

## Hunter 265

### Chapter 265: Concessions Today, Profits in the Future

The situation was just a tiny bit tenser after Jake took out the trash. He considering if they should slap on a charge for contaminating Haven with toxic waste but held himself back. During the brief intermission, the two women had exited the cabin. They now actually stood behind Sultan as if seeking protection from him, both looking terrified.

Miranda cleared her voice, bringing the attention back to her even if Sultan still threw glances at Jake. He didn't seem mad or offended at all but borderline elated.

"Needless to say, we reserve any right to dish out punishment as we see fit. If it is decided by the leadership of Haven – especially Lord Thayne – to deliver the aforementioned punishment, then that is something you will have to accept," Miranda said.

"Naturally," Sultan agreed, his smile now back. He seemed less stressed than before despite just losing two of his "bodyguards." Not much bodyguarding going on, honestly, as those two had been weak. He guessed they were the kinds of casters who needed ample preparation to show their full power, and Jake hadn't given them that. Not at all.

As to why he had killed them? Because they had crossed a line. Where exactly that line was, he couldn't say. They just had, so he acted. Jake was inherently an impulsive person, so when that overwhelming feeling of bloodlust came up, he felt it hard to hold himself back. He still had the self-control to throw Miranda a glance and get a nod of approval from her. After that whole Abby and Donald business, Jake didn't always trust his own sense of anger when it came to other humans.

As for the two last slaves? He didn't care. One of them was that Gabi woman, and he didn't know any details of the other, not even her name. Considering there wasn't any visceral reaction to her, Jake assumed she couldn't be as bad. Miranda could decide what to do with her. They were fucked up, sure,

but they didn't incite any feeling of anger, only disgust. He did have some clue as to why that was and also why he disliked Sultan so much.

What Jake truly despised was unnecessarily causing harm to others in a disproportional way. He was fully aware sometimes you had to kill weaker individuals when it came to fighting, but going out of your way to torture or kill someone weaker was just wrong.

This was why Jake didn't just kill any random beast he came across, even while he still got experience from them. Killing a foe many levels below himself just for an insignificant amount of experience just didn't sit right with him. As an example, if the Minotaur Mindchief had only tried to kill powerful D-grade humans, he would say fair game. The problem was that it tortured and killed those significantly weaker than itself, like a fucking coward.

Sultan was a lesser version of that. He was a sadist who enjoyed torturing, not because he got anything out of it, but just because he was a bastard. Actually, if Sultan just had those four slaves without the whole torture part, he could maybe even see them get along. Sure, he was an ass, but who wasn't a bit of an asshole these days?

It was not like Jake would even pretend he and Miranda were the good guys right now. They were essentially blackmailing and forcing Sultan to give in to all their demands. Shit, they had yet actually to offer anything in return besides his potential survival.

Yet, for some reason, Sultan seemed fine with all that. It was honestly perplexing in every way. Things were going terribly for him, weren't they?

He hadn't been wrong. Sultan had begun questioning his decision to come to Haven before, but seeing the Chosen act, all that doubt was dispelled like the morning fog.

Lord Thayne was domineering, assertive, and acted like he didn't care about anyone else's opinion. He was perfect. His bloodlust and power were enough to send shivers down his spine and make his heart pound. This was what a true powerhouse of the multiverse should be like.

Sultan had met the Augur during his last visit. He had even been asked to join the Holy Church or just become an affiliate partner, but he had refused. The church was controlling, and so was the city. In the end, you had to work for the collective, and while they supported the standouts a lot, Sultan didn't like the way they did things. It was a hive of covert corruption and politics. Without the Augur, the shitshow that was the political arena of Sanctdomo would already have fallen apart. Being a part of that city would mean being forced into politics if he wanted any proper benefits.

But Haven? In Haven, there were no politics. Not truly. It was a dictatorship with Lord Thayne at the top, Miranda Wells acting as the voice of his will. This was far more to his liking. He had hoped to endear himself to the Chosen personally, but even if that had failed, he had time. Even if he couldn't make Lord Thayne like him, he could at least make the Chosen view him as useful.

This was why he couldn't help but be happy. What was giving up a few slaves? A silly hobby? The profits and power he could accumulate from working with Lord Thayne would outweigh all of that a thousandfold. Sultan wasn't just looking at this in the short term either.

The Holy Church already had hundreds of talented merchants. With a population in the city in excess of 50 million, that only made sense, and that number was increasing with sometimes hundreds of thousands a day.

Sultan himself would say he was better than every single one of Sanctdomo's merchants, but he knew he would never get the best things. Because he wasn't loyal, and he would never be loyal to anyone but himself.

There was no way he would be a primary partner of Sanctdomo. Meanwhile, Haven didn't have any merchants associated with the city quite yet. At least Sultan hadn't heard of any, so no one worth his notice had appeared. It was a massive opening and exactly what he had been hoping for. Getting in on the ground floor would be good now. And in the future? It would be massively beneficial.

For who was the Chosen a Chosen of? The Malefic Viper, a Primordial, with his Order of the Malefic Viper. To get direct access through the Chosen to the Order, one of the most prominent alchemy-related organizations in the multiverse, would be invaluable. Sure, they were known as ruthless, but who would dare touch him if he came working for the Chosen?

Sultan knew that without strength, there was no way to succeed in the multiverse. The best merchant needed the strongest backing. The richest man would be the strongest, and the most influential would be the one capable of killing anyone who disagrees with him.

He had seen firsthand what happens to those not strong enough. Sultan had lost everything once already, and he refused to be a victim in this world anymore.

Sultan knew that all of this was, in the end, a gamble. A gamble Sultan believed only required him to put some of his wealth and the potential of being forced to leave on the table. At least to begin with. It had now changed to him already having lost two D-grade slaves, and he was sure he would lose the two others too. One way or another. Even his life was on the line, and he didn't have a single complaint about it. It was exciting.

Miranda Wells was a truly ruthless and talented woman. Lord Thayne was a monster in human skin. Even the green hawk was something else. A natural D-grade only still viewed as a juvenile of its race at D-grade? It was bound to become powerful. Sultan was certain Haven also hid other secrets – not that he was even close to comprehending the three before him fully. Neil, the space mage he had figured out already. He wasn't difficult to dig up information on along with his party.

Sultan had spent only a few hours in Haven, and he was only becoming more and more determined to join them. Sure, Sanctdomo was large. It had hundreds of D-grades already. It had the Augur and many other powerful individuals.

Yet... if Haven and Sanctdomo clashed... he couldn't see Sanctdomo and all their powerhouses coming out unscathed. No... he wasn't sure he could see them coming out alive.

Before, he had wanted to join. Now, he needed to.

Cost what it may. If Sultan died because of his greed, then so be it. Sultan had chosen the life he led now, and he accepted death as a potential risk in pursuit of his goals. He was a man who went for what he wanted and either got it or died trying.

Sultan would take the losses and make concessions today for profits in the future. And while the Chosen didn't like him, he sure as hell liked the Chosen. Hopefully, they could foster a relationship in due time; if not, he would have to focus his attention on the other influential figures of Haven – primarily those who held sway over the Chosen, naturally.

As for his sadistic hobby? Well, he would figure that out... hopefully, they would allow him to keep one of the slaves. Prostitutes always overcharged him for that kind of thing, after all.

The following half an hour or so honestly went too easy. Jake was confused why Sultan just went along with borderline anything and made concession after concession. He did have some points he refused to concede on, but nothing Jake disagreed with.

Neil threw in that they should make him sign a contract binding him to Haven, but Sultan refused adamantly, refusing to be bound by a contract to the city. To Jake, that only made sense. Why would anyone clearly talented bind themselves to another faction? Jake himself sure as hell never would.

Sultan argued he refused to sign anything limiting his own freedom. Ironic, considering he kept slaves. Miranda tried to insist on this point but fast discovered it was an absolute dealbreaker. Ultimately it didn't matter to Jake if the guy was loyal. Having to write a contract to have someone be loyal and work for you seemed kind of unnecessary in nearly all cases. As Jake had no plans of sharing stuff like his Bloodline, there was no reason for him to sign a magical non-disclosure agreement either.

When they got to the slaves and what to do with them, it became more complicated.

Miranda turned to the two, and straight-up asked: "So, if you get to choose, then what do you want; slavery or capital punishment?"

It was an obvious answer, but they just wanted confirmation. Both wanted to remain slaves. By now, Jake had become aware one of them liked to kill entire families because she was fucked in the head and had dearly hoped Miranda would just throw him a "please just kill her"-glance.

"Then the next question is if you would prefer to work under the authority of Haven or Sultan?"

That was where it got surprising. The one called Gaby didn't hesitate to want to get the fuck away from Sultan as she began pleading about being reformed. Honestly, it was bad. Like, even Jake could say with 90% certainty she was just desperately trying to be freed. Didn't work.

But... the other... the serial-killer and stalker woman wanted to remain with Sultan... in fact, she stood oddly close to him as if afraid they would take her away. Could Jake try to analyze her movements and intent? Sure, but that would be a massive waste of brainpower. While it had more or less been decided he wouldn't kill her, that didn't mean he would have to deal with her. Hunting kids was just bad sport – be it to kill or enslave them. Adding on to that, had Sultan walked in with a child slave, he would be dead already.

Ultimately, Miranda reached an agreement with Sultan with Jake's approval.

Sultan would join Haven on a trial basis and be allowed to operate out of the city. For official matters such as the Treasure Hunt and other such events, he would be recognized as a member of Haven too. He would also be granted access to the System Store.

In return, Sultan would pay an increased tax rate over everyone else for the next 10 years or until he had paid a total of 100 million Credits. Additionally, he would be forbidden from enslaving anyone and would be subject to an interview with Silas present every month or so, dependent on when it would fit in everyone's schedules to check if he had been up to any misdeeds. He was also banned from torture, though he managed to argue in an exception if both parties consented. Miranda didn't ask the man further about his fetishes but moved on.

On the trading front of things – what this entire thing was meant to be about - Haven would have the right to buy any product of Rare-rarity or above from Sultan before anyone else and with a maximum of a 50% mark-up. This would essentially result in him selling at purchase price due to taxes.

There were many other stipulations and rules, and Jake only stayed in case things went south. Miranda and Sultan debated vigorously, and eventually, Lillian came by, and they began drawing up a contract using one of Miranda's skills. It was a balancing act of what to include in the contract and what not to. Some things like the interview or inability to take slaves didn't enter the contract, so it ended up being solely trade-related.

Jake thought that was probably for the best. Sultan had been way too dead-set on getting to join Haven that he didn't think they needed any loyalty clauses. Those were borderline impossible, to begin with, as the contracts had to be rather factual and to the point. This also meant that all of those good-faith clauses were out of the question.

Again, though, it wasn't needed. As long as Haven turned out to be a beneficial partnership for Sultan, he wouldn't leave. And if he left... well, who actually cares? Jake sure didn't. He also didn't fear Sultan would try some shit or cause issues in Haven. Maybe he would try to suck up to Miranda and get into the council-thing she had going on, but that was only to be expected of any sleazy businessman.

In the end, the entire debacle ended up taking several hours until finally, a document was signed by Miranda and Sultan. Sultan also wanted Jake to sign, but he declined. Signing it would mean he would have to read it in detail, and that didn't sound interesting at all. Sylphie also wouldn't like it, as it would mean he couldn't dedicate both hands to stroking her feathers as she sat on his lap.

Once everything was signed and done, they all sat back.

"Let me provide you a belated welcome to Haven, Sultan," Miranda finally said with a smile. "I truly hope we have laid the foundation for a fruitful future today, despite the less than fortunate first impression."

"Likewise, I look forward to working with you, Ms. Wells, Lord Thayne," Sultan said, earning a look from Sylphie. "And the young mistress, of course," he quickly added on.

Jake was pretty sure Sylphie didn't really understand what he had said; she was just mad at not being included.



“Now, on to more important things than slavery or the morality of capital punishment or all that stuff,” Jake said to lighten the mood before saying something he had wanted to say for a long time:

“Show me your wares.”