

Hunter 224

Chapter 224: World Congress: Challenge

If one called the discussions for those damn materials heated – a vote where Herb truly was the only worthy choice – then the current discussion revolving around the System Event was absolutely blazing.

At least many cities needed some of the same materials, plus the angle of potential trading. It meant that there was at least a strong desire for consensus. However, for this vote, everyone went straight for what played into the strengths and desires of their own city.

The undead wanted Town Defense – or City Defense, really – for several reasons. First of all, Jake had the feeling they were quite good at defensive stuff. Heck, Casper had an insanely defensive class and profession combo, and as the undead had many enemies throughout the multiverse, it made sense they had developed many means when it came to defensive battles.

On top of that, they had the angle of teaming up with other powerful cities. It would give them 10 days to prove they were valuable allies and form strong alliances. They were clearly desperate to form at least some strong alliances or even defensive pacts to offer them some protection.

During their chat, Casper had briefly mentioned that sometimes the Risen in new universes got wiped out on the planet quite quickly as they were seen as undead abominations. Filthy creatures to be purged. Jake thought it was just silly prejudice and bigotry. Being a bit dead doesn't make you any less of a person.

People tended to fear what they don't know, so being put in an environment with them for 10 days where you had to work together and get to know each other would allow humanity to become more adapted to their existence. As has been said, then the best way to battle bigotry was to actually get to know those you are bigoted against.

So, their angle made a lot of sense.

Meanwhile, Midtgaard really advocated for the dungeons. As in, really hard, though they did say they could also support the group tournament. It was pretty damn obvious that their city had many powerful parties, or perhaps the leader was just a bit of a selfish guy in a powerful party.

The Sword Saint seemed intrigued at the dungeons, but his faction appeared the most open-minded out of everyone in the top 10. He looked confident in handling anything, which kind of made sense.

He had both a powerful faction and was strong as an individual. No matter what they ended up doing, they would end up on top... which is why their next move made a lot of sense.

"The Noboru clan is open to negotiations for our votes. All four cities worth," one of the people on the Sword Saint's platform said. It was the guy Jake assumed to be the City Lord, and he also looked related to the old man. Which he 100% assumed they were since they were from the same clan and all.

The declaration threw the entire hall for quite a loop. The Noboru clan was behind a tenth of the total votes, making their offer quite enticing for everyone. Yet surprisingly enough, the first response wasn't someone trying to get the votes but denouncing them.

"To openly sell your votes like that... have some shame."

It was one of the lower-ranking cities; one Jake couldn't even remember speaking up before. Actually, there were a few cities that had barely talked, if at all. That Eron guy and his city were one of them, though the two people with him did go around doing stuff during the intermissions.

Jake had to admit; it did seem a bit corrupt if that was even the right word to just pretty much put their votes up for sale like that. Then again... who really gives a shit? And isn't these political discussions pretty much just selling votes and promising stuff for benefits? People just tended to be a bit more subtle about it.

"Oh? What does your clan want in return?" the woman from the undead faction asked, completely ignoring the complaint.

The man from the Noboru clan frowned a bit but responded nevertheless. "Such things are better discussed in a smaller setting. The Noboru clan will abstain from the discussion till an opportunity to talk more closely with the interested factions presents itself."

From there... the entire discussion kind of spiraled, as Jake came to learn that most factions honestly didn't care about what event was chosen, while those that did care were just very vocal about it. What they did care about were gains they could get from others for their vote.

After an hour of open discussion, people began spreading out with negotiations becoming face to face and behind closed doors. The first thing Jake did was to go over to Jacob and confirm that the Holy Church indeed did intend to vote for the Treasure Hunt. One can only confirm so much with mouthed words and questioning gazes.

"Yeah, we discussed it and agreed on the Treasure Hunt being the best. There are several reasons for this, but the primary one is that we feel it fits our strengths the most," Jacob explained.

"We are in agreement then," Jake smiled. "How do you feel the chances are to lock it down?"

"Quite good. With our and Haven's votes and a few of the allies we have already made agreements with, we are close. If we manage to secure the votes of the Noboru clan, I believe it is pretty much secured."

"Better get moving then," Jake said as he and Jacob together went towards the Noboru clan. Miranda had already gone over to one of the other top 10 factions who seemed indecisive. Neil hadn't hesitated to go straight to the other space mages present to keep discussing their teleportation circle network. In retrospect, it had been an excellent move to bring him. Miranda deserved a pat on the back for that one.

When the City Lord of the Noboru clan saw Jake and Jacob approach, he quickly finished up with the one he was currently talking to and engaged them – completely ignoring the undead woman who stood to the side, already waiting her turn. Jake had to admit, her level of patience and tolerance was impeccable as he didn't even see her react at the blatant disrespect.

She did do something, though. She motioned backward towards Casper to have him come over. Jake saw his old friend wince a bit, but once he saw Jacob and Jake also there, he relented and made his way over.

"Those two may as well come along," Jake said, nodding towards Casper and the undead woman. "Would make negotiations a bit easier just to have everyone present, don't you agree?"

"Alright..."

The Noboru City Lord clearly disapproved but allowed them all to go up to the platform nevertheless. However, he did throw out one comment just as he obscured them from outside view. Heard only by the four of them and the Sword Saint who sat with his eyes closed inside already.

"I didn't think the Holy Church usually associates with the undead?"

His words didn't seem that bad on the surface, but the meaning behind them was clear: he wanted Jacob to denounce them, take his side, and make them leave again. Jacob was ready, however.

"I cannot choose the associates of my friends. If the Progenitor wishes them present, then neither the Holy Church nor I have any right to tell him to make them leave. That we happen to interact through him is simply unavoidable," Jacob spoke.

Jake nearly wanted to choke as he heard that explanation. "Oh no, I am not here with the undead heathen! I am here with my friend who happens to be with an undead heathen, and if I happen to be friendly with the undead heathen, it is just to play nice with my friend!". To Jake, it was total BS, but Jake could empathize with Jacob's position. He couldn't openly say that Casper was his friend due to the Holy Church and their stance on the undead... it honestly sucked.

"Who cares? We're all just Earthlings and mortals; why care that someone has another eye color and a bit better death-affinity?" Jake asked, shaking his head. Sure, it was oversimplified, but he really didn't give a shit. Heck, his best friend was a snake, and his two other good friends were birds. Oh, and his kind-of-niece was the cutest baby hawk. Well, soon-to-be teenage hawk.

"Ah, I meant no offense..." the City Lord said, looking a bit embarrassed. Clearly not by his actions, but Jake's reaction. He was that kind of guy.

On the other hand, the undead woman made a huge smile as she went over and bowed deeply towards Jake as she extended her hand for a handshake, being a bit too obvious as he looked straight down her cleavage.

"I am Priscilla, and it is an honor to finally meet the Progenitor and Viper's Chosen face to face," she said, her eyes looking deeply into Jake's. No matter how ignorant Jake was at times, even he could pick up the apparent signals and her shameless flirting. Sadly for her, Jake wasn't interested.

He grabbed her hand and shook it. "Jake Thayne, nice to meet you too. I heard a lot about you from Casper."

Indeed he had. Casper had spent a lot of his recounting of becoming undead and the rest of his time in the tutorial talking about her. About how insufferable she was and how she had tried to "honeytrap" him all the damn time, even when he already had a girlfriend. She had even flirted just as they went to the World Congress...

"Only good things, I hope," she answered, her smile only growing.

"Sure."

That made her smile fade a bit.

As for why he used his name so openly, despite hiding himself with a mask throughout the entire World Congress... it was because he saw no reason to hide it. In fact, he preferred if people knew who he was.

It was already known that Caleb was his brother, of course, and by extension, it would be easy to figure out who his parents were. With his brother around to defend them, he didn't fear that they would suffer any harm; he actually believed that the knowledge of not only pissing off the Court of Shadows but him too would serve more as a deterrent.

And as sad as it was to admit, Jake didn't really have any other people he was close to other than his family and colleagues before the system. He had more friends and comrades now than before. Miranda, Hawkie, Mystie, Sylphie, Villy, etc. All were new friends he had made after the system. He also still had Casper and Jacob, who he considered friends.

All of these had in common that everyone already knew he was close to them and/or could take care of themselves.

However, most importantly... he didn't really have any cool nickname. Sure, some called him the Hunter or just Hunter, but he didn't really want to be called that all the time, as a hunter wasn't as unique as an Augur, Judge, Sword Saint, or other cool names like that. Yes, Jake was a tiny bit jealous.

Well, he was sure he would get a cool one in the future, and he did kind of have Progenitor, but introducing himself as the Progenitor would just be weird. It would be like introducing himself as a Prodigious Arcanist or another of his titles. Also, what if he got a better title in the future? Would he have to switch it up then? Way too much work. Jake Thayne worked just fine.

Anyway, back at the negotiations that Jake had just made damn awkward, but luckily Jacob was there to pick up the slack. Casper just snickered at Jake's response as Priscilla looked scornfully back at her undead comrade... yet still containing a bit of her coy demeanor. Yep, she is an S-tier gold digger. Or influence digger? Blessed by a Primordial digger?

"Both Jake and Haven as well as the Holy Church are interested in the Treasure Hunt event, and we naturally hope for your support in this endeavor," Jacob said, leaving the other side open to voice their requirements.

"I am sure we can figure something out," the City Lord of Saya said. "I believe the Holy Church has much to offer, information being one such thing."

"I am listening," Jacob replied as they slowly began talking. There was plenty of time, so Jake did some negotiating of his own.

Jake walked over, took a seat on one of the chairs, and looked at the Sword Saint, who had now opened his eyes and regarded him.

"What do you want?" Jake asked curtly.

"What makes you think I want anything in particular?" the Sword Saint asked in return, raising his eyebrows.

"Because people like us always have something we want, and you look just as bored being here as I do."

Jake had observed the old man enough to see his impatience. They were both here for similar reasons too. Jake came to reconnect with his family and friends and support Miranda, while the Sword Saint came here to support his clan.

The old man smiled and chuckled a bit. "What are you offering?"

"I'm an alchemist," Jake answered, summoning three bottles of the health, mana, and stamina variety.

Jake knew from Miranda he couldn't actually hand them over in here. He had tried and have Casper give him some small thing from his own spatial locket, and Jake found himself unable to deposit it. Chances are, the system wouldn't allow anyone to trade any material goods during the World Congress. A bit sad, honestly, as Jake would have loved to give his pals and family some good potions.

The Sword Saint looked at them as his eyes sharpened. He picked one up and observed it a bit more closely and even opened one of them to take a whiff.

"Certainly better than any made by our resident alchemists or pharmacists. However, while I am certainly interested, I am unsure what the point is offering such things to me personally... I am not the one you have to convince; it is the City Lord," he said, referring to Jacob and the City Lord, who looked wholly absorbed in his discussion with Jacob.

"Are you saying that if you say to vote for something, he won't listen?" Jake asked. From how the City Lord had constantly looked at the Sword Saint for approval, Jake was quite clear he didn't have it wrong.

"Even so, my personal wants and those of Saya are two separate entities," he answered, shaking his head.

"How so? Your success and power mean more power to your faction. Your death or stagnation is a loss or could possibly lead to the collapse of your entire clan," Jake said, becoming clear that they had a bit of a fundamental disagreement about how things were supposed to work.

"You look at it far too simply... to lay everything on this old man is not the way. The Noboru clan is not strong because I am strong. We are strong together. I am merely our sword, nothing less, nothing more," he answered, making his view on things quite clear.

"While I admire that mindset... will a dulled sword be enough for you to stand on top when you refuse to invest in bettering yourself?" Jake asked, looking the Sword Saint straight in the eye.

"I guess time shall tell," he answered, shaking his head.

"Either way... that is another reason I say go for the Treasure Hunt. Dungeons or the Town Defense one will not allow us humans to spar... the tournaments will be structured and annoying, and who is to say the format will even allow those who wish to battle to meet? No, the Treasure Hunt is the only open event where we can all meet. At that time, let's see who wins..." Jake challengingly said as he looked into the eyes of the Saint.

"Me, or the Noboru clan."

With those words, Jake just exited the barrier, getting a weird look from both Jacob and the City Lord, who looked at him leave with puzzlement on their face. Jake hadn't gotten to negotiate for anything but just left... but he felt like the Noboru clan would vote for the Treasure Hunt.

The big smile on the old man's face - shaking his head at the audacity of Jake - being the source of his confidence. No matter how much he talked about doing everything for the clan... he wanted to know who was strongest just as much as Jake.