

Innkeeper 101

The Innkeeper

Chapter 101: Secret Dream

Lex internally raised an eyebrow as he was surprised at the Hidden Quest notification. The last time he got it was when he completed a hidden requirement, but this time his conversation with Alexander triggered the quest. He couldn't tell what exactly was the difference between triggering a normal quest and a hidden one, but based on the rewards he got last time he was looking forward to it. He quickly read the quest.

Hidden Quest:

Despite your lackluster performance, a guest has become interested in becoming a permanent resident of the Midnight Inn. Develop a permanent guest district! To develop a permanent guest district you must:

Purchase a permanent guest district pass

Allocate area of permanent guest district

Raise Inn rating to 3 Stars

Grow a Winding Road Vine

Have at least 1 Karmic Lily

Time limit: none

Quest reward: subject to change based on performance

Lex was quite surprised. This was the first time he encountered a quest that had multiple requirements, with each one being very difficult to achieve. Along with the details of each step in the quest, Lex also received additional information about the last two parts of the quest. They were extremely difficult, as at least the first three could be completed with the system's help. The last two were plants that Lex needed to grow, but first he would need to find their seeds or the actual plants themselves.

Winding Road Vine was an unusual vine that only grew in the cracks between space, whatever that meant. The Karmic Lily itself had no use, but was used as a supplementary ingredient for many things from alchemy to crafting items to setting up arrays and more. The reason why it was so useful was that it enabled one to influence karma.

He was also given brief requirements from guests to be able to get a permanent residence at the Midnight Inn, which made him breathe a sigh of relief as even the Morrison's would not be able to get a permanent residence, giving him plenty of time to set it up.

"Yes," Lex replied to Alexander, "we offer permanent residences instead of rooms to guests. But before one can get a permanent room they need to fulfill certain requirements. The first one is to spend 1 trillion MP at the Inn."

Lex's smile did not waver as he spoke but Alexander was visibly shook. But he recovered quickly. It made sense. The Inn catered to the whole universe, how can the wealth of a family that only owns one planet compare to the wealth to those that might even own entire solar systems, or more?

"In that case, I'd just like the courtyard for 2 weeks."

"Of course," replied Lex and charged Helen.

The duo was just about to head out when they saw a strange shadow pass them by, and looked up into the air to see Ayesha flying with Little Blue. Alexander only took a moment before he started walking to Main street. He had quickly adjusted his mindset to not be bothered by what he saw at the Inn. Furthermore, he had another objective in coming here. Last time he returned to Earth he received a message from RussianPrincess77. She asked him to send her money in a certain account, and in exchange she will give him some very useful information. Since he had not been disappointed by her before, Alexander transferred the money. She responded by telling him he should see John at the Midnight Inn to get something useful. Most likely, Alexander would have encountered John anyway, so the mischievous girl extorted him for some money before he got the chance.

As Lex watched them go he smiled as he was ready to do something he had been wanting to do for a while now. He simply had to wait for a few guests to appear before he could do what he wanted, yet right before he was about to leave he felt more guests coming. This time the guests were coming through the Golden door, and since its origin planet was Vegus Minima he readied his Butter knife.

Fortunately, the guest that appeared this time was not a zombie. A man came limping out of the door, moving as quickly as he could manage. He was bleeding from his forehead and his right arm and leg seemed to be severely hurt. He must have been running from something because it took him a moment to realize his surroundings had changed. Alarmed, he stopped to survey his new environment and when he saw Lex he quickly took a step back and assumed a defensive position.

Name: Slag

Age: 99

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: Golden Core mid

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Condition:

Debilitating wounds across his body, but his cultivation is secure and will heal quickly given the chance

Remarks: He has the smell of a soldier all over him. He's probably broke. Meh

"No need to be alarmed, dear guest. No one will harm you. Welcome to the Midnight Inn, you may call me the Innkeeper."

As soon as Slag heard the term 'Midnight' he was greatly surprised. All Captain level soldiers and above were briefed a few days ago that they might be embarking on mission 'Midnight' and all nonessential operations were halted for the time. He did not know the details nor the relevance of the term, but he did not believe for even a second that the term being repeated here was a coincidence.

"It appears as though you are injured. Would you like to go to the Recovery room?"

Slag quickly realized that he hadn't responded to the Innkeeper and quickly gathered his thoughts. His priority in this situation was to quickly learn his new circumstances, gather as much information as possible and return to Vegus Minima as soon as possible.

"Where are my manners, excuse me. I am Lieutenant Slag of the 7th Forward Battalion, under the command of General Ragnar of the Jotun Empire. If you have any medical facility then I would be grateful for your timely assistance and be sure to pass on news of your aid to the Empire."

Informing the other of his true background may seem like a stupid idea to some, but Slag had enough training to judge the situation accurately. The Innkeeper was clearly someone with a higher cultivation than himself, and usually it was very difficult to lie or keep secrets when the difference in cultivation between two people was massive. Furthermore, the identity of belonging to a Battalion from the Jotun Empire was nothing to scoff at, and carried sufficient deterrence to assure his safety in most situations. In fact, very few other than Demons would even consider any kind of hostility against him. Yet he was slightly disappointed when he saw the other had no significant reaction at the mention of the Empire.

"Follow me," said the Innkeeper warmly and started leading Slag towards the Recovery room.

"The Midnight Inn offers many services, not just medical attention. Once you have recovered, I encourage you to tour the place. In a couple of days we're going to be having a grand event hosting dignitaries from many planets, if you're free then you might want to stay for the event."

Slag mentally linked the date of the event with the date for operation Midnight and confirmed that this place definitely had something to do with the operation.

When they reached the Recovery room, Slag was dumbfounded to learn that he was expected to pay. He had no money on his person, and no payment tool.

"You just need to agree to pay and decide which of your assets you want to pay with, and the Inn will take care of it. Or, you can forward the bill to your battalion as this is technically an operational expense, don't you think?"

Slag was dumbfounded and confused by what the Innkeeper said, but then found a digital panel that appeared in the air in front of him that required his signature. Should he sign, his expenses from the Inn would be forwarded to the Battalion. Unsure if this was a scam, Slag eventually signed as he was sure no one could scam the Battalion and got in the Recovery Pod.

Leaving his newest guest to recover, Lex was finally free to do what he had wanted earlier. He returned to his residence, removed his suit and wore the Clark Kent glasses. Donning the appearance of Leo, Lex quickly teleported to the Gamer's Den, ready to finally interact with his guests without worry. He found Z sobbing in the corner as he watched an episode of My truth in December (can you guess this one) and shook his head. This kid had too much time, Lex should think of ways to go and play outside. He froze as soon as that thought came to him.

'Great, now I'm sounding like my parents,' he complained, but quickly put it behind him. He would start laying the road for his secret dream of hosting an interplanetary gaming tournament today!

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Chapter 102: The mind of the weak, the will of the strong

With a wide grin Leo walked out of the Gamer's Den and looked around. Other than the patrolling guards he didn't see anyone. He had already planted the seeds of becoming a gamer in Helen so she would be an easy pull, therefore he should look for other unsuspecting targets. Lily and Chen were decent options. As natives of Earth he doubted he could entice Hera and William, and Jimmy was still too young. He also doubted that he could get Slag to put up his feet and game casually. With his decision made, he strode into the Guild room to find the pair having a discussion with the staff. Clearly they were interested in what the Guild offered.

"Hello, hope I'm not disturbing anything important. I just wanted to introduce myself," Leo said enthusiastically. "My name's Leo, the owner of the humble Gamer's Den next door."

Lily and Chen looked at the young man, responding politely with a "hello,". They were not sure what services the Gamer's Den offered, but nothing here was simple so they dared not dismiss it.

"I'm sure you're wondering what the Gamer's Den does, and what we have to offer. Let me cut right to the chase, what we offer is nothing short of enriching your life and elevating your state of mind."

Leo's words clearly attracted their attention. But Leo smirked, he would not tell them all the details directly. Building suspense and curiosity were an integral part of tricking- no, of enlightening non-gamers into entering a new world.

"I don't want to take up too much of your time, clearly you are busy. But when you get the chance, do drop by. We have something for everyone."

"We will definitely drop by," said Lily politely. It was evident that they would not leave until they finished their business with the Morrison family, so he didn't even try to pull them away right now.

He wondered where the others were. Without the Host Attire connecting him to the Inn he could not do his usual scan to locate all his guests. It was an unfortunate drawback, maybe once his authority increased he would be able to do it even without the suit.

He exited the Guild room just in time to see Alexander and Helen enter the Battle Ax. Finally, John would get his first customer. Since no one else was in view, he retreated to the Gamer's Den and teleported back to his residence and donned the Host Attire. He would use it to spy on how things were going with Alexander and monitor everyone else. As soon as they entered Main street he would return as Leo and proceed with his plan.

In the Battle Ax, Alexander and Helen politely told Doe that they wanted to meet with John. After only a few moments John let them into his office. Alexander did not show any reaction at the appearance of the man covered in chains, but Helen looked at him oddly.

"Well, then, which one of you wants it done? Or is it both of you?" John asked excitedly. He finally had some customers and could earn some MP.

"Before anything, could you tell me what exactly you are going to do?"

"Huh? Don't you know?" John asked them, surprised. Then it occurred to him that he had put up no details outside his shop, nor advertised his service. How was anyone supposed to know what he did? A significant oversight, but it was not too late to fix it now.

"Well let me explain. I design spirit techniques most suited to a person. You can tell me what kind of technique you want and based on your cultivation, affinity, strength and many more things I will design the technique for you. That's not to say that if you teach it to others they won't be able to perform the technique as well, but if, say for example you can use 100% of the techniques capabilities, others might be able to use 50%."

For once, the duo was not surprised. They had surprise fatigue. Nothing could surprise them anymore.

Nodding as if he had heard the most natural thing, Alexander took out the six floating blades behind him.

"These are my weapons. I can move them freely within 100 meters of myself and can imbue them with my spirit energy regardless of how far they are. I have various techniques that allow me to attack with them, but I want a stronger attack. A secret technique or trump card, whatever you want to call it, I want a technique that will maximize their damage."

John smiled at the young man who did not even ask him the price. If it were up to him, he would charge him a ridiculous amount, unfortunately Doe handled the transactions and the price for each cultivation level was fixed. Furthermore, the Innkeeper would directly deduct 50% of all his income as payment for keeping him here. The fee for making a technique for a Foundation realm cultivator was 1000MP, so John would make 500MP - just enough to go to the Mystery trial.

"I want a technique to detect if someone is spying on me," Helen interrupted his thoughts with her own request. John, however, was not irritated at the interruption but happy instead. 2 customers. Even though the fee for a Qi training cultivator was only 300MP, income was still income.

"Let's start with the young lady first," John said as he began questioning Helen in detail.

The duo stayed at the Battle Ax for well over an hour, adding an expense of another 1300MP under Helen's prestige counter. During that time Will and Hera visited the Guild room as well. Recognizing each other from their previous visit, the two groups started chatting. Learning that Lily and Chen were

here for trade, Hera quickly offered them a few deals as well. Since they already had an agreement with the Morrisons they did not give up any of their current haul, but agreed to conduct future trades with them as well.

Eventually Will and Hera left as well, and Chen and Lily decided it was unwise to simply wait for the Morrisons. They asked the staff member to inform them when the Morrisons came, and left to investigate the Gamer's Den.

Lex immediately returned to the Den in the appearance of Leo and awaited his clients. Behind the counter Z was dozing off on the keyboard. Even though the child had his own residence, he barely left the Den. He had fallen asleep watching anime, again. Leo really would have to think of a solution for this.

But his thoughts were interrupted by Chen entering the shop, looking around curiously.

"Welcome guests, I'm glad you decided to drop by," Leo said, rubbing his hands like a merchant ready to rip some people off.

Chen and Lily looked around the shop, but did not recognize the computers. Even though their own civilization was more advanced, the way their technology advanced was different so they did not have computers that looked like this.

"I must admit, I was curious about how this place could enrich my life," said Lily.

Leo laughed. Of course this place could enrich their lives, but he could not do so by saying they should play games. People who had spent their entire lives fighting for survival, combating vicious enemies and barely scraping by would not have the temperament to relax and play games. They would not be able to immerse themselves in the game with that mentality. Leo would have to prime them first.

"How the Gamer's Den does that is very simple, yet at the same time very sophisticated. Please, have a seat. Let me ask you a few questions first."

Lily sat down on one of the gamer chairs and looked at Leo, awaiting his instructions.

"Now close your eyes and relax. Let your body loosen up, relax your shoulders, and your back. For a moment, remove all the thoughts of your various responsibilities from your mind."

For a few moments Leo stopped talking, letting Lily reach the mental state he had described. "Now, tell me, if you could do anything you wanted, what would you do? If you could learn anything, what would it be? Don't think about what the world demands from you, about others' expectations. For now, simply tell me, in your heart, with all the distractions gone, what do you want?"

Leo's voice echoed in Lily's mind, as if hypnotizing her. But contrary to what Leo said, she was unable to let go of her worries. One by one, all the important moments in her life flashed in her mind. And as they flashed through her mind, it wasn't all the pain, the struggle, the fighting that affected her. It was the loss of her settlement that sat heaviest in her mind. Watching the people she had protected die one by one, unable to do anything else. Making the difficult decision to move, and look for safety elsewhere. Letting all her trusted soldiers go, one by one, on suicide missions to protect her caravan, and when the number of soldiers finally dwindled, ordering her own brother to sacrifice himself to protect the caravan. And after all that, when they finally found salvation under the protection of the empire, losing all of her followers in a few days. She could not blame them for wanting a better life. But when they ultimately all left her, despite all her sacrifices to protect them, they left her feeling hollow. It was the most painful day of her life.

But she was not dragged down by the pain, or the memory of it. Weak-minded people, people who could not endure pain to grow stronger, were the first ones to die in the zombie apocalypse. The pain only made her feel one thing - the desire to grow stronger. To be better. No, not better. To be the best.

"I want to be the best leader. To be able to lead my followers through rain and drought, through war and terror, and come out only stronger, not weaker."

The conviction in her voice was strong and moved Leo. He understood immediately what the woman was saying. She wanted to play a colony management game.

"Great, now let me get you started," Leo said, as he searched for a very specific game and turned it on.

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Chapter 103: Filthy Human

Leo did not even need to browse through the list, he directly searched Brimworld and started the game. While he turned the game on in one screen, he opened some tutorial videos on another screen next to her.

"I suggest you go through the tutorial once before starting a colony, but if you're not able to understand the mechanics thoroughly or get confused, you can watch the videos on the other screen."

Lily nodded and after quickly understanding the role of the mouse and keyboard began her journey. The price for playing games at the Gamer's Den was only 1 MP per day so Lex directly paid the amount for their first experience himself. Then he turned his attention towards Chen who was silently looking at Lily. Only he had some idea of the pain his sister endured, but it was not the way of the survivors of Vegus Minima to point it out. She was not weak, and did not need his pity. The best thing he could do for her was grow stronger himself.

Chen looked directly at Leo and said, "I don't need anything like my sister. I just need to get acquainted with my own strength. I recently raised my cultivation and I still feel like I'm not using my strength to the best of my capabilities."

Hearing Chen's request Leo frowned a bit. Clearly Chen wanted to play a game that included physical movement, so VR could work for that. But it would not allow him to use his strength and experiment freely. The best thing for that would be going to the Training room. But while fighting dummies was challenging, Leo felt that it still didn't provide the immersion and nuances that a game provided with. Training would always only feel like training, and would not provide the weight and tension of a real combat situation that games could build using rich environments and timely music cues.

If only he could integrate the Training room dummies with his Gamer's Den...Wait. Leo's eyes lit up. Why couldn't he do that? Mary had told him that he should find loopholes in the system to get the result he wanted. The Training room was strictly a system provided service and could not be changed by him, but the Gamer's Den was created by him directly using the Host Interface. So why was he limited to having a regular gaming setup? He could make it as advanced or different as he wanted so long as he had enough MP.

Opening the Midnight Market in his mind he searched for training dummies or robots with high strength and durability - he didn't want to use an A.I. staff since he was treating them like real people. He found one a permanent training robot that could be programmed at Initial Foundation realm for 35,000 MP! This price seemed like a lot when considering he got 260 guards for 450,000 MP, all of them at higher cultivation levels. That came out to be around 1730 MP per guard. But those guards were temporary,

and would disappear once the event period ended, the training robot was permanent. Or at least until it was damaged.

"Please, follow me," Leo said casually, leading Chen upstairs to the VR rooms. The entire top floor was divided into only 3 VR rooms so there was plenty of space for Chen to move around and fight in there. But to do what Leo had in mind, he would still need some new additions so he spent 3000 MP renovating the rooms and reinforcing them.

This would no longer be only a VR room, but also an Augmented Reality (AR) room. The training robot was waiting at the opposite end of the room but Leo didn't address it yet. He set the room to the theme of a game called Immortal Combat, and suddenly the appearance of the room changed. It looked like they were standing in the remains of a difficult battle, with debris and corpses everywhere. Music started playing in the background and though at first Chen thought it was strange, he quickly realized that the music fit the atmosphere well. The appearance of the Training dummy changed as well, and he looked like a demon garbed in yellow clothing. His movement and combat style was adapted to a specific character from the game.

"You can change the difficulty by saying Easy, Regular or Hard before you start the fight. If you get too used to the combat you can also change the enemy combat style by selecting the enemy you want to face. All you need to do is say menu to open up the character selection panel.

"Furthermore, you won't be fighting to defeat the enemy. Both you and the enemy will have a health bar above your heads. If your health bar runs out, it will automatically be considered your loss, similarly if the enemies health bar runs out it will be considered your win. Please, enjoy."

Leo left Chen to explore his newest installed feature. For the AR segment he was planning on charging more, maybe around 200 MP a day but for now he wouldn't charge Chen. He had to get them hooked first.

Leo chuckled as he went downstairs. Lily was already engrossed in the game in the few minutes she'd been playing, and wore an extremely serious face as she navigated the obstacles.

"Z, keep an eye on the guests. If they need anything make sure to help them out, alright?"

The boy nodded firmly before returning to watch some more anime. Leo didn't know which one he was watching but it occurred to him the boy was watching multiple anime concurrently. Somehow, that just seemed wrong. But traumatized by the thought that he may be acting like his parents, Leo said nothing and returned to his residence. He scanned the Inn once again to check everyone's location, but no one was walking around. Alexander and Helen were still at Battle Ax and Will and Hera were in their courtyard having a meeting. He waited for a while for someone to become accessible for him to trap, but after a while he got tired. Instead of waiting he decided to meditate and check up on everyone once he was done.

A few hours went by and as the sun set, the Inn looked beautiful under the warm, yellow light of all the sky lanterns. Lex just finished a round of meditation and immediately scanned the Inn just in time to catch Lily and Chen walking towards the manor, both seriously discussing their experience at the Gamer's Den. What surprised him was that Alexander and Helen were sitting in the restaurant in the manor, and so were Will, Hera and Jimmy. Ayesha was also sitting in the corner, looking tired, and maybe sad.

He realized that almost all of his guests would soon be gathered in the restaurant in the manor. If he appeared as the bartender, casually wiping the bar with a cloth he could recreate the perfect mental image of what he imagined an Inn was like the first time he thought of the Inn. Of course, he was not about to wipe the bar, but he changed into his Host Attire and teleported to the restaurant.

Alexander and Helen were having burgers, Ayesha was wallowing over a large plate of fries, Jimmy was having dinosaur shaped nuggets, his mother was only having a cup of coffee and Will having a cup of mint green tea. The food items weren't exactly what Lex envisioned when he thought of food served at an Inn, but who cared?

Lily and Chen sat down in a corner and ordered two steaks, two salads and a lot of fruit. They weren't picky eaters but understood better than everyone else here the importance of nutrition. Even Foundation realm cultivators hadn't gotten rid of their dependance on food and improper nutrition not only affected their health and combat performance, it affected cultivation as well. Not eating properly was a mistake they would never make.

Lex enjoyed the pleasant atmosphere. Everyone was gathered together in the same room, and though they kept to themselves, their general presence created a merry environment. A short while later, Slag also joined in. He was not completely healed, but he was healed enough that he gave priority to his mission of reconnaissance. The room went silent for a second when he entered, as everyone turned to look at the new guest, but they all quickly resumed their own conversations. Lily and Chen recognized his uniform and started whispering to one another, trying to not attract his attention.

Slag came and sat at the bar, directly opposite to Lex.

"Would you happen to have a nutritional supplement drink?"

"Yes, but wouldn't you rather prefer a fruit juice or something? It doesn't sound very appealing."

Slag shook his head, indicating he was fine with choice in drink, then turned around to look at all the guests in the room.

"So these guests are all from Minima Vegus?"

"I cannot share the private details of our guests. But in general, we accept guests from all over the universe so naturally Minima Vegus is included."

"Entire universe?" Slag repeated, confused. "How do they get here?"

"Using our keys, naturally. Or they encounter the golden door, the same way you did. Either way, everyone is teleported here directly."

Slag frowned, but said nothing. Teleportation, even across a solar system, was very costly. He could not fathom what it would require to have teleportation on such a large scale.

While they were talking Lex felt another guest entering the Inn, but since he was in the middle of a conversation with Slag he mentally told Gerard to greet the guest once he made sure it wasn't a zombie. But only a few seconds later a loud roar reverberated through the manor, "KNEEL YOU FILTHY HUMAN!"

The Innkeeper

Chapter 104: Useless Scrub

The conversations in the restaurant hushed. All the guests looked at each other, then turned to look at the Innkeeper who stood behind the bar.

"Excuse me for a moment," the Innkeeper said to Slag calmly, as if he was in no hurry, but then disappeared from his place. The resident teenagers, namely Alexander, Helen and Ayesha rushed to the window to peek at what was happening outside. After a few moments, the rest joined them.

Outside, a pale and trembling Gerard stood before an eight feet tall beast that looked something akin to a Liger. Its whiskers were thick and long, waving in the air with ferocity. Its feline eyes stared angrily at the human before it, its fangs exposed threateningly.

Lex quickly looked at its status.

Name: Useless Scrub

Age: 432

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: Doesn't matter

Species: Dead meat

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: No

Remarks: Those who disrespect the Inn do not deserve to live!

If Lex wasn't in such a serious situation, he would have chuckled. The system was clearly pissed!

"What seems to be the issue here?" Lex asked calmly. He thought that as the great and noble Innkeeper, he needed to handle the situation maturely and-

"ANOTHER CRETIN! HOW DARE YOU STAND WHILE IN MY PRESCIENCE?" the Liger roared. Its anger lit its fur in a blue flame causing the air to ripple from the heat.

"Calm down, you are-" Lex's speech was cut short by the Liger roaring in anger and smashing its paw towards him. Its claws extended out, covered in blue flames as well. Yet before the claw could even reach near Lex it was stopped mid air by a hand. The hand did not belong to Lex's bodyguard, who would have simply disintegrated the Liger, but one of the ten security guards above the Nascent realm that Lex had rented for the Midnight Games.

The Liger tried to pull back its hand, but realized it could not. Sensing that the situation may be getting out of hand the Liger tried to retreat, but discovered that its entire body was frozen solid by an extremely domineering aura. It could not move, it could not speak and it could not even initialize its spirit energy anymore.

Looking at the Liger, Lex frowned. Screw maturity, now Lex was pissed. But he did not want to kill the Liger directly, the way the Liger had tried to do to him. No, he was not so easily satisfied. Even if he knew his emotions were running amok, this time he did not try to control them. Sometimes, it was better to let himself feel whatever it was he was feeling.

Silently Lex spent 2500 MP then looked at the guard and said, "I've created a detention room in the Greenhouse. Take this...well it's no longer a guest, so take this deviant and hold him in the detention room. I will join you shortly."

The guard nodded with an emotionless face and effortlessly used his spiritual sense and carried it in the air behind him as he casually walked towards the greenhouse.

"How are you feeling, are you okay?" Lex asked, looking at Gerard. The old man was still trembling, but he tried to put on a brave face.

"I'm good sir, thank you for asking."

"Go to the Recovery room and have Nurse Jubilation check you out. Then take a rest, you've earned some time off."

"Thank you sir," Gerard replied, and teleported away.

Lex looked back at his guests who were peeking from the window and smiled at them, then disappeared as well. In the forest near the greenhouse, a square building had cropped up. It was gray and had no windows, only a single door in the front. This was the detention room Lex had spent 2500 MP making. It was small compared to his other buildings such as the Gamer's Den and the Barbershop because Lex didn't need much out of it. It was a small, reinforced and soundproof building where Lex was planning on interrogating the Liger...sorry, where Lex was planning on interrogating Useless Scrub. The reason it was near the greenhouse was because he didn't want customers accidentally finding it.

Inside the room was simply an incredibly bright room with chains on the far wall, and a chair for Lex to sit in. He waited a few minutes before the guard finally showed up with Useless Scrub who now looked incredibly afraid. It had been trying for a long time to get loose, but still could not move.

"I want to know everything about it. I want to know where it came from, what its background is, what it does, everything," Lex instructed the security guard. While Lex wanted information, that did not mean he was condoning violence or torture. He was angry, not cruel. The security guard was of such a high cultivation level, if he had no methods to extract a truthful confession then Lex would be disappointed. Even simple intimidation should probably work.

Back at the manor everyone returned to their seats, not at all surprised by the outcome. Yet despite that, the mood in the room was much more serious. The beast that had attacked clearly gave off an aura of a Golden Core beast, many of the guests there recognized that. It was the security guard that had most of them confused, he was so immensely powerful but gave off no aura at all. Only Slag saw some signs of what the guards' cultivation level could be, only because of the kind of exposure he had as a Lieutenant. He was suddenly very happy that he left the Recovery Pod early.

"Well, at least we know the upcoming event will be secure," said Will. He was speaking to Hera but his voice was loud enough for everyone to hear.

The man's words immediately caught Slags attention. The soldier immediately made sure he looked presentable before approaching the old man.

"Excuse me, I couldn't help but overhear. Did you say there's going to be an event here? Do you know what it's about?" Slag paused for a moment, before continuing, "Where are my manners? Let me introduce myself first. Lieutenant Slag of the 7th Forward Battalion of the Jotum Empire, at your service."

Slag analyzed the two as he introduced himself. The Innkeeper was a different matter but he was sure he could easily read these two who had a lower cultivation than him. Their lack of reaction at the mention of the Jotun Empire told him they either also had a similarly powerful background or were unaware of the Empire. He was more willing to bet on the latter, which only meant one thing. They were from an uncharted part of the universe. That in itself was very important information.

"My name is Will," said the old man. "This is Hera and little Jimmy. Please, have a seat." Slag took a seat at the table with them and carefully analyzed them without making it obvious. Their cultivation levels were pathetically low, that much Slag could tell even without scanning them with his spiritual sense. For now he was avoiding scanning his guests with his spiritual sense as he felt his host might not like that.

"In around a week's time, the Innkeeper is planning on having an event for the guests of three different worlds, namely Earth, Vegus Minima and Nibiru. In two days, the Innkeeper will release the details of the event so that interested guests may prepare. There will be a cultural portion of the event, as well as a combat one."

"Do you know the purpose of the event?" he asked, slightly confused. Why would half of it be cultural and half combat? And why was the event targeted towards these three planets? What was the Innkeeper trying to achieve? How will it benefit him? Little did he know that Lex's bodyguard was also wondering the exact same thing since he arrived.

When Will indicated that he did not know the exact purpose of the Innkeeper, Slag asked "I am not familiar with Earth and Nibiru. Are they a part of some Empire? Or alliance?" He was hoping to get more information about why these two planets would be selected in addition to Vegus Minima but his question only confused the two. Will and Hera looked at one another, unsure of how to answer. Will was fairly certain that Earth had never contacted any other civilization out in space, so could not join any alliance nor was it under the rule of any empire. The closest thing he could think of was the Morrison family owning. Speaking of the Morrisons...

Will looked towards Alexander and Helen who were sitting nearby. Perhaps it was best if they were involved in this conversation as well. Will himself wasn't so sure if he should share information about Earth to begin with. But he also did not want to completely end this conversation as this Lieutenant could be a great source of information on other civilizations.

"I think I know someone else better suited for this conversation. Follow me," the old man got up and walked towards the teenagers.

"Excuse me, your highness," Will said, bowing to Alexander. "I was meeting with Lieutenant Slag of the Jotun Empire, who was curious about Earth. I thought perhaps it would be better that you answered his questions."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 105: Painful decisions

Alexander looked at Will and then Slag. He immediately understood the situation. Foreign civilizations might have ulterior intentions and sharing information about Earth might end up being detrimental. Alexander himself raised the same concern with his grandfather. His grandfather told him that they could stop people for some time, but as more people started frequenting the Inn they would not be able to stop people from talking. To paraphrase what he said next, he should use his advantage to glean as much information about others as he could. The actual phrase about 'stripping and whipping' others Alexander didn't want to think about.

"Please, no need for such formalities," Alexander said to Will, and gestured to them to have a seat.

"Lieutenant Slag, please have a set as well. My name is Alexander."

The Lieutenant saluted Alexander but did not bow. As a proud member of the Jotun Empire he did not need to bow before others, but he was still respectful. This youth seemed to be someone important on Earth and had a very decent cultivation for his age. It was not unprecedented to him, but he would definitely be acknowledged as someone very capable even in the Empire.

"I am not familiar with the Jotun Empire, so please excuse any lack in my etiquettes," Alexander said, taking the lead in the conversation. "Is this your first time at the Inn?" Instead of asking directly about the empire, Alexander asked about how much they frequent the Inn. This would give the other an opportunity to talk a little about himself and introduce information about the empire that Alexander could then use to further the conversation. It was quite fortunate that he began the conversation this way, because in Alexander's mind the empire was perhaps based on a continent, or a planet. It did not even occur to him that it spanned entire Galaxies.

"Haha yes, this is my first time visiting the Midnight Inn. As for etiquette, no need to worry at all, the empire is quite liberal in such matters. After all, with so many galaxies and cultures under the empire's control, who can keep track of etiquettes? Since you are not familiar with the empire, I will give a brief introduction.

"The Jotun Empire is one of the leading forces in the known universe, with control over various galaxies, and a proud member of the Henali alliance. We have a proud history of over 400,000 years and have played a vital role in reclaiming numerous worlds from the grasp of demons."

Alexander did not show any look of surprise or shock as he heard Slag's introduction, though the same could not be said of Will. Not even considering the matter of whether Alexander actually believed what Slag said, the Inn had trained him in the subtle art of not being surprised.

"It is very impressive to be able to maintain control over so much space," Alexander said after a moment of careful consideration. "We on Earth are still gaining control over our solar system."

Alexander's answer was vague, but gave Slag enough detail to let him know the background of Earth. From what Slag knew, there were no inhabited planets outside the Vegus System in its proximity, and if the empire hadn't interfered, it could be considered a planet with a weak population. Based on Alexander's explanation, Earth might not be much better than Vegus Minima. In that case, maybe the Inn was promoting the growth of weak planets.

Suddenly Slag felt enlightened, as if he had gleaned some inner purpose behind the mysterious man's actions. It was not enough to uncover his complete intentions, but it was a start.

"Tell me, Lieutenant Slag, will your empire be participating in the upcoming event?" Alexander asked, waking the man from his reverie. He still did not know if what he claimed was true, but if it was there would be no competition in the combat portion at least.

"I cannot speculate on the intentions of the empire, but I see no reason not to. The Innkeeper has been very hospitable and I'm sure whatever he has planned will be worth the effort."

Both of them were speaking politely and vaguely, but neither of them were lying. Will, who was good at reading people, could understand the subtleties of what was going on, but did not feel qualified enough to participate.

"Tell me, young Alexander, have you ever wanted to explore the universe? You seem like a very talented and bright man, and the empire loves to nurture young talents. If you..."

"You know, at a glance your routine sure looks like that of a kidnapper," a booming voice interrupted Slag, attracting everyone's attention. A lean and handsome man was sauntering through the restaurant door. Without his truckload worth of muscles Marlo looked a lot less intimidating, but Slag immediately felt like someone had their hand wrapped around his heart. It was not the feeling of danger, or an impending threat, but the feeling of impending certain death.

Slag immediately stood up and readied himself for a fight. Even though his instincts were telling him he could not survive a clash, and his mind was telling him that the Innkeeper would not allow a fight, as a soldier of the empire he feared no enemy and shied away from no fight.

'This must be Alexander's protector', Slag thought. 'He must have assumed I have ulterior motives.'

Before Slag could rationalize the situation some more Marlo roared, "I'm a hundred times more talented than my stupid student. If you want to poach someone, poach me!"

With that, the man burst into a round of laughter as he came and sat down at the table.

"Velma, give me food. And lots of it, I haven't eaten in days."

"What would you like," she asked, appearing beside the former behemoth.

"Anything. Everything. Bring me different dishes, and bring me lots of them. I'm not used to being so tiny, I feel uncomfortable. I need to put some more meat on my bones."

"Chef's choice, I understand," she said, before disappearing once again.

Turning back to Slag, Marlo gave a wide grin. He was feeling great today, he had almost fixed the issue with his blood. He came out to celebrate and overheard Slag's introduction. His instincts were telling

him Slag was not lying, so he immediately became curious. Earth could no longer satisfy him, he wanted a larger stage. If this so-called Jotun Empire was poaching talents, he would happily volunteer.

"Now tell me Slag, what do I need to do to explore the universe?"

Lex was standing silently in the detention room, looking directly at Useless Scrub. The investigation was much easier than he had anticipated. Faced with a much stronger enemy, the Liger was extremely cooperative. On the question of what planet he was from, the Liger was completely lost. He had no concept of what a planet was.

A few more questions later Lex could safely deduce that it was from Nibiru, as previously suspected. It was an overlord and in its territory it treated humans as slaves or servants. He did not completely oppress them, but only because he discovered that too much fear and oppression would only reduce their productivity. Just because he was arrogant did not mean he was stupid. Humans were the best farmers, miners, carpenters and all-in-all general workers around. It grew up in an environment of the survival of the fittest, and after many years of not only surviving but thriving it became extremely arrogant. Seeing a human standing upright in its prescience the Liger could not tolerate it, as it considered humans beneath it. To be clear, it was not discriminating towards humans specifically. All non-feline animals in its opinions were base creatures. As a ruler, it treated its feline followers extremely well and had created a very intricate society based on promoting its followers' strength. With such a mind and experience, if it had not offended the system and then Lex, the Liger could have greatly benefited from the Inn. But its fate would be very different now.

Lex's anger had already waned by now. His impulsive desire to have the guard kill the beast had also diminished.

Lex looked the beast directly in the eyes as he thought about what to decide. Lex saw intelligence, fear, and confusion. No longer being threatened for his life, Lex thought he would feel guilty if he ordered his death. After all, the situation arose from the beast's ignorance. If he was taught there was a larger world outside the one it knew, and that humans and other animals weren't inherently worse than it then perhaps the Liger would not react that way in the future. Perhaps, the Liger could be reeducated and reintroduced into its world to bring a larger positive impact. These were the thoughts going through Lex's mind. Or rather, his heart.

For in his mind he knew that regardless of the reason, the animal had tried to kill him without a second's hesitation. He could not show mercy to such an animal, now or in the future. So while his heart was still full of reluctance he simply ordered, "kill it." The guard shot a single ray of spirit energy into the Liger's skull, and it died like the Useless Scrub the system had named it after.

Lex had killed zombies before, and wolves. Both of them were in situations where his life was in danger. This was the first time he was responsible for a death while he himself was not being actively threatened, and while his heart was full of guilt, this was a decision he made with his mind. He could allow himself to feel pain over a difficult decision, but he could not allow himself to get into the habit of making stupid decisions out of guilt.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 106: Shenanigans

Once the Liger was dead, Lex told the guard to pass the body to the gardener. The body of a powerful beast would probably serve as a wonderful fertilizer. Lex didn't know the exact details of how to use it but he didn't doubt that the gardener or turtle knew how to. Once that was done, Lex stayed in the detention room for a few moments longer, looking at where the Liger was held. Just as he was about to leave, his bodyguard appeared beside him.

"Do you mind if I ask you a question?" the bodyguard asked. His voice was deep and smooth, making it very pleasant to hear.

"Go ahead," Lex responded.

"Why do you care so much about the beast? Why did it affect you?" The bodyguard was genuinely curious. In his mind, the Innkeeper was an existence close to itself, otherwise the bodyguard would have been able to view the Innkeepers' cultivation. At their level, a lot of things became irrelevant. So then the bodyguard could not understand why Lex was burdening himself so much by caring, or to be more specific, by having an emotional response to killing an enemy?

"I just think it's a pity," Lex said, looking back at where the body of the beast used to be. "It was not a bad leader, and it stumbled upon an immense opportunity by coming here. It could have not only raised its own cultivation but also of all its followers, and exposed them to a much wider horizon than the one they lived with. Yet instead of availing the opportunity, in its arrogance it chose to become my enemy. Even when I tried to give it a second chance, it wasted it."

The bodyguard shook his head. What Lex said was true, the Liger did waste an amazing opportunity, but he did not understand why Lex cared one way or another about the beast.

"It doesn't matter if you understand or not," said Lex, feeling slightly contemplative after the incident. "Your belief or understanding of something only affects how you experience life, nothing else. Whether you believe you are the best, or the strongest, or better than others does not affect the universe at all. It only affects how you perceive the universe around you. And if one day, you encounter someone or something that challenges your belief, how well you can adapt will determine your outcome. The beast believed it was superior to humans, and thus lost the opportunity to better itself using an opportunity provided by humans. Similarly, if you believe that you are the best, you will never surpass your current self since you have already deemed it the best."

The bodyguard quietly listened, trying to dissect what Lex had said. He was attempting to see the relevance or purpose behind Lex's actions using this logic. Whether he would be able to succeed or not didn't matter, for Lex only felt like being randomly philosophical. With his emotions vented, Lex put on a wide grin and returned to the manor.

He returned to the unusual scene of Marlo stuffing his face with spaghetti and meatballs with his left hand and arm wrestling Alexander, Helen and Jimmy with his right. A pale and obviously defeated Slag was standing in the corner, observing the situation. Hera was watching with a smile, and she watched her son finally interact with others. Even the previously morose Ayesha was standing in the crowd, cheering on the kids.

Harry and John had also appeared in the room and seemed to be egging them on. Harry was playing intense music on his phone, as if to set the scene. That made Lex realize he should hire a musician, but he put it at the back of his mind and watched his guests goof off.

He did not know how the situation became like this, but he was suddenly tempted to offer Marlo another job as the resident joker.

Just as Marlo finished his food his right arm came crashing down, defeating the kids without any suspense.

"Who's next?" the now giant wannabe Marlo screamed as he swapped out the empty plate for a dish of lasagna. Lex felt personally offended when he saw Marlo eat the lasagna with a spoon.

Surprisingly, Chen stood up and sat opposite to Marlo, replacing the defeated kids. As he grabbed Marlo's hand, Lily tied a rope around their hands and stood on the side, ready to pull Marlo's hand down.

"I'm going to need some help, who else hasn't gone yet," Lily asked, looking around the room. Harry raised his hand as he hopped towards Lily and grabbed the rope. He changed the music as well, pumping himself up. At this point no one noticed Lex disappearing, and Leo running into the room. Lex's bodyguard simply lost track of the Innkeeper, but did not put it to heart. His job was only to protect the Innkeeper while he was in the Inn. If he left of his own accord, the bodyguard did not need to be bothered.

Leo grabbed onto the rope excitedly as well, asking Harry, " what's going on?"

Harry did not react at all to Leo's sudden appearance and said, "The loud guy sealed his body cultivation and challenged everyone to an armwrestling match. He said he won't use any strength while he eats, but once he finishes you will win the match. The goal is to beat him before he finishes his meal."

At this point Chen started trying to push Marlo's hand down, and the others pulled on the rope. As one of the weakest cultivators there Lex did not expect his contribution to matter, but he was getting severe FOMO (fear or missing out) just standing there watching. The trio pulled hard on the rope and it seemed for a moment that Marlo's hand moved down a bit, but no one could be too sure. Only a few moments later Marlo had finished the lasagna like a vacuum sucking up dirt, and slammed Chen's hand down!

"Next," he roared, though whether he meant the next meal or armwrestler, no one could be sure. Velma hopped towards him and put down a plate of fresh BBQ, politely handing him a fork as well. At this point, almost everyone in the room had already lost. Just when everyone thought that no one would step up, one of the suited guards sat opposite to Marlo. This guard's cultivation was Peak Golden Core, so he was not weak at all. Yet the look Slag gave the guard was one of ridicule.

The people in the room cheered as the new match started, and someone started a chant of "kick Marlo's butt!". Jimmy was the most vocal with that chant, and stood up on a table to watch the exciting match. Hera almost cried, watching her son enjoying the festivity. Jimmy had been so reclusive the past few months, he was finally behaving like a child again.

The guard surprised everyone by putting up a strong fight. Marlo's hand moved down till it was at a 45 degrees angle, but before he could move it down further Marlo had devoured his food and started

fighting back. Unlike the previous matches, he was not able to simply slam down the guard, which prompted another round of cheering.

"You're getting weak, old timer," Alexander yelled, smirking at his former teacher. As if to answer Alexander, Marlo started exerting even more strength. His shirt ripped at the bicep and veins started running up his arm. Finally, after a tough fight, the guard was defeated.

A round of booing and cheering took place as Marlo chugged down a jar of mead and slammed it down on the ground. "Next," his roar echoed, prompting Velma to reappear with a plate of deep fried cheeseballs, nuggets, sausages and french fries.

Marlo, like a ravenous animal, set upon the plate without waiting for his next opponent. While everyone waited to see if anyone would step up, perhaps another guard, John casually strolled to the table. In a great show of arrogance, instead of clasping Marlo's hand, he only stuck out a single finger.

"Velma, be a dear and get me that drink you offered last time. What was it called, Pina Colorado?"

"Piña colada," she said, handing him the drink.

John accepted the drink with a smile, and looked at Marlo. "I'll give you until I finish this glass to defeat me. By the way, all my spirit energy is already sealed so you don't need to worry about that."

Marlo let out a viscous grin and grabbed the man's finger. The match started immediately, but neither the hand nor the finger moved from the middle. The room was full of hooting and chanting, with Leo participating as well. John casually drank his drink while Marlo hurriedly swallowed his food. The two finished at the same time and after giving each other a dirty look, began using full force. The table cracked immediately, but they continued to wrestle as if the air itself was solid. For exactly 1 second it looked like it would be a tie, but then John smashed his finger down hard, throwing Marlo's body across the room after a crushing defeat. Marlo's body hit a window, and though the window did not break, cracks appeared

The whole room exploded in celebration as almost everyone had been defeated by Marlo. Even Slag let out a smirk. To everyone here, this victory was more dear than if they themselves had won.

The celebration, however, was interrupted by the Innkeepers voice giving an announcement in the room saying, "For broken and damaged furniture, Marlo and John will be fined 300MP each!"

Everyone started laughing, Marlo shrugged it off, but John started scowling! He was the most broke person here!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 107: Assembly

With Marlo's devastating defeat, the merry-making and festivities slowly came to a close. Will, Hera and Jimmy eventually returned to their rooms, Jimmy still bouncing up and down from the excitement. Ayesha stayed a while longer, but then took a look at her watch and eventually returned. Slag, who no longer wished to associate with anyone in Marlo's prescience, went out to stroll about the Inn and collect more information. Maybe Lex should just make a booklet for new guests so that they don't need to explore themselves. John, whose sense of satisfaction from the victory had been ruined, returned to the Battle Ax and Harry returned to Earth.

Eventually it was just Marlo, Alexander and Helen left, mainly because Marlo was still eating like a ravenous wolf. At a certain point Lex realized that he wasn't just being a glutton, his body needed sustenance and since he could no longer absorb spirit energy due to his broken core, food was his primary source!

"Would you like to try our spirit food instead of just regular meals?" the Innkeeper asked, finally halting the man's actions. Lex reminded himself that despite Marlo's bombastic actions, the man was a very focused and dedicated individual. Everything he did served a hidden purpose, so he should have realized sooner that he was finally suffering the toll of trying to resolve the issue with his blood without the support of the Recovery Pod.

"Why not? Send them my way," he finally said after swallowing, but then continued to eat the food that he had. Marlo was the first person trying the spirit food made from the vegetables Lex had grown in the greenhouse. In terms of price, it was still very reasonable, changing the price for a single meal from 1 MP to 10.

As much as Lex wanted to watch Marlo try out the new food, see him discover the brilliance of the Inn's cooking that would bring him to a world where champagne flowed from the sky and rose petals appeared beneath his feet - maybe Lex had spent some time watching a certain cooking anime in the past - he decided to leave.

Although he felt well enough, he wanted to meditate some more and calibrate his mood for the upcoming meeting. Today's incident also reminded him that not everyone would go along with his designs willy nilly, and he needed to be in best form.

Back at the manor, with some privacy finally, Alexander turned to Marlo with a serious matter to discuss.

"When are you going back to Earth? Your disappearance has caused some issues. Your wife has caused a lot of problems. Even Bluebird finally could not ignore it and sanctioned her, but that has not redeemed the situation."

Marlo did not slow down eating and it didn't look like he cared much either way, but a careful observer would notice the flashing sadness in his eyes.

"I cannot leave this place until I finish my new method of cultivation. The meditation room speeds up my progress astronomically, and I might need to go to the Recovery room at a moment's notice if something goes wrong."

Alexander sat in silence as he contemplated what Marlo told him. Like his grandfather, all the Nascent level cultivators on Earth reached that level through unique and unrepeatable ways. Following that road, Marlo had devised a new cultivation technique that could be summed up by describing it as rapid evolution under the influence of spirit energy. With his core crippled and no resources to push his body cultivation further, this is the solution he came up with. The rapid evolution would be induced under the influence of spirit energy, but by doing so he would essentially be changing his very body. This change went beyond the scope of change brought about by cultivation, and would bring his body's natural state to be equivalent to higher cultivation levels.

This was a theory that Marlo came up with based on his study of Beasts, as they had no problem reaching the Nascent realm even when humans could not. What Marlo did not know was that he had embarked on a path that was already known by some in the universe, but very few tried and even fewer succeeded in - the path of the Prime. In fact, without the aid of the Inn Marlo would never have even made it this far.

"And how long do you think that will take? Will you be able to join the Midnight Games?"

"I'm not sure," Marlo replied. "I feel like I'm on the verge of success. But like any breakthrough, that last step could come quickly or it could take years."

After a moment of silence, "Well even if you miss the games, I think you should take some time when you're able to go back and settle things on Earth before they become too ugly."

"Speaking of things getting ugly, what are the geezers planning on doing about the Inn? I don't know if what Slag said was true, but it's only a matter of time before someone sends a tracker or something of the sort back to Earth with a guest who wants to venture out into the universe. Or someone who gets bribed. Or tricked. Either way, the end result will not be good."

"I asked my grandfather," Alexander said with a confused expression. "He only said that I don't need to worry about it, and if possible, accept the biggest bribes. He told me to get the most I can out of anyone who is willing to throw money our way, and then continue to get some more."

The room returned to silence, as everyone contemplated the future. Eventually they parted ways, and as Marlo walked back towards the Meditation room his eyes became resolute and a Tier 5 zombie core appeared in his hand.

The rest of the day past peacefully. After a round of meditation Lex eventually went to bed. For some reason, his meditation was extremely fruitful today. He felt like he was on the verge of stabilizing his spirit. He didn't know if his progress was faster than normal, but since his cultivation technique was unorthodox he simply accepted it. Not that he was complaining, he wanted to become stronger as fast as possible.

The next day, Lex held an assembly for all his guards. He was not sure if his guards were very well designed robots or constructs of the system or real people, like he suspected his bodyguard might be. Either way, instructing them once himself would not be a bad idea. In the forest surrounding the greenhouse 260 guards stood in 10 straight lines, facing the Innkeeper. The A.I. staff was also standing on the side even though Lex could pass orders to them mentally. They didn't want to feel left out.

"I've been observing you and you've been doing a good job. I can see you patrolling the grounds diligently, and even the quick response to yesterday's event made me proud. Tomorrow we'll be expecting a lot more guests, and with more people I expect there will be more altercations. You have to stop any incidents before any of the guests can get hurt. Should anyone cause an issue, you should only detain them, try not to harm them. Once you've detained them, hold them until you can contact me, no need to be polite against offenders. If the opponent is too strong or attacks with intention to kill, then no need to hold back. You can attack with extreme prejudice. This meeting will be practice for the much larger event in a few days, so make sure to perfect your rounds."

Lex did not give them too many instructions, they were doing their job well enough and probably knew what to know better than he did. It was just, he needed to make sure they knew how to handle most situations. He did not want guards killing or crippling any guests, at least on their own discretion.

Then he informed them on the protocol for various different situations from medical emergencies to massive zombie invasions to lost children and more. Honestly he did not expect any such situation to arise but he had learnt that he could never adequately predict things when it came to the system.

When it came to his regular staff he did not give them many instructions, but instead told them to note down areas where they were lacking that they noticed during the larger crowd. This would be a good time to test the limits of how the Inn was running and what things needed to be changed. Finally, he also told them not to overburden themselves as he had arranged for temp staff for each guest during the event.

Before Lex could finish his briefing, Z raised his hand and asked if he could go back to the Gamer's Den. Lex mentally facepalmed, but nodded nonetheless. He needed to find this little boy some friends. That was the only solution.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 108: Lex freakin Williams

Lex rubbed his forehead with index and middle fingers as he worried about Z. But this was not the time or the place for that. He forced his attention back to the matter at hand and gave the rest of the staff a motivational speech. He needed them to be at their best. With that done he sent the rest to return to their duties, but told Gerard and Velma to stay back. Something important he realized, only while giving them the speech, was that he had been giving them instructions but never received any feedback from them. Other than when they responded to his requests, he never really talked to his staff. This was not good practice. Even if he did not become friends with them, he should at least know their thoughts in regards to the Inn.

"What do you guys think of the preparations? Do you think there's anything we need to do?" he asked them. Since they were his oldest employees, they would have the most insight.

The duo looked at each other, confused, then thought about the answer for a moment.

"You should choose a second in-charge to tackle any situation while you're busy. If there are too many guests, waiting till you're free to resolve the issue would take up a lot of time," said Gerard after a moment.

"Hmm that makes sense," Lex replied thoughtfully. After thinking about it for a moment he said, "For now Mary will be second-in-charge. Since others can't communicate with her, Gerard, you can act as her communicator. Others can come to you with their issues, and then you can communicate her instructions."

"Very good, Sir," Gerard responded with a bow.

"Anything else?"

"I think having maps would be a good idea," said Velma. "All the guests have to walk around themselves if they want to find out about the Inn, a map would make it much easier."

"Excellent, why didn't I think of that!" Lex said, surprised by his own obtuseness. He went directly to the Midnight market and looked at what options he had. Simple printed maps that would be updated every time he made an addition to the Inn would be the cheapest and cost him 10,000 MP total. Once paid, he could have an unlimited amount of such maps. Maps that would pin the user around as they traveled on the map were even more expensive, going directly up to 50,000 mp! There were more sophisticated maps as well, such as digital or holographic maps, but Lex didn't even bother with those at the moment. He directly bought the cheapest option for 10,000 MP.

"That was a great suggestion, anything else?"

The both of them thought for a minute, and could not come up with anything else so they just shook their heads.

"Alright, then what about yourselves? How are your work hours? Do you need more rest? What about your residences, are they satisfactory? Do you want anything more?"

Honestly, Lex felt a little bad as their residences were very bare and without a lot of furniture and they didn't really do much else other than work or cultivate.

"It's more than enough," answered Gerard truthfully.

"Yes yes, I never even thought about having a place of my own. It's already very great, we don't need anything else!" Velma answered with a lot of enthusiasm.

Watching their earnest faces and listening to their satisfied responses, Lex felt even more guilty. The simple minded A.I. staff were too easily placated. He vowed to himself that the next time he made a lot of MP he would do more for them.

With everything done, he sent them off and returned to his own residence. A fact that he didn't want to acknowledge was that he was actually feeling quite a bit nervous. Thinking about speaking to a large crowd consisting of the most powerful people from several planets made his heart jitter, just a little bit. It was not like he'd never given a speech or presentation to a crowd before. He did it often while he was working, but this was an entirely different scale of things. Not to mention, all of them probably had monumentally high cultivation levels and he was barely a beginner. Even with a cheat such as the system, he felt dwarfed.

He didn't want to distract himself from the feeling however. He had a gut feeling that if he didn't acknowledge it and plan for it, even with the help of the Host Attire he'd mess up tomorrow. So he did not shy away from the feeling, nor did he go to meditate. He let himself feel the nervousness for a while. He felt his gut plummeting, his muscles tightening up, nerves jittering. He felt his bones tremble. He felt his hairs stand on their ends. He felt the dread setting in. Then, he closed his eyes and took a deep breath, holding the air in. When he could hold it in no longer, he released his breath slowly. When he opened his eyes, despite his anxiety and apprehension, they were filled with conviction. Fear would not stop him, anxiety would not deter him and the unknown would not slow his steps. His audience for tomorrow might consist of the leaders of three different planets, but he was Lex freaking Williams, the goddamn Innkeeper! They should be the ones nervous in his presence, not the other way around.

He went back to his study and prepared all his talking points. He did not write a speech, but jotted down a list of all the important things he needed to discuss. He wrote down all the rules for the events and repeated them in his mind multiple times, so that he would not forget to inform them. He imagined questions others would ask, and jotted down potential answers. He thought of various scenarios he could encounter tomorrow, and prepared his responses. He visualized himself on stage, and thought about how exactly he needed to speak. He thought about his body language and gestures. Most of the time, Lex was a pretty relaxed fellow. Even though he had decided to keep his persona as the Innkeeper mysterious, he could not help himself from chatting and occasionally joking with his guests because it was hard to act as someone he wasn't. But tomorrow, even if he maintained his relaxed demeanor, he could not allow others to take him lightly.

As he prepared for the following day and imagined the various scenarios, his nervousness did not actually fade. The bottomless feeling in his gut remained with him, and occasionally he even felt randomly cold, but he let none of that deter his actions. As a result something unexpected happened. Through working amidst difficulty, he honed his spirit faster and better than during any meditation session. By the time night fell, his spirit completely stabilized and he was ready for the next procedure!

Lex felt as if his spirit made a 'pop' sound, and suddenly the world became much clearer. It was as if previously he had been trudging through mud, exerting all his strength with each step he took, but now suddenly he had been freed to walk freely. No, it did not feel like he was walking freely, but that he was walking along a travelator that was going in the same direction.

He did not need Mary to tell him what had happened, he realized on his own. But right now was not the time to undergo a procedure and raise his cultivation. He would have to wait until after the meeting.

Even though he didn't need to anymore, he got up and went to meditate. He stabilized his thoughts and let his body relax. He did not let his thoughts return to tomorrow's meetings, and completely freed himself of all future worries. Eventually, he reached a mental state equivalent of floating freely in a swimming pool.

When he was done, he got up, showered and went directly to bed. The shower was warm and the sleep deep and dreamless. As the Innkeeper slept silently, countless people around the universe waited impatiently for the next day to arrive. They did not dare to relax, lest they miss their opportunity. Others were not impatient, but looked at their silver keys with eager attitudes. Others simply didn't care.

Some people summoned countless soldiers and guards, with weapons equipped and armors worn. Others called for translators and dignitaries. Others yet collected their best booze and hallucinogens. A specific fellow on Earth prepared his visiting cards, each one hand made with the best calligraphy he

could muster. On Nibiru, a sloth lazily opened its eyes. The world seemed to distort under the weight of his vision, so he closed his eyes again. On Vegus Minima a youth landed on the planet, surrounded by some of the most elite guards of the Empire. He was reading a briefing of the reason he was sent here. The Empire had certain suspicions. As unlikely as they were, some things could not be put to chance so he was sent. Somewhere in a realm known as Garvitz, a small gathering of elite demons was gathered. Surprisingly, all of them looked like humans. Well, mostly human. An occasional pair of horns or wings and such were still visible. They were oddly disciplined, and stood according to rank and position. At the forefront sat a pure blooded devil. His smirk was remarkably enchanting and his eyes full of mischief.

Back at the Inn, as the sun rose, the Innkeeper opened his eyes.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 109: Respect

Lex did not wake up groggy, nor was it a slow process. The moment his eyes opened he was wide awake, fully aware that today was the day he had been preparing for. He got up, showered and put on his suit. But he did not leave his residence, he simply scanned the Inn.

His guards were already patrolling the grounds and all his staff was in place. Even Harry, who originally had a commitment back on Earth today, was here.

It was around 8:20 am right now, and the keys would activate at 9 am. He did not select his targets individually, that would have cost too much MP, but set a general criteria of leadership of an adequate number of living beings. Then he chose to launch 300 silver keys per planet. Each key would allow the main guest to bring up to two other guests, so at minimum he was expecting 300 guests per planet and at most 900. This was not including the few random guests who already had Golden Keys. So if each guest brought along two colleagues or guards, he could have upto 2700 guests here today. 2700 guests who were all at a much higher cultivation level than him.

Suddenly, he stopped himself. His thoughts were spiraling again. He closed his eyes and regulated his breathing. He was not in a meditative state, as he still kept an eye on the Inn, but he had a strict control over his wandering thoughts.

Time ticked by slowly, and as soon as it was 9 am, Lex exhaled slowly, then opened his eyes. Right now, he was no longer a young man who had made a simple wish for excitement in his life. Right now, he was the Innkeeper. His heart no longer beat irregularly and his nerves no longer tingled him. He had no distracting thoughts. Normally, the Host Attire helped him keep composure, but it did little in the way of elevating his mind and body language. Yet now, not only was he composed, even with his casual smile

his demeanor demanded the utmost respect. Lex had somehow entered a state of total concentration, similar to what he had so long ago when he was fighting zombies. Every thought, every nerve, every instinct was honed on the mission he had set for himself.

The first portal finally opened, and out stepped a massive, 9 foot tall wolf with green fur. Behind it, two other canines followed closely. The wolf's followers had black fur, and were in fact much larger than the wolf, at nearly 15 feet, but made sure to stay a step behind the wolf.

Lex instantly checked the wolf's status.

Name: Blood Fang

Age: 4555

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: ???(Too high for host to view)

Species: Inferior Lykaios

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Bloodline: Inferior Lykaios/Unique variant

Remarks: Unsatisfied with its stock in life, the wolf has decided to carve out its own path. A hungry, ambitious and cunning beast like this is excellent prey for price gouging, charge without restraint!

Lex was happy that the wolf's status could be viewed, even if he could not tell its cultivation. With back to back error warnings lately, he was getting concerned that most high leveled cultivators would have ways to avoid detection from his system scan.

Yet even as he scanned Blood Fang, Lex made no move to greet it. There was no way he could individually greet all guests, so he would greet none of them. Instead, the personal hologram staff that he hired was responsible for the greeting.

A holographic wolf appeared before Blood Fang, though its size was nowhere near that of Blood Fang and its entourage. It was sized according to a normal wolf on Earth.

"Greetings guests, and welcome to the Midnight Inn, the best Inn that caters to the entire universe!" The hologram said. "I am your personal hologram, there to assist you with anything you need and answer all of your questions. The meeting will begin shortly. Would you like me to take you to the coliseum, where the meeting will be held, or would you like a tour first?"

The wolf stared silently at the hologram, and Lex stared silently at the wolf. He hoped the wolf would not do anything drastic, but if it did his guards were there to resolve the situation. As he could not see their cultivation levels, he was not sure if his guards could handle it, but if they couldn't he would step in personally and his bodyguard would be forced to intervene. Lex had every confidence in his bodyguard that cost him a ridiculous amount of money!

Just as the wolf was about to speak, another portal opened nearby. A massive, 98 foot tall Gorilla stepped through. After sweeping the area for immediate threats or traps, the Gorilla stepped aside and allowed a Deer to enter. The deer was not only normal sized, it actually looked petite, yet the obvious deference of the giant gorilla spoke volumes of its status. The deer was followed by a stag.

"Greens Haven," Blood Fang called out to the deer, and gave it an acknowledging nod.

"Good to see you, Blood Fang," the deer responded casually, and took a look around. A holographic deer appeared before Greens Haven, and repeated the exact line that had been said to Blood Fang.

"This is so interesting," the deer said to the stag. "It's like a picture, but it has a spirit. Tell me spirit, what do you mean by 'universe'?"

"The landmass on which you live is known as a planet, and exists in space. It revolves around your sun, along with a collection of other planets although not all of them may contain life. This collection of planets that revolve around a sun form a cohesive system called a solar system. A galaxy is formed of

millions or billions of solar systems, and there are billions of galaxies. The space which these galaxies exist in, and more, is known as the universe."

"Nonsense!" Blood Fang roared angrily! "Nothing that big can exist! What lies are you spouting? What is your purpose?"

The holograms were not affected, but the guards surrounding them suddenly became alert. Fortunately, that seemed to have an effect as both the deer and wolf felt the intimidation of the ten guards with unknown cultivations.

"Now, Blood Fang, no need to be so closed minded. Don't tell me you can't feel that the spiritual energy of this place is different from our...planet. This at least proves that there are lands other than ours, far away from our reach."

The wolf reluctantly nodded.

Before they could continue their conversation, more portals opened and new beasts started emerging from them. It seemed that Nibiru was the first planet to be connected, as only Beasts were coming through the portal. Fortunately, the beasts that were coming out now were mostly at the Golden Core realm, with an occasional Nascent realm one. Lex was slightly concerned that if all of them were at the unknown level his ten measly guards would not be enough to maintain the peace.

And the peace definitely needed to be maintained, as only a few minutes after beasts started emerging through, two enemy beasts identified each other. The first one did not look like any animal Lex knew. It stood on six legs with a massive hairy torso connecting them. Instead of hands or claws it had wings and tentacles, and on its three heads it had horns, tusks and protruding fangs respectively. The other animal was a fairly ordinary looking Fox. Yet their encounter was anything but ordinary!

The two beasts did not seem to care that they were surrounded by other beasts and immediately launched an assault, along with the guards they brought along. The six beasts had a single exchange that caused shockwaves to spread throughout the Inn. The few guests who still did not know that beasts had made an appearance, namely, Alexander, Will and Chen's parties, instantly woke up from the noise. The fight had only begun and the beasts were already launching their next attacks when they were all suppressed by a massive force!

All six animals were sprawled on the ground, unable to move and barely able to breath under the suppressive force. Confusion and fear filled their eyes, as they had never been suppressed so completely since they had started their reign. The other beasts that surrounded them that were previously enjoying the show all took a few steps back, afraid to become involved.

"No free fighting is allowed on the Inn premises!" a voice boomed through the Inn. It was Lex's voice, firmly laying down the law. "Guests who wish to engage in combat may request to go to the combat arena, but due to today's occasion the combat arena is not available!" Well, also because Lex hadn't made a combat arena at all, but that was an irrelevant detail.

"This is your first, and only warning! Anyone who engages in a fight, or tries to harm other guests will be strictly punished, and banned from the Inn!"

With that announcement concluded and the force suppressing the six beasts disappeared, yet they were too afraid to stand up. The force had been the combined effort of all 10 guards above the Nascent realm, suppressing these beasts with their spiritual force! It was not something lightly endured, and probably left mental trauma in the victims, not to mention the physical trauma they experienced being squeezed into the ground.

This was something Lex had expected, and already instructed the guards on how to react. This was the Midnight Inn, a place people came to rest and relax, but also a place that must be respected!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 110: Happy Sloth

For a moment the crowd hushed as everyone whispered to one another. They waited for a while, but when nothing else happened the Beasts finally relaxed. The Beasts slowly formed into small clusters, gathering with those they knew and were on good terms with. They whispered amongst themselves, discussing what they thought was happening. Some of them were gravely intimidated by the 6 Beasts getting suppressed, as they themselves were weaker than them. Others smugly gloated over their stupidity.

A very few of them silently observed the gathering. In the history of Nibiru there had never been an incident where so many top tiered cultivators gathered together. This was not only because the planet was divided into multiple continents that were kept apart by the ocean, it was also because Beasts were generally territorial. This meant that not only would they stay in their own lands to protect them if other powerful Beasts entered their territory, even if only to travel, they would view it with hostility.

Eventually the clusters started breaking apart, as some of the Beasts headed towards the Coliseum while others roamed about to explore the Inn. Noticing this, and realizing the variable sizes of the Beasts, Lex quickly opened the Event management panel and quickly rented the Size Regulator for 20,000 MP! With this, once any Beast tries to approach any building their size would automatically be reduced to a maximum of 7 feet without affecting their strength of abilities. This feature was actually quite expensive to buy, fortunately to rent for a single event it was relatively cheap. This left Lex with 125,106 MP in total.

This was cutting his budget a little close, as he wanted to spend a lot of souvenirs for his new guests to buy. Basic souvenirs would be cheap, less than 10,000 MP for enough to last the whole event in fact, but Lex wanted ones that had some use or ability. After a moment's consideration, Lex decided to take a risk. He wanted to save MP in case of emergencies, but retail was an excellent way to earn back some of what he spent. Lex spent 50,000 MP to purchase commemorative golden coins.

On one side of the coin was an image of the Midnight manor, with the initials M.I. on it. On the other side was a giant number 1. The initials as well as the number weren't written in English, but were written using a special crafting technique so that they would change so that whoever viewed the coin would always see and understand those initials and number. The coin served no purpose, but simply acted as a commemorative souvenir to celebrate the first ever Midnight Games. Another thing to note, the coin was golden in color but was not made of actual gold. It was made from a much tougher, much rarer metal and more durable metal. The engravings would not fade as a result of time and the coin was extremely resistant to any kind of damage. Maybe, after a long time once the Inn became more popular, these coins would be worth a lot to collectors.

Each coin could be purchased for 500 MP, from either the gift shop or through the assistants, for now. If he made enough MP and he could add more stuff to sell, he would place stalls near the coliseum.

Lex had stopped viewing the statuses for his guests as they were just too many coming in now. There were already over 500 Beasts, and more coming.

Alexander, Helen, Will, Hera, Jimmy, Chen and Lily all watched the gathering from the lobby of Midnight manor. Even knowing that the Inn would protect them, looking at the massive Beasts roaming around some of them felt intimidated.

Since Lex had stopped viewing statuses, he missed out on a single sloth that stood alone in the crowd. It had no followers, and no one interacted with it. The sloth simply stood amongst the crowd, looking

around with interest. The world did not seem to distort under its gaze, and even if it moved around the ground would not crack. A small, innocent smile grew out on the sloth's face. Slowly, as slowly as it could physically manage, the sloth moved a single claw on its foot and its position changed. The sloth was no longer in the crowd, but in a strange little building. It looked at a human who had been startled by its appearance, and its smile grew even wider. The human did not die under its gaze. The rules of this world protected the human. The human, who finally gathered himself, smiled and said, "Welcome to Harry's barber shop. Would you like a makeover?"

To be clear, the rules of the Inn weren't protecting Harry from an attack by the sloth. The sloth naturally released an aura that was harmful to those around it if they were not of a certain cultivation level. Since this was not an active act, the system deemed it acceptable to curb the aura so that others would not be affected by it. This was similar to how Chen and Blane were unaffected by Falak's natural aura when they were talking to him, whereas should they have tried on Earth without Falak actively withdrawing his aura, they would have immediately died. The difference here was that the sloth was incapable of withdrawing its aura.

"Go ahead," the sloth answered, amused by the human.

"Please, take a seat," Harry instructed as he turned the chair for the sloth. He had no idea of the sloth's cultivation and normally should not know how to groom a Beast. But his Sorcery heritage was extremely thorough, and the species of his target was irrelevant as he was not grooming the physical body, but the soul and spirit directly. The physical changes that appeared after his grooming were an indirect result of that.

Once the sloth was seated Harry's eyes started to glow purple again and a pair of flying scissors appeared beside him. After careful consideration of what to do, Harry proceeded to cut the sloth's hair.

That is when something unexpected happened. After a single cut, Harry collapsed on the floor, fainting due to exhaustion. The scissors that he used had also snapped. On the sloth's body, the top 1 mm of a single hair had changed color from its natural light brown to a much deeper brown.

The sloth was not alarmed by this, but in fact marveled at the change it felt in its single hair. It was the most pleasant sensation it had felt in a long, long time. A holographic sloth appeared before it and said, "Don't forget to pay when you leave. You can pay me directly, and I will transfer the money."

The sloth smiled and summoned a single, glowing spirit stone. "Keep the change and tip the little human. I enjoyed the 'makeover' very much."

The spirit stone disappeared from its hand, along with the hologram. The sloth was now very curious about the Inn. It moved another claw and suddenly appeared in a forest. Once it entered, the sloth got completely lost and was unable to exit at all. Eventually it decided to climb one of the trees and take a nap. Someone would wake it up once the meeting started.

As Lex was overlooking his some 700 + guests, Mary informed him that Harry had collapsed due to overconsumption of his soul power, and Mary had transferred him to the Recovery room. Harry would fully recover, but it was unlikely that he would wake up today. After making sure that Harry had not been attacked, Lex turned his attention back to his guests. Despite his earlier warning, the newer Beasts who entered had no prior knowledge of it and so a few more fights broke out.

Fortunately all the fights were handled quickly and safely, without anyone getting hurt. Since none of the offenders were repeat offenders, Lex could not ban them from the Inn for violating his rules since they did not know them. To fix this issue he made a little change. He arranged his 10 most powerful guards, who he had decided to call his Tier 7 guards since he did not know their cultivation level, at the entrance and had them blast their spirit senses in full. All new guests would undergo a single, quick wave of pressure from his guards before a hologram would appear and tell them the no combat rule of the Inn. This seemed to solve the issue.

As for why the guards were called Tier 7? He numbered it according to the cultivation realm. Mortals was Tier 1, Body Tempering was Tier 2, Qi Training was Tier 3, Foundation was Tier 4, Golden Core was Tier 5, Nascent was Tier 6 and the unknown was Tier 7. This division also intimidated Lex a bit. He never thought about it so he never realized how far he really was in terms of cultivation levels, but dividing it in terms of numbers made it a lot more obvious. Yet he put that thought out of his mind. Just because he was not there yet did not mean he would not get there eventually. His focus returned to the Inn.

It had been exactly 3 minutes since a new Beast entered the Inn, and at a total of 798 Beasts, it seemed that would most likely be all the guests he would get from Nibiru. Soon, guests from Earth would start to arrive. Having humans and Beasts mix together might cause some problems initially so he needed to be focused to solve them.

Speaking of which, Blood Fang had just made its way to the Midnight manor and was about to encounter his other guests. He silently transferred some guards nearby to handle any potential issues.