

Hunter 225

Chapter 225: World Congress: Master Negotiator

Okay, Jake did fuck up one thing during – or after, really – the discussion with Sword Saint. Jake liked walking off after getting the last word in, as he felt like it was the easiest way to come out on top of a discussion and because it allowed him not to need any more arguments.

This resulted in Jake leaving behind two undead with no one really talking to them, as Jacob and the City Lord were already doing their own thing.

It wasn't like he could walk back in either. Both because the barrier blocked him, but more importantly because that would be totally uncool. Luckily, Casper didn't want to be in there either as he also walked out... Priscilla following a few moments later, looking quite conflicted, wondering if she should have stayed or not. In the end, she seemed to have decided to rather go with the city that didn't either openly hate the undead or were bigoted towards them.

When Jake saw them following... well, he decided that he might as well also get them on board. With them, the Treasure Hunt would be damn near ensured. He would also go by Caleb and do as any good big brother and use their familial relation to convince him to go with Treasure Hunt by bringing up old memories, like how Jake always allowed Caleb to use the good controller.

Anyway, the undead faction wanted the Town Defense event because it would allow them to form better relations with other factions of Earth. Jake felt like as long as he could alleviate their fear of humanity suddenly banding together to wipe out the evil undead, they would be more open to voting for the Treasure Hunt.

Jake felt pretty sure about his assessment, but it was always good to confirm as he went up to Casper and asked.

"You guys want the Town Defense mainly to make humanity less assholeish towards the undead, right?" he asked as straightforwardly as he could.

"Yep," Casper answered with a shrug. "Can't see most of the others do anything good for our image. Could you imagine if we actually did well in the tournament and got a good reward? The "righteous crusade to wipe out the unclean" would be just around the corner if that happened. It would have nothing to do with just wanting to take our stuff, not at all."

"People like justifying their own shitty behavior, nothing new there," Jake said, shaking his head in his disappointment of the human race.

On a side note, all of this was said outside any of the platforms, allowing anyone interested to listen in.

Priscilla – despite Jake's cold reception to her earlier – still caught on as she nodded in agreement, her eyes practically shining at the opportunity.

"Indeed, we just want to form good relations with everyone and make valuable allies for the future. We carry no animosity towards anyone; we simply are what we are. Most of us didn't choose to become Risen. I died a few hours before the integration myself, and I was one of the people brought back to life by the system as a Risen along with thousands of others. Everyone who died less than 24 hours before the system integration, in fact," she said, giving a small speech, continuing.

"We Risen are barely different than anyone else... we have classes, professions, families, and friends just like everyone else. Casper here is a rare exception as someone who chose to become a Risen, and the Progenitor knew him beforehand. Has he truly changed?"

Her last words were naturally directed towards Jake.

It was clear she wanted validation, even if a bit of it was bullshit. Casper didn't as much choose to become a Risen as he got blackmailed into it with his dead girlfriend's soul. He also was a bit different than before, though that was primarily due to the constant dark energy that he kept bottled up – no doubt related to his curse magic. Personally-wise, he was pretty much the same, except for those suppressed emotions.

"Yeah, he is still the same downer he always has been," Jake answered, throwing a cheeky smile towards Casper. "Probably still sucks at poker too."

"Fuck you; I'm still convinced you cheated," Casper answered back with an accusatory smile.

"I deny all such accusation."

Wait, did I cheat? Considering I always had a muted version of the bloodline even before the system, it is entirely possible. I did like betting based on intuition more than anything. I should have gone to casinos... also, sorry, not sorry, Casper.

Priscilla just stood smiling as the two talked, elation clear on her face as Jake did all the PR work for them. If being a bit nice to them could help his friend in the long run, he was all for it.

"Should we go discuss a bit more closely behind closed doors?" Priscilla asked.

"Sure," Jake agreed and followed them towards the undead faction's platform. Actually, it was only now he noticed the name of the city. Jake would have personally thrown money on it, either being called Necropolis or The Graveyard or something else cool – or stupid, depends on who you ask – like that.

Instead, he was met with the boring vanilla name Deepshire. Nothing related to death at all except maybe the deep part – something Jake would later learn actually just referred to how they were geographically placed low and how they had many mines and underground networks.

Before he stepped on the platform, he noticed his brother off to the side, leaving another platform, and Jake took the chance as he yelled. "Hey Cal, we are having a small meeting; wanna join?"

He was a good big brother like that, always trying to involve his little brother when he did fun stuff. Jake totally didn't have any ulterior motives... not at all.

Caleb looked his way, threw a quick look at the two people with him, and nodded as he went towards Jake. "Shouldn't be an issue."

He went over, and together they all stepped up on the platform the four of them. From what Jake knew, it was the first time his brother met Priscilla face-to-face, and he was already looking forward to how his brother would react to her "friendly" behavior.

So when she went to greet him after they all stepped on the platform, he had to hide his childish giddiness a bit.

"Greeting Judge, It is an honor to meet you," she said, as she did a curtsy towards him respectfully. "I apologize for not seeking you out earlier, but I am glad we finally got a chance to speak."

"Likewise, the Court and the Risen tend to do well by each other in the multiverse; let's not make Earth any different," Caleb said, as he also greeted her.

Jake stood back, disappointed as hell. He had expected Priscilla to act like she did with him and Casper and make a bit of a fool of herself when Caleb shot back with "I'm married" or something like that, and Jake could laugh at the awkwardness of it all.

Yet Priscilla acted perfectly decent, not even trying to do the slightest. She just seemed like a competent leader and not a gold digger trying to get into the pants of anyone with strong backing. Was it because his brother wasn't blessed by a Primordial? No, Umbra was also pretty awesome in her own right, according to Villy... so maybe... just maybe...

She actually was competent. Yeah, she had to know that Caleb was taken, so she didn't even try any of her shit... damn, I was looking forward to it.

It was sad that Jake would have to actually do political stuff instead of messing with Cal.

"Cal, you'll vote with your big bro for the Treasure Hunt, right?" he asked, with a big smile.

"No, of course not; we are going with the tournament," Caleb answered back, returning the smile with an even bigger one.

"What happened to my obedient little brother, who always did as his awesome older brother asked him?" Jake said, acting hurt.

"He became the leader of a shadow assassin organization," Caleb answered curtly. "My question is why you wouldn't like a 1 vs. 1 tournament. Not confident you'll win?"

"It's not that; I just wouldn't enjoy slogging through 10 days of battles against weaker foes for a handful of good fights... I can find plenty of good fights outside of events. The Treasure Hunt, on the other hand, will likely offer unique and cool challenges to get the treasures... and you can do the fun stuff from day one. No need to wait for some stupid tournament brackets or things like that," Jake answered, really trying to convince his brother.

"Also, who says shadow assassins aren't good at hunting treasures? You can sneak around and steal stuff from others or quickly swipe things and run away! I am sure you would all love it too!"

"But shadow assassins are even better at assassinating people," Caleb countered.

Reasonable... however...

"You can also assassinate people during the Treasure Hunt. It will actually be way easier than as they will be distracted. You can snipe them from long distance unnoticed, emerge from a shadow right as they least expect it or after they just get done fighting a tough foe for a treasure. Then you can both beat them and get the loot. Win-win for everyone but the poor sap who gets robbed and possibly killed." Jake once more reiterated how great the Treasure Hunt was for everyone involved.

"While that does sound convincing, people also tend to group up when it is possible, and it tends to be harder to assassinate people surrounded by allies."

"Not if you bring even more assassins. Group assassinations. Sounds like a great teambuilding exercise, doesn't it?" Jake kept trying.

"Not as great as the afterparty for when we do great in the tournament," Caleb didn't relent.

"Boring," Jake shook his head before turning to Priscilla and Casper. "You guys support the Treasure Hunt, right? No one likes Town Defense anyway."

"I am not certain what we will choose," Priscilla answered noncommittally. "It depends on what is best for the Risen as a whole... not just a few of our experts."

"If you don't, I am going out there right now yelling loudly about how we need a crusade," Jake announced - his mask hiding his emotions a bit too well as Priscilla didn't pick up on the sarcasm as she panicked.

"Wait! I don't think that's necessary, what if w-"

"He's fucking with you," Casper chimed in with a big grin. "But if you do go for it, can I come with you and toss out some curse magic to really solidify the image that we are evil life-hating monsters?"

"It would be my pleasure," Jake chuckled. "But in all seriousness, the Holy Church and Haven will both vote for Treasure Hunt, and we are collecting more votes as it is. Pretty sure Jacob will get the Noboru clan vote locked down, and Miranda is working on another of the first ten cities. With you guys, the Treasure Hunt will be pretty much assured."

"So you're telling us to be on the right side of history?" Caleb asked.

"That, and also... Cal... would mom and dad really want to see their children fight?" Jake asked, going full-throttle on the emotional manipulation. "The tournament might force us to battle. What would mom say?"

"Don't worry, I swear I will surrender if that ever happens, so that won't be a problem; I doubt I can win anyway," Caleb said, not taking Jake seriously at all. "But it does sound like we're screwed. The group we just came from seemed pretty damn disingenuous when they said they would strongly consider the tournament. It might be an idea to voice that we will vote for the Treasure Hunt just to be one of the "cool guys," I guess."

"Treasure Hunt voters are the cool guys," Jake fully agreed, once more regarding the undead. "The Risen are cool, right?"

"Our body temperatures are indeed lower than you humans," Casper confirmed.

"So, you're on board?"

"I don't really care either way, so sure. On one condition, you're gonna come visit and help me with some stuff. Work-related stuff. Oh, and bring some alchemy stuff along; you must have some cool stuff. I want all the stuff," Casper answered. "That sounds fine, right, Priscilla?"

"I'll also promise to walk out of here smiling and looking happy like I just had a swell of a time," Jake added on, looking at the slightly troubled Priscilla. "The Risen are gonna look like the nicest people around."

"You're wearing a mask; no one can see you smile," Caleb commented, not at all supporting his big brother as a good little brother should.

"Irrelevant," Jake shook his head. "But sure, I'll come by, but it will be after the Treasure Hunt. I am sure we're all going to be busy in the next few months grinding out levels. I guess I'll go on an adventure after the event, so stopping by and seeing the evil stronghold of the undead faction makes sense."

"Alright, we'll support the Treasure Hunt vote," Priscilla finally relented. "I hope that you will also support us if we run into difficulties in the future."

"Of course. As long as you guys don't do anything weird, that is. No mass-undeadification-rituals, we clear?"

"Alright, we'll pause the construction when we get back," Casper smiled. "Thanks, mate."

Casper knew that Jake only agreed to help them because of him, which was true. Jake didn't care much about the undead faction – he didn't care much about factions at all, period – instead, he cared about

people. Casper was a friend, and of course, he would help his friend. He had fucked up in the tutorial... he wasn't going to repeat that.

"You're also on board?" Jake asked Caleb, trying to get his brother to confirm the vote for the Treasure Hunt.

"Alright, but I expect a damn nice stack of presents when you come to visit. Oh, and it's fine to wait till after the event," Caleb also relented.

"Of course, I planned on bringing good stuff anyway. Also, while we're here, I can even toss in that I promise not to beat any of you up during the Treasure Hunt. I won't even rob you!" Jake happily said.

"So you would beat me up if I didn't agree?" Caleb asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Of course, you've gotten a bit too cheeky lately. So be happy; you won out big time," Jake joked as he gave him a pat on the back.

"Lucky me."

They sat down and kept talking. Priscilla was a bit hesitant in the beginning but soon joined in. While Jake's first impression of her wasn't that good, she seemed like an okay lass once you got to know her.

Miranda sighed as she returned to Haven's platform. She had spent the last nearly three hours trying to get votes for the Treasure Hunt, but honestly, it wasn't easy. Many of them wanted unreasonable compensation or promises, some of them even requiring a system-enforced defensive pact just for a damn vote.

She wasn't even sure if she had secured a single vote... at least no one willing to sign an agreement. Heck, the majority didn't even let her know what they wanted to vote for.

Soon, Neil and Lillian joined her on the platform before she finally saw Jake walk from the platform right next to them – the one belonging to the city Saya. The Augur exited soon after, and from the looks of it, things had gone well.

Jake entered the barrier and smiled.

"Oh, hey everyone. How did things go? I managed to get Caleb and his city as well as the undead on board, and Jacob, with a solid assist from me, also landed the Noboru clan vote, so we should be good," Jake casually said

... Making Miranda truly feel like she had just wasted the last three hours of her life.