

Hunter 116

Chapter 116: A Godlike Getaway

Jake stepped through the door into the bedroom that he remembered belonged to the Viper. He had barely entered the room as a loud popping noise was heard along with a... party horn?

“CONGRATULATIONS!”

... In front of him stood the legendary god known as the Malefic Viper wearing a small party hat with a horn in his mouth. Beside him, an old-looking man with a big white beard, messy clothes, and overall unkempt appearance. Except for his headwear. He, too, wore a party hat, though he seemed less than amused at the entire ordeal, and Jake would bet his entire potion stash on the Viper having forced him to wear it.

“Thanks, I guess?” Jake managed to answer, still bewildered by the beaming Viper and the bored old man.

The old man was plump, if not outright obese, and looked like he hadn’t taken a shower for months. Yet, the most noticeable thing about him was his sharp eyes and the faint aroma of soil around him. Looking at him, Jake also instantly knew that this man was a god. He didn’t know how he knew; he just did. Perhaps it was the aura...

“Man, that finale in the tutorial was great. Straight up burned your entire damn soul to punch him harder. If not for how absolutely suicidal that was, I would want to see it again,” the Viper joked, as he slapped the back of the old man.

"This right here is Duskleaf, my true-to-me disciple. Taught the kid alchemy from when he was a wee lad. When it comes to alchemy, he isn't bad at all, I tell ya."

"Still new to this, but anyone who can become a god can't suck, I guess?" Jake answered. "Nice to meet you, name's Jake."

"Hmph." That was all the answer he got from the old man who still looked like he really didn't want to be there. Which he likely didn't, but Jake had the faint feeling that the Malefic Viper could be quite persuasive.

"Oh, come on, why so gloomy? Isn't this great, just three buddies chilling?" the Viper said, still slapping the bored old man on the back. A bit harder this time.

With a grunt, the old man said in a weirdly meek voice that didn't suit him at all. "You said you would actually teach me something..."

"I did, and I will!" the scaled god answered. "We are still gonna do alchemy, no worries, we just have another participant! The more, the merrier and all that."

"I feel like I am intruding in the middle of something here."

"You aren't-"

“Yes, you are.”

Before the Viper could correct him, his disciple quickly shot him down. Jake could only inwardly chuckle at the two. Without a doubt, they had developed their own little dynamic over the eternity they had known each other.

“If it’s any consolation, then I am pretty sure I am only allowed to stay a couple of days before I am whizzed off back to Earth. Or whatever the planet has become.”

“I know, that is why we are in a hurry! Come on now, to the lab!” the Viper yelled as he began marching out the room.

Duskleaf, knowing arguing would be useless, simply followed, with Jake also trailing along. They walked at a brisk yet relaxed pace, as Jake failed to hold back his curiosity.

“You said that you could provide information on the circumstances of my family during the tutorial rewards-thingie?”

“Yeah, but not now. We’re going to go over all that stuff shortly before you return. Trust me; we got more time than you think.”

“Alright, I guess. By the way, did you know three other gods had also given out invitations for me to come and meet them?”

“Nah. Who were they? I guess one was the tutorial’s main sponsor, whoever that is, but who are the other two? The Shroud should make it impossible for most even to know you exist,” the Viper asked, with a hint of surprise in his voice. Something that also got a raised eyebrow out of Duskleaf.

“The main contributor, or sponsor, I guess, was a guy named Karroch. The other two were Umbra and Gwyndyr.”

“I see. Umbra is a bit alarming though unsurprising. Gwyndyr isn't that unexpected either, but I must say I am not really that familiar with Karroch.”

“To answer master, Karroch is a god from the 89th era. As a mortal, he was a beast tamer and commanded an army of beasts. He is just a rogue god, and all in all, he isn't very impressive,” Duskleaf interjected, answering both Jake and the Viper.

Jake knew from prior conversations with the Viper that an era was when a universe was the newest one integrated. In other words, if one was born during the 89th era, it means that the 89th universe was the most recent universe to the multiverse. Currently, the multiverse had just entered the 93rd era, with Jake’s own universe’s integration.

“What about Gwyndyr and Umbra?” Jake asked, addressing both Duskleaf and the Viper.

“Gwyndyr is a god from the 7th era. Leader of the Crimson Flame, a collection of powerful gods who have assembled, all focused on the concept of fire. As a mortal, he was an archer, most notable for having killed a god before achieving godhood himself. In other words, he isn't a god to be belittled. He is old and powerful,” Duskleaf said, as the Viper continued for him.

“Umbra is an old acquaintance of mine. She came to be during the 2nd era. She is strong, and in the concept of shadows and dark mana in general, has skills that are second-to-none. On top of that, she has an organization known as the Court of Shadows. Assassins for the most part, and one feared by mortals and gods alike. If you want someone dead, are filthy rich, and got enough leeway, they are the ones you go to. Be the target god or mortal.”

“Yeah, alright, sounds impressive, I guess,” Jake answered, not knowing even half of what the fuck they were talking about. He did find one thing very interesting, however.

“You call some of the gods strong and weak? How exactly does godhood work?”

“Honestly, just like mortals in most ways. Some are strong, while some are weak. It’s just more... complicated than mortals. Just know that the main divide lies exactly in that word: Mortal. To become a god is to become immortal,” the Viper answered.

“So, who is stronger, you, Gwyndyr or Umbra?” Jake asked, a bit teasingly.

“Hah, good question. Hard to know without fighting it out. Though if I had to answer... while Gwyndyr would be annoying, I can’t see myself losing. A bit of the same with Umbra, but I would put her a level higher than Gwyndyr. The thing with gods is that a lot of our strengths are conditional. To fight any god within their own realm is pretty stupid unless you are far more powerful than them. And even if you fight on neutral ground, there is a lot of difference between beating someone and killing them. Gods are notoriously hard to put down,” the Viper explained after thinking for a bit.

Considering the answer a bit, Jake inquired further. “is Umbra a Primordial too? Actually, what even is a Primordial? A rank of god or something?”

“Nah, she isn’t. Primordial is not a rank but a title. It doesn’t really have anything to do with strength. The title is for becoming a god during the first era, before the integration of the second universe. In other words, to be among the first gods.”

“Going out on a limb here assuming that any god who is among the first are considered strong... how many of you are there?”

“First of all, a good assumption. There are 12 of us in total. Not a single one of us weak. Not to brag - actually fuck that, to full-on brag - becoming a god during the first era was fucking brutal. There weren’t any gods to guide you; no one knew what the fuck was going on. The system was still new and very different from today, far simpler. No tutorials, no stores, just killing and getting stronger. For even twelve of us to emerge was a goddamn – pun intended - miracle. And anyone who can bring about such a miracle is strong.”

“Damn. So you 12 are the strongest around? It sounds like I hit the jackpot with my profession,” Jake half-jokingly said. He was still processing what he had just heard, trying to relate to how it was back then.

“That wouldn’t be very accurate. While we were the first, that doesn’t mean we are the strongest by default. A long-ass time has passed since the first era, and there are now more gods than ever - many extremely strong ones among them. Umbra and Gwyndyr in that batch,” the Malefic Viper answered patiently. Duskleaf was just silently wandering by their side, not showing any intentions of adding anything.

“Exactly how many gods are there?” Jake asked.

“Hell if I know. There were 12 during the first era, as I said, and that was, of course, the era with the least amount. After that, it has only escalated exponentially. Think about it, just because the second era begins doesn’t mean that the first multiverse stops producing gods. By the end of the second era, there were around 300 gods, while we were into the thousands by the end of the third one.

“That isn’t to say that it just kept growing. Let me be clear, that even with it being easier to become a god, it sure as hell is never easy; any god, no matter who, is an extreme talent. This was also about the time we began really seeing gods even die. With the guidance of the prior generations, becoming a god became more manageable, but it also meant that the quality fell. That is pretty much how it still is today, with each era having more and more gods, with the overall quality falling.

“Which isn’t to say we don’t have standouts still. The 92nd era, the one just before your universe, had Yip of Yore. A fucking lunatic of major proportions who killed half a pantheon the second he became a god himself, and from what I heard hasn’t stopped being bat-shit crazy since.”

“That is a lot to take in,” Jake said, after listening to the Viper’s lengthy exposition.

He felt more than a little lucky that he had his own source of direct information on the world of gods. From how the tutorial apparently had ‘sponsors’ and how blessings and all that worked, he had a solid feeling that gods were an essential part of the multiverse. And as a former financial analyst, Jake guaranteed that the more data, the better.

“Wait, didn’t you say that Eversmile guy is also a Primordial?”

“Yep. But enough of that, we are here!”

They stood before a big door that appeared to be made of some kind of dark metal. On it was countless glowing runes, and Jake felt himself getting a headache just by looking at it.

“What is here?” he asked, averting his gaze from the door.

The Viper didn’t answer but instead opened the door and led him and Duskleaf into the chamber. Entering, Jake found himself in a big room with a big table and chairs, with not much else around, except for dozens of doorways leading into other rooms.

He could see into those rooms with his sphere and saw that most of them just had a pillow placed on the floor. However, two of them were full-on alchemy labs, with more tools and equipment than Jake had ever seen before. Before he could ask about it, the Viper spoke once more.

“As you know, we are pressed for time, so I thought, why not just get some more time? This is a time-chamber. Think of it like in that movie Interstellar. Time spent within this room is slower than the time out here.”

“Seriously? Pretty sure this isn’t Dragonball?”

“Actually, that would be a more accurate reference. Good catch. Anyway, we can slow time, but the magnitude is dependent on you.”

“How so? How high can it go?” Jake asked. His imagination was already beginning to run wild. Could he spend years here, maybe even reach D-grade before returning to earth?

“Higher than you can handle. Time distortion isn’t all happy times and sunshine. It negatively affects a lot of things, including experience gain. Learning concepts, well, except for the concept of time, is also way harder, if not outright impossible. You also can’t do it too much, or it negatively affects your Records. Finally, the degree to which you can bend time is dependent on the ones affected.”

“In other words, I am too weak to handle it,” Jake stated, which just earned him a nod from both the Viper and Duskleaf.

“Well, let’s stop wasting time. I am gonna activate the formation, and time will begin to slow down within the chamber. Be warned that it will feel weird as fuck, and speak up if you start getting too disorientated. The first time can be tough,” the Malefic Viper said as he, without any further delay, picked up a weird crystal from the table and channeled mana into it.

Instantly Jake felt a... shift. Like everything turned murky yet didn’t. It was an oddly disconnecting feeling like it wasn’t really happening to him, but someone else. Yet the feeling disappeared just as fast as it came while he tried to make himself used to it.

Just as he was grounded once more, the time distortion got worse once more. Jake had closed his eyes at this point, just taking it all in. It felt very similar to when his Moment of the Primal Hunter activated, actually. However, those times were often too brief and too intense to really reflect on.

Jake had some understandings of time and relativity theory from his schooldays, but experiencing it like this likely wasn’t what his teacher had imagined. The notion that time moved at an entirely different pace, just ten steps away outside the door, was unsettling and incredibly interesting at the same time.

As the seconds ticked by, the feeling changed from weird to pressuring. Jake felt like a huge weight was pushing down on him. At the first sign of pain, he opened his eyes and asked, a bit worried.

“Is it supposed to hurt? My body feels like small needles are pricking everywhere.”

He had expected a fast answer, but instead, he saw the Viper and Duskleaf just stare at him for a while. After the two exchanged a quick glance, the Viper answered.

“It means that your body, or more accurately your soul, has reached its limit,” the Viper said as he scratched the back of his head. “Did you pick up a skill related to chronomancy or something like that as a reward for the tutorial?”

“No?” Jake answered, a bit confused. “I only picked two skills, and none of them had anything to do with time magic as far as I can tell.”

“I see. This may sound weird, but have you somehow ever experienced time distortion before?”

“Not like this, but I have a skill. One related to ‘that,’” Jake answered. He remembered not to mention his bloodline outright. While he didn’t distrust Duskleaf, he didn’t exactly know him either.

“I see... moving on!”

Before Duskleaf, who clearly had questions, could open his mouth, the Viper turned the time distortion down just enough for the prickling feeling to disappear.

“Now, follow me!” the Malefic Viper said, as Jake heard a sound he hadn’t expected.

Music with a title related to the visual organ of a large felid began blaring from nowhere, as Jake just looked at the Viper with a resigned expression.

“Really?”

“What? It’s training montage time!”