

Hunter 217

Chapter 217: The World Congress Begins

Jake, Miranda, Lillian, and Neil all stood at the lodge as the timer ticked down.

The question of who would attend the World Congress had never been an issue for Jake. In fact, he didn't have any input at all but just left it all up to Miranda to handle. The only ones he could possibly bring along were birds, and birds aren't known to be great political negotiators. Or maybe they were? Mystie did come off as very smart, even by human standards...

Either way, Miranda quickly managed to fire off a few quick bullet points in the final seconds. Mainly just: avoid fighting, politics and good relations first, no starting wars, agreeing that she should take charge of the primary negotiations, no killing other City lords and/or owners, and other such essential things.

When the timer reached zero, Jake and Miranda both got the option to join along with the ability to invite up to two people total. Neil and Lillian were naturally chosen.

With everything in order, they accepted as they disappeared from the valley.

Jake appeared with the three others inside a large circular room that was much akin to a conference room of the old world. He stood on a small platform with a table and four chairs in front of him. He also immediately noticed similar platforms to his sides, except the one he was on was slightly raised compared to the others, and the design of the table was also a bit different. The most significant of which was a sign saying "Haven – Earl."

The one to his immediate right had the name: “Saya – Viscount”, with the one to his left saying: “Sanctdomo – Viscount”. Jake counted nine of these Viscount platforms total, with theirs being the only one with the Earl tag.

Ten or so meters separated each platform, and Jake felt that each had a barrier of sorts surrounding it, one Jake naturally completely ignored with his Sphere of Perception. Well, that wasn’t that significant a thing as the barriers were invisible and didn’t affect sight at all.

“Do we take a sea-“ Neil tried to ask before figures appeared to their sides. Before Jake even had time to inspect anyone in his sphere, he felt the auras.

To his left, a serene presence appeared that sought to soothe all around it. It inherently had magical and mind-affecting properties and was one Jake recognized instantly as his old superior: Jacob. There was also one other presence mixed in by a middle-aged man, but it was nothing compared to Jacob’s. Besides those two, there was also Bertram and a woman.

To his right, the aura he felt was far different, and it was the reason that the first direction he looked wasn’t towards his old boss, Casper, or even his own brother that he had already noticed with his sphere. No, he looked straight at an old man who met his gaze with a smile.

This was the first human that Jake had ever met that made his instincts warn him so directly. That old man... wasn’t simple. Not at all.

The old man looked towards Jake as they both sized up the other until finally, he bowed. Jake returned his greeting with a deep nod. Their eye contact never breaking as both saw something similar in the gaze of the other: a desire to fight.

Yet they both knew now wasn't the time as they broke their staring contest just as they began attracting the attention of their companions. Jake saw the old man speak but couldn't hear his voice. Guess I just found out what the barriers do.

"Who is that?" Miranda asked, also feeling the aura, though she was more affected by Jacob based on how she kept throwing glances his way.

"Someone strong," Jake answered as he looked to his left towards Jacob. Jacob also turned to him with a nod, Jake gladly returning it. Well, Jacob seems normal... as normal as someone with that Augur stuff going on can be.

"Alright," Miranda said as she also now truly inspected the platform with Jacob on it. "Sanctdomo... and the Augur... how do you know him?"

Miranda had read the notebook Jacob had given Jake, and in that, the Augur class was described. She was smart enough to put two and two together, especially after talking with Neil about having met the man. The only thing she had never figured out was Jake's relation to the Augur.

"He used to be my boss," Jake answered nonchalantly, as he turned his attention towards the two other people in the large hall that he knew who looked his way. Miranda just shook her head, not even bothering to deal with the bomb Jake had just dropped.

"That's the guy?" Matteo asked as he looked over to the highest platform in the entire room – the singular Earl on Earth.

He saw a masked figure wearing nearly all-black clothes, giving off quite a mysterious and unapproachable aura. Thinking about it, the guy would fit in quite well with the rest of the Court of Shadows.

"I can't Identify him," Nadia said as she shook her head, getting a glance from Matteo and the current manager of trade of Skyggen, the sole city controlled by the Court. Nadia had an upgraded version of Identify that allowed her to better pierce normal obscurations, so if she failed to Identify him, he had to have some great skill or technique behind it. As for the City Lord of Skyggen himself...

Caleb looked over and saw Jake look back towards him. He met his yellow eyes, and despite their outward change, found his brother's gaze as familiar as ever. He saw the mix of relief and happiness in his eyes, and Caleb could only return the sentiment as a wave of relief washed over him.

Good to see you again, Jake.

So far, only ten platforms were filled as it looked like the system brought in people based on nobility, with 1 earl and 9 viscounts present so far. And while Jake's platform attracted a lot of attention because it was the only one that was earl-tier, one attracted even more.

It was the only platform that wasn't occupied by humans... at least not the usual definition of humans.

The aura given off that platform was different from all others. It had an inherent concept of death seeped into it, making it automatically repulsive to most living beings who didn't possess the affinity themselves. Needless to say, this was more noteworthy than the three far stronger auras present, as it was simply too foreign.

No one could speak to each other yet, but there were many whispers around the chamber, especially by the ones with the old man as they were placed right beside the undead faction. The same was true for the faction on their other side, one consisting of a bunch of burly men and women who looked straight out of a medieval festival. All of them holding axes or maces for some reason. Well, it wasn't that weird to have a weapon, most did, but the majority at least had them sheathed.

Jake threw a look the way of the undead and saw Casper on the platform along with three others. The one in the lead was a woman with long white hair and equally white skin. She smiled like the negative attention didn't bother her and looked like she tried to appear as inoffensive as possible.

Casper looked like he wanted to make himself invisible. Should have gotten a mask, Jake joked to himself, honestly feeling bad for his old friend. There was power in wearing a mask, and Jake knew he would in no way feel comfortable with the attention on him currently without it. It was like a powerful shield that put a barrier between him and everyone else.

Hang in there, buddy.

After a few minutes of everyone sizing each other up and a bit of a dick-measuring contest in the form of auras, it was time for the rest of the chamber to fill up.

People began appearing on the platforms one by one, nearly all of them with four people, but there were a few with less than that. In total, 94 new platforms were occupied, meaning a total of 104 Pylons of Civilization had been captured. Four more than the day it announced a week was left till it was World Congress time.

A flood of auras overtook the room once more. Of the 10 first factions, six of them had at least one D-grade on them. The old man, Jacob, Jake, the white-haired undead woman, the leader of those bulky cosplayers, and the tenth platform with a middle-aged woman on it.

As for these new arrivals, all of them were E-grade except for three. All of them were automatically noteworthy for their strength, but one was more noteworthy than anyone else in the entire room - old dangerous swordsman included.

The two less noteworthy D-grades were a young red-haired woman who already looked annoyed at being there, and the other a man wearing full plate armor. As for the last one...

It was the only individual who had shown up only with two and not the allowed three companions.

He looked to be in his mid-thirties and had deep brown eyes and combed back hair and a small mustache. Jake's first impression was that he looked relatively harmless; the aura he gave off did not threaten him either... it was what he felt in the aura.

Jake felt an emotion he hadn't experienced before... an innate recognition of sorts. They both held something unique, something no one else possessed in the room beside them. A power that was their and theirs alone.

A Bloodline.

The two men stared at each other for a while before the other guy raised his finger to his lips and made a shushing motion. Jake answered back with a toothy smile as he understood. No sharing secrets, eh?

He could get on board with that.

Jake spent the next minute or so observing others while being closely studied back by the various factions of Earth. Most attention on their platform was focused on him as he was the sole D-grade, but Miranda, Neil, and Lillian also suffered quite the scrutiny. Miranda looked unfazed, Lillian like she didn't care, and Neil a bit uncomfortable. Jake himself hated every moment as he hoped for the system to do something.

Which luckily, it did.

Welcome to the first World Congress of Earth.

The World Congress is an opportunity for the newly integrated Earthlings to establish political connections and an arena for discussion, voting, and international politics that can impact the planet as a whole. Note that no fighting will be allowed during the World Congress. Each booth has an aura that will offer privacy to each city.

During the first World Congress, three votes will be held with one three-hour intermission between each to discuss the proposal. The total length of the World Congress will be 10 hours.

The first vote will be held in one hour and pertain to the election of a World Leader. The World Leader will automatically have their noble rank advance one stage. Becoming a World Leader requires more than 60% of the total votes.

Jake and everyone else got the notification. This was easily concluded as everyone suddenly stopped for a moment as they took in the information. To be honest, it was a lot more... formal than he had expected.

A small part of Jake had expected this entire World Congress to just be a big room they were all tossed into like the tutorial, and Jake having to dunk on some morons to set them straight. Luckily – or perhaps unluckily – this wasn't that kind of event.

Though he would like to fight that old man with the sword... maybe later.

The whole World Leader thing was a bit of a surprise and not something Jake expected was relevant here and now. Seriously, even if Jacob went full-on mental interference with his Augur stuff, he couldn't convince 60% of the attending to vote for him. It only became more apparent how daunting the task would be with the next message that popped up.

Voting rules of the World Congress:

The number of available votes is based on the nobility rank of the attending members. The number of votes per nobility rank is as follows:

Earl: 10

Viscount: 5

Baron: 3

Lord: 1

The noble in question may distribute their votes as they choose if there are multiple options. The noble may abstain from voting. Votes are final and cannot be appealed. Any agreements will come into effect until the next World Congress or if all included parties choose to revoke it. All tie-breakers will be decided by the highest-ranking noble present at the World Congress.

Going through that, it only became clearer how much harder it would be to be voted World Leader as the more prominent nobles had more votes, so you would have to convince the big factions to vote for you. It was without a doubt a feature not for this first World Congress but for future ones after the political landscape had formed and strong alliances were established.

As for all the rules... Jake didn't like them. He already felt a few more eyes upon him now, likely due to that last sentence about the highest-ranking noble deciding at tie-breakers... seriously, no way there was even going to be tie-breakers.

Also, why did he need 10 votes? Heck, Miranda had 5, Lillian 3, and Neil 1... their small group of four had 19 votes total. They were, without a doubt, the group with the most votes. If Jake had given Neil a baron title, it would be even more. Actually... maybe he should give out titles. That would be something to talk with Miranda about.

With the final message out, a countdown appeared.

Vote for first World Leader will begin in: 59:59

And with that, the barriers around each platform faded. They could still be re-activated, but now everyone was free to move. Everyone seemed hesitant until one person moved.

A figure teleported from the tallest platform, first towards the middle of the chamber before he a moment later stood before the four people from Skygge and the Court of Shadows.

Three of them tensed up as the figure spoke to the only calm member of their group.

“Hey Cal, how’s mom and dad doing? Did everything go well with Maja?”

“Yeah, they are doing quite well considering the circumstances. As for Maja... congratulations. You’re an uncle now,” Caleb answered Jake with a big proud smile as he thought about his son.

“Damn, good to know the system didn’t do anything weird in that department at least,” Jake said, genuinely relieved but also feeling a bit weird. He had suspected he was an uncle now, but it was still something else to have it confirmed. Well, he was also kind of an uncle to Sylphie, but Sylphie was a bird, so that is different.

“Anyway, how have you been doing? Heard some stuff through the grapevine that you went and did some impressive stuff,” Caleb asked with a raised eyebrow. Umbra hadn’t given that many details, and confirmation from primary sources were always best.

“Oh yeah, it’s been fun. You haven’t slacked too much either, though you should really hurry up and get to D-grade; the evolution is damn nice.”

Jake was so embroiled in his reunion that he didn't care that the entire hall's focus was now on him and Caleb. Miranda staring confused at him barely registered, and the three people with Caleb also just looked utterly confused, as their boss clearly hadn't told them that the mystical Progenitor they had been warned to stay away from was the brother of the Judge.

The two of them lit the spark and broke the ice of the entire hall. The tense competition of auras died down, and while many were still wary – especially towards the undead faction – they eventually began moving about, a dozen or so already beginning to group around Miranda, Lillian, and Neil.

The reunion of two brothers split by the integration to the multiverse was something everyone could relate to. Many had lost touch with family, and so much uncertainty still remained for so many. The sight of two influential faction leaders just talking about family was... human.

It was an element that had been sorely lacking for many of those present. Many had spent the last few months just struggling, but perhaps this congress was a time to return to something more... civilized. Without Jake knowing it, his spontaneous action of impatiently approaching his brother had set the entire mood of the World Congress.