

WHAT IS IHUNT?

iHunt: It's on the tip of everyone's tongue. What is it? Are millennials making like their ancestors and stalking deer for dinner? San Jenaro Beat's own Gina Esposito dives in so you don't have to.



MEET TARA

"In a way, #iHunt is about control."

Kill monsters, get cash. Sounds fairly simple, doesn't it? After all, your favorite blockbuster *Movieland™* superhero could fight werewolves in her sleep. Can't you picture yourself bashing in zombie skulls like your favorite prime time drama character, except for the part where he murders racial minorities (spoilers!)? Well, it turns out, hunting monsters isn't for the light of heart. Let's talk for a second about the average #iHunt user:

- 21-35
- Single
- Renter
- High school or GED graduate
- Misdemeanor criminal record
- No college degree
- \$40-100k debt
- Chronic medical conditions
- Working full-time elsewhere
- LGBTQ+

As you can see, #iHunting isn't for everyone. Why does #iHunt trend toward the underprivileged? It appears that killing monsters is actually a highly dangerous line of work, with high casualty rates and excessive medical complications.

During my investigation, an #iHunt user who chooses to remain anonymous explained her situation. She deals with Crohn's Disease, and can't normally afford treatment despite working 30 hours per week at Carver's Supercenter and part-time at GameShop. To afford medical care to help alleviate her chronic pain so she can manage her normal work schedule, she takes on an average of one #iHunt contract every two weeks. She explained that on her hunts, she has to navigate the pain from her Crohn's.

I'll be calling her Tara. Tara isn't the hardened, grizzled badass from your average comic book. She's 32, going on 65 she tells me. She wears long, over-worn pencil skirts that range from faded brown to faded gray. That is, when she's not on the hunt. She tells me she has to buy expensive cut jeans to keep her legs safe while pursuing her prey, and she can't afford to get a skirt caught on a chain-link fence. She has a mousy voice you might expect from a librarian, although she says she doesn't really spend any time researching ancient horrors in libraries. In fact, she says her favorite hunts are werewolves, since she doesn't have to do much research. She says that after 11pm, after a full morning shift at Carver's, and a closing shift at GameShop, the last thing she wants to do is research. Who could blame her? She says that killing a werewolf is exhilarating, and helps her forget about the pain for a while. After all, she jokes, it's hard to focus on the pain of bowel inflammation when you're being disembowed by a werewolf.

Dark humor, she says between sips of coffee, is a common trait in #iHunters. Everyone has a joke about how they'll eventually die. Always on the hunt, never at home of illnesses or poverty.

Tara doesn't date. She says she'd like to, but with 60 hour schedules and another 10 to 20 hours dedicated to the hunt, it comes down to either sleeping or dating. Sometimes she'll find a hookup on the FlingFinder app, but it's usually difficult to explain her hunting wounds and it really takes the fun out of a one-night stand. She says that some hunters end up in flings. While that means never having to explain bruises, it also means competing for contracts.

She explains that she's definitely the average #iHunter. But they run the gamut. Some are outright criminals who can't apply for jobs thanks to outstanding warrants. They like #iHunt because it pays under the table. Many of these hunters are just as willing to take out private contracts on other people, or to kill other hunters to stifle competition. On the other end, you have trust fund kids who hire small teams to tackle jobs efficiently, and make small fortunes. She knows of two CEO's children who have turned #iHunt into lucrative business models this way.

I asked her if there was one thing she wanted readers to know about #iHunt. This is what she said.

"In a way, #iHunt is about control. Control of yourself. Control of your situation. If there's one thing I've seen in every single #iHunt user, it's that they're under a huge burden and it feels like life is spiraling out of control. We'll probably all die hunting monsters. But until then, we don't have to worry about coming home to the electric being shut off or not being able to replace a pair of shoes when you've worn a hole through them. You know?"

I asked her to take me on a hunt, to see what this hot new app is all about. She agreed, under the strict condition that I didn't get a cut of the bounty.

I told her I had a small stipend to pay consultants. She told me welcome to the hunt.

Then she told me to dress for a hike. Tara and I would be BFFs for the next week.

THE APP

Before Tara even sees the contract, the client has to post it. Let's take a look at a sample #iHunt contract listing and break it down:

THE RATING

This is the minimum average hunter rating for the job. If you don't have at least an average rating of that star level, you can't take the job. Generally, higher paying gigs require higher average ratings, but this isn't always true.

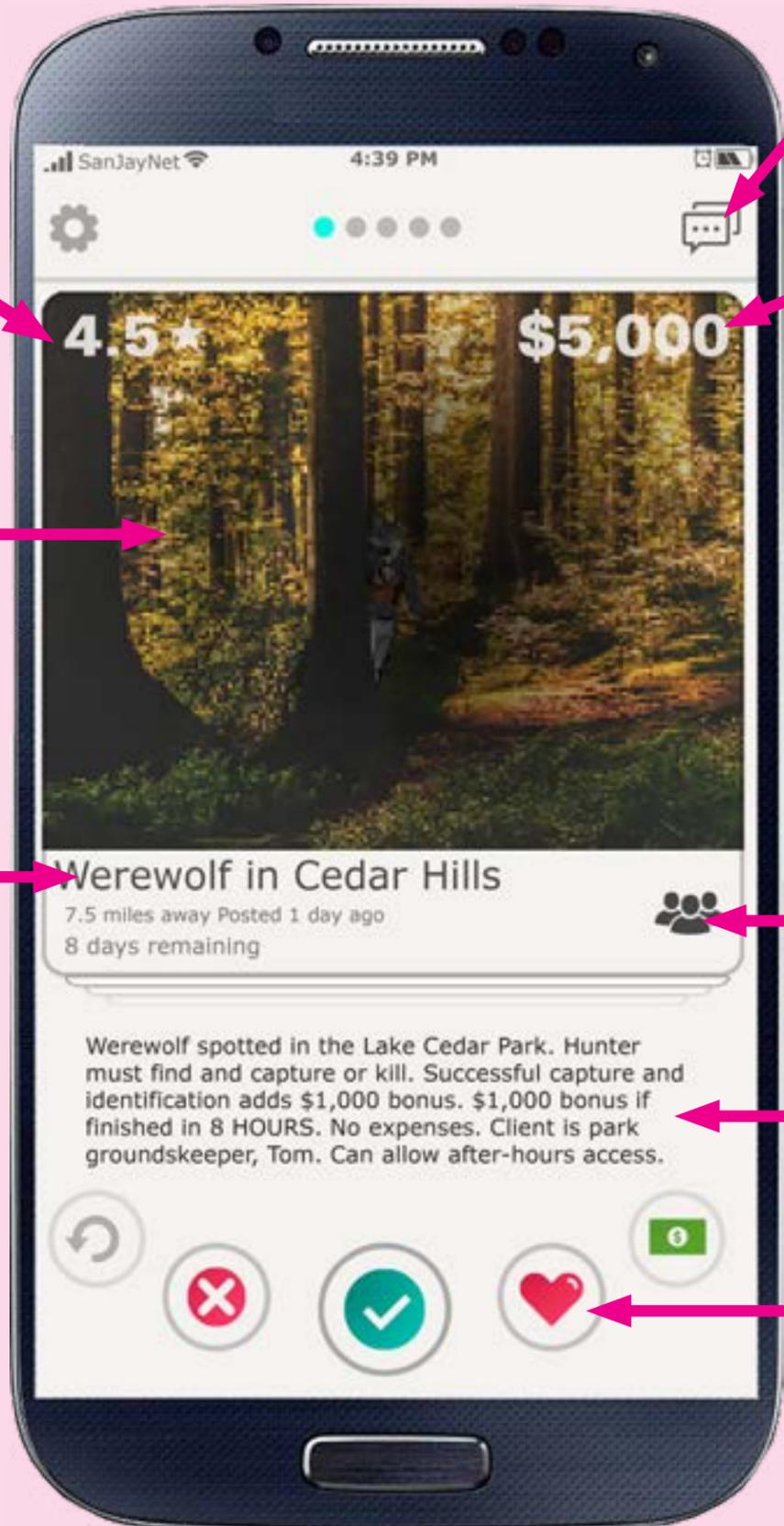
THE PHOTO

Tara says this is a recent addition to the app. Tara explained that the #iHunt corporation decided that a shift to photos was essential to keep competitive. However, most photos are all but worthless on the hunt. Since every listing requires a photo, many listings simply have an uploaded image of a black box, or the client's favorite Pokemon. She says taking photos has gotten more than a few clients killed. There are rumors the app will shift again to video, which could be downright deadly for clients who insist on filming monsters in action.

THE LISTING NAME

The listing name should give a pretty good idea of what you'll be hunting, and where you'll be hunting it. Tara says a lot of clients don't actually know what you're hunting, and they're just guessing. So if the client says it's a werewolf, you might very well be dealing with a skinwalker, which, she explains, is a completely different fight.

The time is what's allowed for the contract. Most clients will just repost the same listing if it expires. It's not like a haunting just goes away because of an arbitrary deadline. If you take longer than the deadline to complete the gig, the client may or may not pay.



MESSAGING

This is how you connect with the client. If you need job details before accepting, you hit them up here. But if you ask any questions about money, you can be reported and lose your account. The company says they don't want clients to feel "pressured."

THE PAY

This is the base pay for completion. It's discretionary. The client can reduce pay by up to 25% without justification. If they score you 2-3 stars, you only get 50% of the base pay. If you get a one-star review, you only bring home 10% of the base rate. Tara says that a 25% pay cut is fairly common. So when you take a job, consider the pay to be 75% of the listing and "be pleasantly surprised" when you get full pay.

Pay can take between 24 and 72 hours to post, depending on your bank's relationship with #iHunt. Sometimes #iHunt pay gets flagged as suspicious activity, which can lock your account for upwards of 45 days for investigation. That's rare.

SHARING BUTTON

If you don't want to do a job, but know a friend who might, you can share it with this. If they successfully pull it off, you get 5% of the contract amount (taken out of their cut.) The app doesn't show all listings normally; an algorithm curates listings for you specifically. So you may only ever see some contracts through referrals. Nobody really knows the criteria the app curates with.

THE DESCRIPTION

The client provides a short description. Sometimes it's enough to do the job. But usually you have to consult with the client for the necessary information. This should detail the basic requirements, and any potential bonuses available, usually for quick, quiet, or thorough work.

THE FIVE BUTTONS

The five buttons are how you primarily engage with the app. This is how they work:

-  The undo button can cancel your last contract, if you tap it within ten minutes of taking the job. After that, you're obligated to complete it.
-  The X button is how you tell the app you don't want the contract. Tap this, and it vanishes from your queue forever.
-  The approve button is how you take a job. Tap this and it's yours. You have ten minutes to cancel, but otherwise you get any additional job details as well as the client's direct contact information.
-  The heart button saves a contract you might be interested in but don't want to take. Clients have an option to offer additional money to clients who have hearted their contracts.
-  The cash button is how you outbid someone. It animates for ten minutes after another hunter has taken the contract. Tap this, and you undercut their rate by 5%. They have ten minutes to counter with an additional 5%. So on, and so forth, until nobody outbids for ten minutes.

Outbidding is a new feature, and a highly controversial one among hunters. There's some evidence that it's caused fatal conflicts that claimed at least four hunters' lives in San Jenaro alone.

If you approve of the listing, you can also just swipe right. If you want it out of your queue, you swipe left. Unfortunately, Tara says, sometimes accidental swipes happen, and abandoning a job is grounds for a one-star review. Hunters affectionately call these mistakes "Butt Hunting." When she explained this, she blushed and glanced away.