

Hunter 218

Chapter 218: World Congress: Friendly Talks

"Should we not be out attempting to sway the vote for World Leader?" Jacob was asked by the middle-aged trade manager he had brought along for the Congress. Maria and Bertram also looked at him questioningly.

They controlled several Pylons already, had many votes between them, and an Augur with frankly overpowered skills for convincing people. Yet Jacob did not look like he carried any intentions towards securing votes for World Leader.

"It's too soon, and there are far too many unknowns. Becoming World Leader will undoubtedly come with a lot of power but also a lot of responsibility. In addition, fear that it may put a target on our back from those who disagree. Finally... I see no possibility of us securing 60% of the votes. At least not yet."

"I am confused... I find it doubtful that any faction will dare move against us directly? We represent the Holy Church on this planet, and any powerful forces with divine connections will surely want to join hands with us or, at a minimum, not dare stand in opposition. While I understand that the Court of Shadows and the undead are not to be taken lightly, I do not see--"

"Exactly, you don't see it. The problem is that I don't either. This entire World Congress is an utter enigma to not just me but the gods too. Not just due to the inability of skills to predict the system itself, but also due to the leader of Haven and the Sword Saints' presence here," Jacob explained.

Jacob would have loved to be able to divine what the best choices for this World Congress would be - to see the fates that the voting would result in and in concert the future of their entire planet. Sadly, things didn't work that way.

The individuals present formed a maelstrom of destiny that threw all predictions off. Jake was the primary issue due to whatever fate-bending skill he had been given. If Jacob was honest, he knew that just the mere fact that Jake was a Chosen was enough to toss off all predictions, even if he didn't have a skill. A single sentence from the Malefic One would throw off all predictions.

Anyone being blessed made it harder to predict anything related to them, but not to the level of Jake. Not even close. He could at least get a general feel for things with most people, but with Jake and Haven, it was just a black hole.

Additionally... usually the Holy Pantheon or even the Grand Master who was in charge of their section of planets would throw in a tip here and there... but in regards to Jake, it had been radio silence except the warning of not interacting with the Malefic Viper's Chosen at all, and if he had to for some reason, limit it as much as humanly possible.

A warning Jacob had no intentions of following.

Stronger than me.

That was the assessment Miyamoto had when he saw the masked man for the first time - the enigmatic Earl that had claimed the very first Pylon.

Miyamoto was prideful and, in the eyes of many, arrogant, but he understood when he locked eyes with the man. He wasn't the only one. He saw the arrogance and inherent challenge in the eyes of the man. He was an old man, but at that moment, he could barely contain his childlike excitement as one of his biggest fears was alleviated.

A fear that he would have to wait for the multiverse to open up to meet peers with the same drive and desire as himself. A tiny part of him had feared that the first to claim a Pylon had done it simply as a fluke and not due to his own power... something that clearly wasn't the case.

Their duel would come... but not today. Today was not a day of fighting but one of forming bonds.

The masked man clearly understood this, too, as his first choice was to greet his brother. Miyamoto smiled as this was the first action taken, and his respect for the hunter grew. That he also possessed such a profound movement skill only making it all the better.

"Grandfather, should we still move according to plan?" his grandson, a middle-aged man, asked him.

"Yes. Focus on getting a good feel for the state of things, and as for this whole World Leader business... we shall abstain as our default choice. To make such a choice this early would be an act of foolishness," Miyamoto answered as he threw a glance towards the Augur.

"What about... those?" an assistant to his grandson asked. The man didn't even bother hiding his contempt as he looked at the undead.

Miyamoto frowned as he shook his head. "Do as you would with anyone else. Do not make enemies because you fear the unknown. The system has brought us here as equals – as humans – so treat them as such. The world is changing, and the Noboru Clan will change with it."

The last words were said as he looked the assistant straight in the eye, making him freeze up from the implied threat.

“Mistress Carmen, it’s an honor to finally meet you in person,” the large burly man said as he smiled at the far smaller woman.

“Sven... you look utterly ridiculous... and don’t call me mistress again. Ever. Carmen is fine.” Carmen looked the man up and down.

Standing at nearly two and a half meters, he had clearly grown with his evolutions, the evolution to D-grade no doubt coming in tight to make him the tallest man in the entire World Congress. He was built like an absolute tank, but his outfit...

He was wearing fur clothes and a bear-head-cap on his head, with the three following him looking equally ridiculous. Of course, Carmen knew it was actually equipment that was likely as good as her own, but that didn’t make them look any less silly.

While the majority had shown up in clothes ready to battle, that still meant most looked presentable. You could never go wrong in plate armor or the robes worn by nearly all casters and healers, with many of those present also just wearing large cloaks, making it entirely possible that they looked ridiculous beneath it.

“Bah, who cares about something as trivial as that,” Sven dismissively said as he waved his hand. “Here, let us first establish an official alliance before anything else.”

Would you like to enter an Alliance with Midtgaard?

Carmen got the notification as the city owner but just shook her head as she directed Sven towards the actual city lord who was busy talking to their neighboring city. As one of the rare groups outside of the first 10 with a D-grade in it, they instantly attracted quite a bit more attention.

“Handle it with that guy,” she said, pointing to the city lord behind her. “Got any other orders from the big shots?”

“None recently. I am sure the gods of Valhal believe we can handle ourselves and are judging our ability to make our own decisions. We have backing of the highest level, so let’s use that and find likeminded individuals to join our ranks, and-“

Sven kept talking proudly as Carmen slowly zoned out as she looked around the room a bit more. That ability to split your attention between different things in D-grade was awesome when it came to listening to a boring speech and doing something actually interesting without the other party noticing.

Needless to say, Sven was blessed by a god related to Valhal too. Valhal was a pantheon of gods founded by the Primordial named Valdemar. Unlike many others, it focused far more heavily on combat over everything else and didn’t care much for higher goals or complicated ideals. It was just about finding strong people who liked fighting and bringing them together with like-minded individuals, and Carmen liked that.

Well, it did have a few tenets of sorts, mainly related to getting proper fights, and was, in Carmen’s view, more common sense than anything. It talked about how there was no honor in mindless murder of those weaker than yourself and how one should fight foes in a straight-on fight.

This isn't to say one should fight stupidly. It was fine to use any advantages you got and research your foes or use all your skills to their full extent. An assassin sneak-attacking was a part of their strength and not something to look down upon. Well, it likely also had something to do with how instantly killing anyone of equal strength was pretty damn hard in the post-system world – a sentiment that only got more and more true as one advanced through the grades. So a powerful sneak attack just meant the fight started with one party injured.

The entire organization didn't recruit as actively as the Holy Church, yet it had a lot of faith. Many warlords or career warriors of the multiverse found themselves recruited to Valhal, where they would interact with their peers, which lead to another difference.

Valhal didn't recruit factions, empires, or kingdoms – it focused on people. That those people then made Valdemar and Valhal the figurehead of their entire faction was another thing entirely, that quite frankly, not a single god Carmen had met cared about.

This had lead to Valhal not being a large "faction" of the multiverse in the truest sense... yet it was still one of the most feared – because even a faction as massive as the Holy Church didn't dare fight the massive amount of war-crazed powerhouses belonging to Valhal.

These experts could even be found within other factions. Many members of the Holy Church or large empires were part of Valhal while also belonging to another faction. In the truest sense, Valhal was neutral and so far had only taken sides in conflicts a few times throughout the history of the multiverse. And those times were often just because Valdemar really didn't like something and personally went on a warpath, and the warriors of Valhal just following him on his quest.

Carmen began to feel bored just looking at the people in the hall talking as she picked up something from Sven she did find interesting.

“-between the Sword Saint and the Hunter that guards Haven, I am unsure who is the most powerful human currently on the planet, but if I had to guess, it would be the Hunter. Of course, it is entirely possible some hidden powerhouse exists, but beating out a Progenitor is no easy feat.”

“How would you compare me to them?” Carmen asked. Sven was many things, and a competent warrior and leader were undoubtedly one of them. With his axe in hand, he had reached D-grade about the same time as her and was strong, even for a D-grade at his level.

“Without an actual bout, it is hard to say... but I get the feeling that the two of us wouldn’t win if we fought either of those two together. Of course, my senses may be off, but I am getting some serious vibes from both of them,” Sven explained as he shook his head. He was a proud man, but he wasn’t stupidly overconfident.

“We’ll see,” Carmen said as she threw another look the way of the masked man who was talking with that shadow-assassin leader who was apparently his brother, before shifting it to the ancient-looking man who was currently moving with his entourage towards meeting people she assumed were his allies... mainly based on how they all called him Patriarch.

“That King sounds like an absolute monster,” Caleb frowned as Jake had just quickly gone through a few key points of his own tutorial. He didn’t really bother to keep things a secret as he was pretty damn sure Umbra already knew, and if she hadn’t told anyone... well, a bit of bragging never hurt anyone.

“Yeah... I blame all those gods messing with shit to get their way. Well, it turned out pretty well in the end, if you ignore how nearly everyone died...” Jake said, shaking his head.

Thinking about it, four out of five survivors of the tutorial was present in this meeting. Jacob and Casper both part of two of the largest factions of the multiverse. Which left the question... what is that psychotic metal mage up to? Actually, who cares...

Caleb had also told of his own tutorial, and Jake had already learned about some cool stuff. Like that virtual fighting arena they had where one could safely fight to the death without actually dying. He needed one of those for Haven, that's for sure.

"Being immortal beings of untold power must be boring with how much they bothered messing with your tutorial. At least Umbra and the Court of Shadows seems pretty decent. Pretty sure they subscribe to the whole freedom under responsibility-doctrine," Caleb said with a chuckle.

Caleb's comrades just stood silently behind him, not uttering a word but just observing Jake and Caleb interact.

"Villy is also pretty chill, too, especially considering how stuck-up gods tend to be from what I can tell," Jake agreed.

That got a confused frown from the three observers behind Caleb before the woman suddenly seemed to realize and asked before his brother had a chance to.

"Are you speaking about the Malefic Viper?" she asked a bit cautiously.

"Who are you?" Jake asked, a bit annoyed that someone was butting in on his family time.

"This is Nadia, one of the higher-ranking members of the Court and a real meanie with a sniper," Caleb came to her rescue, not knowing what he had just unleashed.

"A sniper?" Jake frowned. He felt a bit bad for her... using inferior weaponry like that, but he nevertheless gave her a chance. "What's your longest kill?"

"112 kilometers," she answered without hesitation, clearly quite proud of it.

Okay, that was longer than expected... but I still win. I guess snipers are technically better at extreme ranges... bah.

"Not bad," Jake acknowledged a bit reluctantly. "And yeah, Villy is the Malefic Viper. I just call him Villy because all his other names are just too long or feel weird... like calling him a Viper all the time. It would be like if he called me Human."

"Is the Malefic Viper fine with that?" Caleb asked with a hint of worry.

Jake knew that his brother was worried about him getting into problems with authority again, which was totally unfair to expect just because he had a history of it. Jake couldn't even remember how many teachers he had pissed off by being stubborn before authority throughout his life.

"As I said, he's a chill dude. Has mom or dad received any blessing? How are their levels, by the way?"

"No blessings, but they are both getting levels slowly. Dad more so than mom... but they shouldn't have any issues getting to D-grade, at least," Caleb said with an assuring smile, knowing that Jake was truly asking.

It was an uncomfortable conversation they would have at some point... but not yet. It was too early. Either way, his parents' ability to reach D-grade quite easily was exemplary proof of how relations and connections to others could positively impact your Records.

Their two sons were both extraordinary beings of Earth already. Jake had no worries about his brother reaching D-grade soon, and he was sure Caleb could go even further than that. While his current level of power was far from Jake – or any other D-grade present – he was still one of the strongest E-grades present, if not the strongest. Moreover... he had Jake.

A lot can be said about nepotism, but Jake sure as hell would deploy that aplenty. He would gladly help his family out, and he was already planning on getting them a bunch of potions and hopefully even elixirs and such in the future.

With, of course, also making it clear everywhere that he would hunt down anyone who touched them. Was he fully aware this would cause some political issues with his brother literally being the leader of some semi-corporate assassin organization? Sure, but he didn't really give a fuck.

"I'm going to come by and visit once I get the chance... but I need some directions," Jake said with a goofy smile.

"Oh, I'm sure we can figure something out," Caleb said, returning the smile.

The first half an hour of the World Congress turned out to mainly be networking and reuniting with allies or friends. The factions that possessed more pylons teamed up and made their size and influence clear, while the smaller ones began talking to their neighbors as alliances already began slowly being formed.

Some conversations were very business-like, but with the original mood set by Jake, the entire atmosphere turned out to be way more relaxed than one might expect the first clash of the majority of the strongest humans on Earth.