

Hunter 238

Chapter 238: A Distraction

Jake sat regenerating on the ground, observing the trolls in his sphere. He was inside a dungeon, but everything was just like out in the real world. Yet he knew he wasn't... dungeons were special. He knew that he himself could meet the trolls now and befriend them, the next party could kill them, and the one after that could never discover them to begin with.

The same troll could die a thousand times, give the same experience a thousand times, yet when party one thousand and one entered the dungeon, they would still see it. The dungeons were temporal pockets of sorts, so whenever Jake entered it alone, he started another timeline for the dungeon. A new reality. This was common knowledge throughout the multiverse and one of the reasons why dungeons were such valuable natural treasures for monsters and enlightened races alike.

But Jake also knew dungeons wouldn't last forever. One day a natural dungeon would come to an end, and what happened to the monsters then? Where did these dungeon creatures come from, where do they go, where did they come from cotton e-

Anyway.

Were they born there? Had they grown up in the dungeon until one day a door appeared, and invaders came? What about if no one ever entered a dungeon... would time just stand still forever? Jake didn't know the answer to any of these things... but he knew someone who did.

Vilastromoz stood within his realm as he once more tried. The entire realm shook as he mobilized every inch of his power. He put his hands on the obelisk as the runes came alive just like all the other times – his entire mind focused only on this one task.

Usually, he would have his mind split into countless fragments. One could talk to Jake, another theorize some magic, work on a concept, and if he needed something physically done, he could just use his Avatars or, if it was a smaller task that didn't require much power, summon a temporary Incarnation. For him to have hundreds if not thousands of these fragments of his mind up at a time wasn't unusual.

But at this moment, everything was gathered for him to use his full power.

A dark green glow emanated from the entire realm for a few moments before everything faded once more. Blood poured out of the Viper's eyes and mouth as he shook his head. "Failed again..."

It was expected in most ways, but every time inspired an immense feeling of failure and grief. He clenched his hands in anger at himself. It wasn't power... he needed something more, but he didn't know what the fuck it was.

Maybe he should fully return his focus to-

"Sup Villy, just making a phone call to see how you're doing and to shamelessly get advice on things I probably should know to begin with."

The Malefic Viper was stopped in his train of thought as the message came. After Jake's evolution, he could no longer stop them... he could zone them out, but the connection between them had changed. A blessed mortal could not stop the divine message of a god, and now he as a god could not stop the divine message from his own Chosen. It was weird and something he had never encountered before. Yet he appreciated it.

Vilastromoz – or Villy as Jake insisted on calling him – answered with a smirk.

"I'm just dandy, and what studying did my Chosen skip out on this time?" Jake heard Villy's voice say.

The words sounded as usual, but Jake frowned. Villy seemed... down. His tone reminded him of the first time they met in his realm. If someone listened to it, they wouldn't know the difference, but he trusted his instincts, telling him things weren't as they should be.

"Are things alright on your end?" Jake asked with concern.

"Of course, why do you ask?" Villy laughed it off. "What could possibly bother a god?"

"I don't know, but something clearly is," Jake answered. "You listen to my ramblings and constant questions, so of course you can do the same thing back. If anything is bothering you, just tell me. Even if you just need someone to listen. I am probably not the best at giving advice to anyone, much less a god. We're friends, man, so unload on me if you feel like it. Keeping things bottled up isn't easy or healthy. Be you mortal or god."

Jake knew he wasn't the most articulate, but he hoped to get the point across anyway. He always felt a bit bad about how he only ever got things from Villy while he didn't give much in return. So if Villy needed anything, he would be there.

"I appreciate the thought, but no. Maybe in the future. Right now, a distraction is all I need, so hit me. What's up?" Villy answered after a delay. One far longer than usual.

“Alright, just poke me anytime if there is anything,” Jake relented as he asked the actual question he wanted to know. “How do living things and dungeons play together? I am talking of those that live in the dungeon.”

“In what way?”

“Is there any way for dungeon monsters to leave the dungeon?” Jake clarified.

“Not under usual circumstances, no. Unless the dungeon has inherent mechanics allowing you to bring out living creatures, don’t expect it to happen. All dungeon creatures are, for all intents and purposes, considered dead in the context of the outside world,” Villy explained.

“What do you mean by considered dead?”

“When a creature enters a dungeon, it becomes a part of the world that dungeon creates. Its Records – everything it is – becomes bound to that dungeon. From there, two things can happen once a natural dungeon reaches the end of its lifespan. One is that it will simply disappear along with all the creatures bound to it. The second thing that can happen is that it merely stops being a dungeon but becomes its own accessible separate space somewhere as part of the real world without any dungeon mechanics. Often a prolonged period will have passed for all the creatures in the dungeon, but no one will ever have entered it. For them, it would just be as if they had been stuck in a confined world for a while. The second one is absurdly rare, which is why it is better just to consider them dead.”

Jake frowned as he considered this. He could see that it would lead to issues if one could simply make creatures leave with them... it also added the issue of possibly being multiple copies of the same creature out in the real world. For example, what would happen if Jake took the troll out with him, and

then Miranda entered and also took the troll out. That would create two copies of the troll in the real world. It was damn complicated, so he asked.

“As I said, sometimes you can bring creatures out. You’re actually lucky, an old mate did many experiments with dungeons, and this isn’t common knowledge as it really isn’t something that can happen often. If, say, you managed to bring a creature out, and someone else brought the exact same one out... the second one would disappear the moment it entered the real world. This is because they have the same Truesoul, and thus only one can exist. Well, there are ways to kind of circumvent this by doing some advanced stuff way above anything you are capable of doing anytime soon.”

“Does that mean I am screwed if I want to bring this nice troll and the small trolls out with me? And that I should just consider them almost virtual creatures that are already dead?” Jake asked, his frown growing even deeper. He was happy the trolls couldn’t understand him, as the two small ones were play-fighting.

“Depends. As a natural dungeon, it may have some ways to bring them out. You can also do it through some very limited exploits of sorts. Pretty much consider the kind of means deployed to get people out of the tutorial. If you kill them and do a true resurrection on the bodies outside, you ‘fooled’ the system. If you make them do some incredibly advanced ritual and bring them outside right as their souls transition between living and undead, you can bring them out.

“Besides that, there are some skills. Changing their races and thus souls in any way often leaves an opening, though this isn’t anything you can do. Trust me on that one. The only other way is to bind their souls to yours and make them be considered almost an extension of your being, but you have no ways of doing that either, as far as I can tell. This usually requires special items or a very special set of skills. In conclusion, your only real bet is to hope the dungeon has a natural way to bring them out. And I do mean really hope for it. The rewards given out by the system can be unpredictable, but there are many cases of them being at least partly based on what the people doing the dungeon needs and wants.”

"Huh... I did theorize that was the case back in the tutorial, but then I got a bunch of light-affinity equipment instead... speaking of which, I still have that book and staff sitting around... I really need to pawn it off..." Jake mumbled, deep in thought at the new information.

"The dungeon rewards tend to be related to what is in it. So, based on the dungeon you are currently in, it will likely give out life-affinity loot," Villy told him, making Jake nod along.

"Makes sense," the hunter agreed. "Also, no comments in me slaughtering mushroom-lovers?"

"What do you mean? You are dutifully collecting mushrooms right now. I even saw you eat some. That you hate doing it deep inside is exactly what I would expect of a heretic. That you do it anyway because you want the rewards associated with doing so is just what I want out of my Chosen. So keep it up, Heretic-Chosen."

"Touche," Jake grinned. "One final thing... what happens if I leave the dungeon now and come back later? What if I wait a year or something? How does that work with all the time-shenanigans?"

"After you leave, the time in your version of the dungeon will keep going for a short period of time. Usually up to around a day, sometimes shorter, sometimes longer. And I already know that your follow-up questions will be what happens if you just stay in the dungeon forever... well, nothing, really. Time will keep moving inside, but nothing will really happen. Due to how dungeons work, the creatures within cannot level or reproduce above a certain point. They simply don't have the Records for it. So it will just be very boring. Of course, new herbs or ores or anything in that vein will never regrow either."

"Hm, so it won't just randomly implode in on itself while I am in there? Nice," Jake responded.

“The door may disappear though, and the entrance forever buried, meaning you exit somewhere else after an extremely long time has passed, and you will find yourself in a world all but foreign to you, as your prolonged stay in the dungeon has slowly corroded your mind,” Villy said, shooting back with a half-joke, half-warning.

Jake smiled, glad that Villy now sounded a bit more like his usual self. He knew the old snake god was dealing with something, and Jake had a faint idea of what it was... but wasn't going to press. He had enough emotional awareness to know some things shouldn't be pushed but had to come out when the time was right.

“Thanks as always, Villy. Remember, just ping me whenever. The connection is two-way, and as I kind of claimed it a bit, you should also abuse this inescapable bond,” Jake reminded him as he smiled in thanks.

“Yeah... it was good to get my mind off things. As I said, maybe in the future.”

“I'm not in a rush for anything. Besides, when the universe opens up a bit more, we gotta get together. Multiversal beer has to be a thing. So take care of yourself. You may be a big boss snake, but sometimes even a big boss snake needs to sit back and have a cold one with a friend,” Jake said with a smile.

“I may just take you up on that offer... and believe me, there is alcohol even us gods can get smashed on, much less a fragile mortal like you. I'll be sure to pull out some for when the time comes. See you around, Jake, and you take care too.”

He felt the connection fade away as Jake got up. He felt fine now and ready to move further into the dungeon. The troll, on the other hand, still looked quite weak. Jake had already given it two health potions, but they honestly didn't do that much. It had eliminated all the poison by now, but it was still low on health points as far as he could tell.

Jake theorized that the damn thing had more pure health points than himself tens of times over. This did mean it was incredibly hard to kill in a fight, but also that it would take a long time to heal. Heck, even the small trolls needed more than one potion to be topped up, and they were barely E-grade.

How exactly that worked, he didn't know. Maybe some skill that made vitality grant more health points, or some massive percentage amplifier or something... either way, it didn't really matter. The troll couldn't really join Jake in his quest for the Golden Mushrooms as it had kids at home.

He bid the trolls farewell, and the two small ones wanted to follow but were held back by the parent troll. A good call as Jake was about to get some real good slaughtering on. He felt like he had a good idea of what the Deepdwellers were all about now... which meant it was time to turn up the tempo and get this Deepweller genocide started.

Vilastromoz genuinely smiled as he said his goodbyes. Jake didn't know it, but he had impeccable timing indeed. He had even picked up that he, a god, wasn't feeling his best. The mortal had even dared question it and ask him directly. For a moment, Villy had focused on something else than his issues, and with it, his headspace improved.

Duskleaf, the Sisters of the Verdant Lagoon, Snappy... none of them would ever do that. None of them dared to. Even Duskleaf, who seemed so casual, never dared cross the line. He still talked to him formally, and Vilastromoz couldn't remember any time his disciple had ever called him anything else but master.

The sisters and Snappy? They would never dare assume they could do anything to help.

"He sure is a heretic... isn't he?" Vilastromoz asked as he looked towards the large obelisk. "The last time someone told me to take care of myself was you, I think. I know I should, but...."

He sighed. Today had been another failure... he would just have to try again later.

Over 80 eras, he had tried.

Trillions of years.

More than 107 million failures.

But the Malefic One still refused to give up.