - lvl 107 / Recognized Jeweller of Zeil’Juia – lvl 91]

Jake walked over to the chair and sat down as he cleaned his hands on his cloak. Sylphie just jumped back on his shoulder as if nothing had happened. Everyone looked at him.

“Continue.”