

Innkeeper 111

The Innkeeper

Chapter 111: Not a coward

A holographic wolf was giving Blood Fang a tour and was leading it to the Midnight manor when it halted in its steps. It saw humans standing in the building, looking out at it. These humans were clearly different from the so-called 'guards'. It suspected that they were also guests. Truth be told, Blood Fang has great trouble adjusting to the fact that these humans were so powerful. On its planet they were nothing more than insects. In fact, since insects could also cultivate, calling them insects was a compliment. They were simply humans, the name an insult unto itself.

Yet now in this mysterious place it encountered countless humans who were ridiculously strong, some even stronger than itself. This enraged Blood Fang, yet it dared not do anything lest he upset its host. Blood Fang firmly decided to vent his anger on the humans back on its own planet once it returned. For now, it would adapt.

As the wolf walked towards the manor it felt its height shrink, until it was no more than 7 feet. Even its guards were suppressed to seven feet, though nothing else seemed to change. This made Blood Fang uncomfortable, but it understood that the buildings here weren't designed for Beasts and thus some changes were needed.

"Greetings...humans," Blood Fang said in a low, throaty voice. Perhaps it tried to be friendly, but his voice was too full of disdain. Yet none of the humans reacted to it. The Beast was clearly extremely powerful, and had a right to be disdainful towards them.

"Greetings, sir," Alexander responded with a slight, respectful bow. "You must be from the planet called Nibiru, I assume. I look forward to your participation in the Midnight Games."

"Yes...the planet Nibiru," the wolf responded. It was still struggling with the concept of a planet and had never heard the name Nibiru before, but how could it say that to a measly human?

"What...planet...do you humans come from?"

"We come from Earth," Alexander said simply.

"And we come from Vegus Minima," replied Lily.

'Two different planets...' the wolf contemplated. It had difficult accepting this new change, but it considered the possibility. Should such planets exist, its path would open exponentially. It only needed to find a planet with weaker beings and conquer it. The wolf was on a journey to replace the bloodline it was born with with one of its own design. Such an endeavour required countless resources, but the wolf only had a limited supply in its territory. It could not expand further because it controlled an entire continent, albeit a small one, and could not venture out to the sea. Not to mention, the deer had strongly threatened it: should the wolf start a senseless massacre the deer would not sit still. How could the wolf conquer more land without exhibiting its might? Yet the deer was stronger, so the wolf had to obey.

The exchange ended there. The wolf said nothing more, and the humans did not question it. The hologram continued to give the tour, and Blood Fang continued to follow it. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief that there was no conflict, and everyone mentally prepared themselves for more such encounters in the future. Lex simply accepted it. Even if there was a conflict he could handle it. Everything was in his control.

Ten minutes had passed since the last portal opened, bringing a Beast, when finally new portals started opening. They did not open one by one, but simultaneously, as if they had been orchestrated as such. Dozens of humans stepped forth, entering the Inn for the first time. These humans had a much lower cultivation compared to the Beasts, mostly belonging to the late Foundation realm, with one or two Golden Core cultivators here and there. Yet even so, with prior experience the guards took no risk, and a wave of spiritual force passed over all of them before a hologram appeared in front of each guest, welcoming them and giving them instructions about fighting.

Lex kept an eye on the people from Earth to see if he recognized anyone. Most of the people were strangers but he managed to see a few familiar faces belonging to popular Tempest profiles.

If it could be said that the Beasts from Nibiru had him on guard, the people from Earth only provided him with entertainment. Firstly, everyone was dressed strangely. He expected a lot of suits, but it seemed everyone wore very traditional attire. It seemed that Lex still didn't fully understand the cultivation culture of Earth. He saw everything from kimonos to plated armors to quilts to skirts to this one particular hairy lad who was wearing uncomfortably short shorts. As in, Lex had never seen a man wear such short shorts. Who the hell was he and how did he get here?

Lex decided to look away. He wanted to forget the image the very next moment. The next thing that amused me was that the humans did not realize that they could communicate without utilizing their

spirit sense. This caused a small verbal argument when an Estonian man passed a comment on an Arabic woman to one of his followers. Almost the entire crowd surrounding him froze when they realized they could understand him. This was followed by a very aggressive argument that would no doubt have turned into a fight had they been anywhere else other than the Inn. In the Estonian man's defense, he was only admiring her thick mustache.

Fortunately the embarrassment the humans were causing themselves was lost on all the Beasts otherwise Lex would have been ashamed to associate with Earthlings. A few moments later, more leaders arrived and the situation finally took a more formal tone. This was because, amongst the newest arrivals was The Queen. The one true monarch widely recognized on Earth. Of course, although recognition did not mean approval as there were a few people who gave her frustrated looks. But that was the extent of what they did. Who had the guts to go against her?

Even Lex recognized her, and was surprised to realize that it never occurred to him that she was a cultivator. While Lex was undergoing his own epiphany, the Queen and her followers were undergoing a realization of their own. Brandon's claims about being able to cultivate here were real. This was ground breaking news!

This would drastically affect the power dynamics of Earth. They had to be sure to maintain their lead in utilizing this new resource over the rest of Earth.

"You may begin the tour," The Queen said to her hologram, ignoring the crowd of Beasts staring at them from a distance. Even though they were powerful, the humans from Earth had never been afraid of Beasts.

On Earth it was early morning, and all seemed normal. Everyone was going about their day, no one realizing that some of the top leadership on all of Earth had almost simultaneously disappeared. Well, almost no one.

After waiting thirty minutes and ensuring that enough time had passed, in a bunker under the Sahara a meeting was started.

"We have official confirmation, wherever they have gone they do not have access to communication. Immediately begin the operation," said a hoarse voice. "Begin moving all units into place. However, only move the units into place. No one, I repeat, no one is to start any action right now!

"Establish reconnaissance on the five families and start repositioning troops worldwide. Make sure everything looks official and there are no loopholes. This opportunity is too good to miss!"

All the members of the meeting turned off their holograms and began taking actions personally. This opportunity was heaven sent, they could not mess this up. Troops started to be repositioned all over Earth, under the guise of drills, or practice, or some reassignment. Various companies started relocating valuable resources, many banks raised their interest rates on loans, various currencies strengthened and many others weakened. No pattern or correlation could be seen between these seemingly separate incidents. Only very few people knew what they signified.

One of those people was a soldier, following his troops' repositioning. Only, these troops weren't on Earth - they were on the moon. A few hours after leaving their original base, they arrived at an underground base full of various kinds of jets and ships.

Under orders from their superiors, some of the soldiers started climbing into the ships. Others started loading supplies. The only soldier here who knew what was actually happening stood quietly as he waited his turn to board a ship. His actions seemed completely normal, and no one could tell something was amiss, so it was fortunate that he was wearing a helmet that covered his face otherwise someone would see the nervous eyes of a teenager. Even as he climbed onto the ship and the doors closed behind him, he said or did nothing suspicious. But in his mind, he only hoped that what he was doing would redeem him, and that he lived long enough to go back and tell his friend Alexander that he, Zeus Levintis, was not a coward. As the ship lifted off Zeus' knees trembled. Well, he was mostly not a coward.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 112: Underwear models

Unaware of the silent changes happening on Earth, the leaders of the various factions on Earth began to tour the Inn guided by their holograms. All of the leaders had already been identified by the five families in the days leading up to the meeting, and had been given a non-interference order. They could do as they wished as individuals, but only the five families would represent Earth and make appropriate decisions. This may seem like bullying, but the fact that they were allowed to come to such a place at all was generous in the eyes of the five families. Besides, as Brandon put it, 'I'm a bully, what can you do about it?'. The answer was nothing. They could do nothing about it, so they all accepted.

So they all simply toured the place. Honestly, even if there was nothing here and it was a barren land, just based on the premise that it could aid their cultivation they would consider it a holy land. Yet even as the humans spread out in small clusters, they avoided the Beasts. None of them wanted to be the first to experiment by talking to them, and since none of them were the main characters here anyway why should they take a risk? Soon the other members of the five families arrived as well. There was a stark difference between the Morrison family and the rest, however. While the other families only came with two followers each, the Morrison family which had access to the golden keys appeared with over twenty Golden Core cultivators, not including Rorick and Audrey.

"Show off," the fat man - the only fat Nascent cultivator in sight - muttered.

Instead of getting offended, Brandon grinned at the remark. Yes, he did in fact like showing off. In fact, in the 1970s Brandon traveled the Earth as the world's most successful underwear model. His youthful looks and well sculpted body drew admiration and praise everywhere he went, not to mention various sponsorships. Yet he decided to stop when Audrey, following in his footsteps, also became a model. Alas, while Brandon listened to his wife dutifully, she herself didn't give a rat's ass behind what anyone told her and did as she pleased, and only gave up the career when she grew bored of it. Those were some of the darkest days of Rorick Morrisons life.

"Shall we head to the coliseum?" asked Sam, ignoring the gloating narcissist.

"Wait for my grandson. I sent him here a few days in advance, he will update us on the matters here."

Richard, the fat man and Sam only nodded, and patiently waited for Alexander. The Queen had not bothered waiting for them as she had another objective. One of her two designated followers was someone sent by the lady in the hologram that the five Nascents had reported to. His only job was to observe everything so that he could report back once he returned. The Queen had volunteered for the job and the rest decided to keep their distance. Even though they knew it was a fundamental truth, none of the Nascents liked being reminded that they reported to someone higher up. On Earth they were without equal, but in the vast universe that meant little.

It did not take long before Alexander found the group. Helen had to stay back at the manor this time, as they may need to discuss sensitive matters and her presence might be inappropriate. No one asked it of her, she volunteered on her own, but the effect was the same.

"Little man, you're growing up so fast. When I was your age, I hadn't even embarked on the path of cultivation. Ahh, those summer days, working in the city, flirting with girls..." the fat man seemed to be reminiscing but his casual musings were cut short by Audery who said, "Are you telling my grandson to go around flirting with girls? I suppose you have a few candidates in mind?"

The fat man froze, feeling awkward. Compared to the rest, the fat man had a very casual attitude and almost behaved like a mortal. In his views, there was nothing wrong with a teenager flirting with some girls, right? However, for some reason he didn't understand, everyone of the other Nascent families assumed he was always trying to set up his daughters or granddaughters to their families. Please, he couldn't be bothered with such old fashioned thoughts, yet somehow that was the impression everyone had of him.

"Little Alexander, tell grandpa, has anything interesting happened so far?"

Alexander quickly briefed everyone on his encounter with Slag, and shared the information that he got from him. He was observing everyone else's reactions, hoping to learn something. They were curious, and asked many questions about the Empire, but none of them seemed surprised by the talk of galaxies of empires. Alexander said nothing, countless thoughts were running through his head.

After asking Alexander a few more questions, Sam said, "So only representatives from two planets have made it here so far? The third planet, this Vegus Minima, must be next then. We should wait and see what they look like."

The rest were about to nod at his suggestion but then, just as he finished speaking, 200 portals opened simultaneously. The timing was oddly coincidental, and not at all purposeful the work of mystical forces that did not want to waste more time on idle conversations.

In true military fashion, 600 uniformed men and women stepped through the portal at the exact same time. Most of them were Golden Core cultivators, but there were at least 80 Nascent realm cultivators and at least a couple above that realm.

Lex focused all his attention on this new incoming force, as their strength was by far the biggest and most dangerous. It was clear that these newcomers were a part of an army, and Lex did not even need to guess to know that they must be from the same Battalion as Slag. The army underwent the same pressure of the Tier 7 guards as well as the warning and welcome from the hologram, but had the smallest reaction. Quickly, the 600 men started arranging themselves in small teams that they had probably agreed upon beforehand. They did not take combat stances and appeared only to be standing

together in small groups of ten, yet Lex could feel that not a single one of these soldiers had their guards down. They were ready to fight to the death at a moment's notice.

General Ragnar, who stood with an entourage of nine people behind him, looked at the various guests at the Inn. He noticed all the Beasts in the vicinity eyeing them, as well as oddly dressed humans that were from a different planet.

Before he could do anything, Slag marched as quickly as he could without breaking into a run and appeared before the General and saluted him.

"Lieutenant Slag of the 7th Forward Battalion, reporting for duty, sir!" he said in a very robotic fashion.

"Authenticate," Ragnar said, and one of his followers stepped forward with a machine that he placed in front of Slag's eye. The machine scanned not only his face and eye, but his brain directly. A green light lit up on the machine, along with details about Slag.

"Lieutenant Slag, according to reports, you went M.I.A. a few days ago. What are you doing here?" Ragnar asked, directly using his spirit sense to speak into Slag's mind.

"I stumbled through a Golden door while escaping enemy combatants and arrived here, sir! I thought it would be more useful if I collect data about the Midnight Inn than return immediately. I have compiled a report of my findings."

"Alright, fall into line," Ragnar said, indicating that Slag should join his personal entourage. "Tell the soldiers to disperse and act according to their directives. We will regroup at the coliseum."

His orders were passed down and the soldiers had just started to move around when the remaining 100 portals opened up simultaneously as well. The latest arrivals did not come in the uniform style of the military, and walked through the portals one by one, yet the impact of their arrival was the biggest so far! The Beasts, the humans from Earth and especially the soldiers of the empire all tensed up when they saw zombies walking through.

In fact, unseen by everyone, it was Lex who was shocked the most! Zombies? How could they come? He had made sure in his selection parameters for the silver keys to enter that the leaders should be

sentient and intelligent. These zombies, that ranged all the way from Tier 2 to Tier 5 definitely should have not entered. Although immediately he noticed that the zombies at Tier 5 showed a remarkable level of intelligence, for a zombie that is.

Finally, out of the last few portals stepped a few more guests who looked human at first glance. Yet it was only limited to the first glance, as one would quickly notice the various horns and tails these guests so proudly brandished.

"Devils," Ragnar muttered through gritted teeth.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 113: Crossdressing Devil

Even though Ragnar was not loud, as Lex was paying extra attention he clearly heard the term 'Devil'. Were these the leaders of the zombies? Did they get the keys? That was the only explanation.

The atmosphere was extremely tense as the 600 Jotun soldiers immediately got in position for battle. The humans from Earth were dumbstruck watching these supposed fictional horror story creations appear. When they noticed the soldiers gearing up for a battle they started backing away quickly, so as not to get caught in the crossfire. Unexpectedly it was the Beasts who had no affiliation with the humans and should not have known the demons who showed the greatest hostility. In fact, were it not for the quick reminder by a few smart Beasts about the Inns non-combat rules, they may have already attacked.

The Devil did not seem to notice the ridiculous hostility pointed at them, and took a look around the Inn as if they were truly admiring their latest vacation destination. They were amused by the holograms that took on the shape of the kind of Devil they were, as they did not believe real Devils would ever work here.

Lex did not make any early announcements or reminders. After he calmed down from his initial shock, he did not panic either. He was still in a state of flow, and his mind and body were reacting perfectly to his intentions. His guards seemed insufficient to handle the situation should a battle arise, simply because he had not planned for them to deal with a battle. They were supposed to stop random fights and minor incidents. Individually or even in small groups, his guards could handle most situations that could arise. However, an organized fight between hundreds of soldiers and demons that not only outnumbered them but were also stronger than them overall was not something they could face.

Yet what allowed Lex to remain calm was the knowledge that his bodyguard should be able to handle any of the leaders here. He did not need to fight the entire army, simply intimidate the leaders. Yet while intimidating them, he still had to maintain the facade of the strong yet mysterious Innkeeper. If he reacted preemptively to prevent a fight it could be viewed as him acting out of fear for the situation to deteriorate. He had to wait for someone to take the first step, and then he would react. He was very grateful he hadn't been a miser and spent lavishly on his bodyguard.

Yet it was not as if Lex did nothing at all. He identified the Devil as well as the man that looked like leaders of the two armies and checked their statuses.

Name: Ragnar Asulf

Age: 3574

Sex: Male

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

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Condition:

Remarks: *Knock knock* Who's there? It doesn't matter, because Hells Butcher does not crack jokes, he cracks his enemies' will to fight!

Name: Loretta Pental Val Kilger

Age: 971

Sex: Female

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

Species: Devil

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: Don't look into her eyes, she's very shy. She may just blush and kill you!

Lex's flow almost collapsed and the strict control he had on his twitchy lip almost broke when he read Loretta's status. That was because while the status clearly stated Loretta was a female, and even had a feminine name...sort of...he was clearly looking at a man! Or maybe the difference was curtailed in Devils, he was not sure, but if Lex had to guess he would have clearly guessed that this was a man wearing cosplay horns! Even the black, leathery wings behind his...her back looked like a mans...eh, looked masculine? Maybe Loretta was just wearing a disguise. Yes, that must be it.

Not that he needed any new reasons to discriminate against Devils, but seriously if that's how female Devils looked he knew a lot of anime crazed humans who would be seriously disappointed.

The silence was going on for too long. Lex decided to proceed with the event as planned and deal with any situation that arises as it happens.

The holograms for all the guests appeared simultaneously and said, "Now that all the guests are here, the event will begin shortly. Please make your way to the coliseum."

Somewhere on the other side of the Inn in a forest a sloth was woken up from its slumber, only to see a whale staring at it directly in the eye. Holding onto the whale's tie was a turtle that seemed to be whispering something to one of the trees nearby.

Back at the Inns entrance the tension could be cut with a knife, yet no one dared to be the first one to act. It was one of the Devil's who finally chuckled and said, "Oh children, why don't you take a seat while papa goes for a round with the boys. Don't do anything naughty while I'm gone."

The zombie's, as if taking his instructions very seriously, sat down on the ground - taking a seat on the dirt.

Lex looked at this Devil's information, curious to see if he could get any information on how he ordered the zombies. Was it something all Devils could do, or this specific one?

Name: Warheil Heil Fendal

Age: 12100

Sex: Male

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

Species: Devil

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: Don't be fooled by appearances, the clothes he's wearing are worth more MP than you've ever collected! Quick, offer him some cake!

This was by far the oldest guest Lex ever had so he naturally assumed he was probably very strong. For a moment, he started feeling doubtful - would his bodyguard be enough? But the doubt was momentary. He spent 1 million on a single individual. Whatever his realm was, Lex was sure that it would be enough.

Warheil may have started first, but he was careful to stay one step behind Loretta - something that everyone noticed. Ragnar was struggling with a decision. His instinct was to immediately take this opportunity to kill the Devils, yet logic told him that they would not have appeared in public unprepared for an assault. Furthermore, he had yet to learn anything about the Midnight Inn. If the owner of the Inn was able to contact him directly, as well as others all over the world without leaving a trace he was not a simple man. Not to mention, even the Jotun Empire did not lightly use interplanetary teleportation, yet here it was being used casually to teleport random Beasts and people over.

But Ragnar was not an indecisive man. He hesitated but for a few moments, before he ordered his troops to march towards the coliseum. The holograms guided everyone, but the building was massive and clearly visible so they really didn't need any help.

Seeing that both the Devils as well as the soldiers were moving without incident, the Beasts as well as the Earthlings decided to do the same.

"Alexander, listen to me," said Brandon seriously. "Go call Marlo, tell him to come to me immediately. Once that is done, you and Helen both return to Earth immediately. Once there, I want you to seal yourself in the safety bunker, don't let anyone know you're back. I will summon you out once I return to Earth."

"Marlo's in the meditation room, I don't think I'll be able to go in," he replied.

"Do what you can. He's faced zombies before in combat, his experience will guide us if things take a turn for the worse. Not to mention, it isn't only for us. If something were to happen and he was meditating then he would be gravely injured."

"I'll see what I can do," Alexander said, and started sprinting towards the manor. He planned on getting Helen first, then going to fetch Marlo.

Everyone moved towards the coliseum, the original jovial mood changed drastically. Even Will and Hera, who originally planned on attending the meeting, returned back to Earth. Will briefly considered sending Hugo, but then decided that to be safe he would wait until tomorrow. At that time he could directly ask the Innkeeper or some of the staff the details for the event.

Soon, nearly 2700 guests were seated in the coliseum, leaving large empty gaps between each group. Even with this many people, most of the seats were empty so it wasn't really a problem to find a suitable seat. Sam was filling the Queen in on what she missed, and her follower who had been sent to observe was greatly shocked to hear about the Devils. It appeared as though he knew of them. The five Nascants naturally noticed his reaction, and looked towards him, waiting for an explanation.

The follower, noticing this, cleared his throat and said, "You don't need to know much. Just know, the Devils are our enemies. The weakest Devil is still far beyond what your planet can handle, so it is in your

best interest to turn the other way should you ever encounter one. If something happens here, don't wait to see how things turn out. Escape back to Earth directly."

Before anyone could ask him any questions, a man finally appeared on center stage. His casual smile and relaxed demeanor did not match the tense atmosphere at all.

"Welcome guests to the Midnight Inn."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 114: An itch

Under normal circumstances, Lex would have been extremely nervous with almost 2700 people focused on him. Even up until yesterday, or to be more accurate, earlier this morning, Lex did not feel ready to address such a crowd without stuttering or at least mumbling or mispronouncing a few words. Yet right now, the way he looked at the crowd was completely calm and natural. It was as if he believed they should be the ones nervous in his presence, not the other way around.

He scanned the crowd briefly once, his eyes passing over the four divided groups. His gaze paused a second longer when he looked at the Devils, but continued on as if they were just ordinary guests.

"It brings me great pleasure that you all could make it," he said, his voice loud yet still casual. "For those of you who did not get the opportunity to take a tour, or skipped it, let me introduce you to the Inn. For the travelers of the universe, or those who just want a home away from home, for the adventurers who want a respite, or the scholars who want to broaden their horizons, for anyone in need, anywhere in the universe, the Midnight Inn is the destination for you. We offer you rest, security, opportunity, adventure, excitement, enlightenment and more. I am the Innkeeper, and this is my humble establishment."

Lex paused for a moment. He had just received a new quest from the system, and he was going to ignore reading it till he was done, yet a simple glance at the notification let him know how serious this quest was. He quickly made a plan in his head, and decided how to deal with it. This was going to be the fastest quest he ever completed.

"Recently, three new planets gained access to the Inn. To celebrate this, and to nurture an environment that promotes mutual growth and camaraderie I decided to host the Midnight Games, which will allow the three worlds to share their culture with one another, and compete in some games for prizes."

He paused again, this time a little longer, as he looked through his guests. He spotted Marlo entering the coliseum, clearly agitated. Some of his muscle had returned, but Lex did not bother paying attention to that right now. He looked at all the guests' faces, looked in their eyes, to see if he still had their attention. The oddly dressed humans, crossdressed devils and confused Beasts all had their eyes focused on him. No one had said a single word so far, but he would give them an opportunity to speak soon enough. Not to mention, some guests might not really wait to be given an opportunity.

"The Midnight Games will be divided into two portions. The first portion will be a cultural show. Any and all guests from each planet can participate, and the event will entail whatever format the guest requires, whether it be a show, a presentation, a game or anything else. Of course, you cannot harm other guests in the process.

"This portion will be divided into a few stages. The first is the general stage, where everyone will be allocated a space and will have their presentations simultaneously. Based on genuine audience response, appreciation and popularity, candidates will be selected into the qualifying round, where they will be given the stage to present in front of the entire audience.

"That will lead to the finale, where the last two finalists will be given center stage. The winning team will win a prize not only for themselves, but for their entire planet as well. I hope that through that experience the people of all planets come closer together, and learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses.

"After that, of course, will then lead to the combat and the actual 'games' portion of the Midnight Games - much to some peoples delight." Lex gave Marlo a look before continuing. "This portion is a little different, and also dangerous. Instead of taking place here at the Inn, these games will be taking place on Vegus Minima."

That statement made Ragnar frown slightly, and caused Loretta to raise an eyebrow in curiosity.

"Some of you already know, though most do not, that there is a great undertaking going on in Vegus Minima at the moment. For those of you that do not know, I will explain the details a little."

Naturally Lex himself did not know about events happening on Vegus Minima, but under the events panel he can view major events going on in all planets connected to the Inn. He can incorporate those events into his own using the panel, which is how he learned about the largest event taking place on

Vegus Minima - the hunt for the spawning portal, as well as a detailed description of events relating to it.

"Currently, the planet is divided. Much of it is under the control of demons known as zombies, while the rest of it is under the control of humans."

This was a simple statement, but it attracted the attention of almost all guests. Some of the Beasts suspected as much, but learning that an entire planet - though they still did not understand the concept of a planet - was being controlled by humans shocked them! The Jotun soldiers and Devils were focused because clearly these 'games' were about to have a direct impact upon their confrontation that had just begun. Based on the direction of the games, support could go on either side. As for the Earthlings, well, which one of them had never seen a zombie apocalypse movie? It was as if their fantasies were coming to life in front of their eyes, and they were truly enraptured.

"Some of you may think that it is a simple battle, since the zombies have no direct way of reproducing, killing them would slowly but surely eliminate the zombies from the planet once and for all. But it is not so simple. You see, there is a spawning portal on the planet that lets more zombies enter the planet infinitely from another realm.

"The humans are desperately trying to locate the spawning portal, while the demons are doing everything in their power to keep it hidden. But in this struggle, the demons have had the advantage of time.

"They've taken a long time to set up a formation that not only hides the portal, it protects it from interstellar attacks. Should any weapons of mass destruction be used, the formation will channel the destructive energy directly into the planet's core, destabilizing it and ultimately destroying the whole planet."

Lex's words caused not only Ragnar to grimace, it caused the Devils to frown as well. This was not a new tactic used in the war against Demons, and was in fact a very common one. Unless the occupants are ready to sacrifice the entire planet, such a formation would prevent the use of not only high leveled cultivators, it would prevent the use of heavily destructive technological weapons. Unless the formation can be located, that is.

"With that background information, I think I can begin to explain the games. The protective formation has ten, very important nodes that keep it running, and so there will be ten games!"

"Dear Innkeeper," Loretta finally interrupted Lex, having completely understood the direction this was going in. But even while interrupting, her disguised masculine voice did not sound aggressive or accusatory, but rather remorseful and regretful. "It seems to me that there is a lot of discrimination going on in your 'Midnight Games'. I thought the point of this event was to get along together, build camaraderie and learn about each other's cultures. Yet now it seems to me that this is all just a build up to a slaughter...a slaughter of my people." Loretta wiped an imaginary tear off her cheek as she said the last part.

"That's not very nice, is it? Not the kind of behavior I would expect from an Inn. Especially not one that is trying to operate without needlessly provoking some enemies."

Lex smirked. He was waiting for this - and so were a lot of people, and Beasts.

"I think there has been some kind of misunderstanding," he said, amusement quite evident in his tone. "The Midnight Inn only ever promotes peaceful gatherings that help not only our guests, but the entire communities that they belong to. As a business, we have no interest in having 'enemies', only more guests. Our sole focus is on spreading our name across the universe, so that anyone who needs to rest knows exactly where they can come to."

"See, again. Your actions and intentions aren't really a reflection of your words. How can you say you're not making any enemies when you're clearly targeting us? How can you condemn an entire planet full of my precious zombies to death, and yet claim to be looking for more guests?"

At her question, Lex started laughing. It was not a chuckle or a giggle, or a small laugh that ended quickly. It was a clear, loud laugh full of mirth and amusement. The sound of his voice echoed across the coliseum. It was not oppressive or tinged with hidden anger, but genuine amusement. Yet the more it was like this, the more the Devil's frowned, and the more Ragnar looked confused.

They needed no explanation to understand that the Innkeeper did not take them as a serious threat at all.

"Loretta dear," Lex said, wiping actual tears from his eyes, "I am not provoking enemies, I am just hosting some games, do you understand? I am not condemning a planet full of zombies to death, these are just simple games."

The Devils and even the humans felt their back tingle at the man who considered the fate of an entire planet as a game.

"I have guests from all over the universe. I do not discriminate, and host everyone equally, so long as they obey the rules of the Inn. Do you understand? But when certain guests come to my Inn and repeatedly attack me, well, I don't mind tweaking my games just a bit. After all, how long can one ignore an itch before scratching it?"

Lex asked the question wearing his brightest and most genuine smile, yet no one felt as lighthearted as he looked right now. This was the Innkeeper, and even the Devil's threat was nothing more than an itch to him!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 115: A Celestial

The coliseum was silent - each group for their own reasons. The Beasts, despite having very strong representation, were the most confused. They did not understand a lot of the concepts that were being discussed, not because they were stupid, but because they focused their society on individual growth, and not the growth of the whole.

They formed and stayed in their own territories, and the only exchange they had with their neighbors was defending from expansion, or expanding themselves. This caused their growth as a civilization to stagnate, and their individual power levels weren't high enough to leave the planet, so their knowledge base existed only up to a certain point.

The Beasts technically could not be blamed for this, as the term 'Beasts' was a generic term. For example, humans treated feline Beasts and avian Beasts both as if they were under the same category, but were they really? That Beasts treated those of the same species kindly, but were mostly hostile to other species. Looking at it from this point of view, it made sense that they were not eager to share their knowledge and progress with other Beasts. After all, even on Earth, despite all the humans' technological progress, did they share any of it with the Beasts? They were both sentient beings so technically they could, but the species barrier was a difficult one to overcome.

The Earthlings were silent, not because they couldn't understand what was happening, but because they were clearly the weakest ones here. They were ready to participate in the Midnight Games, but if

participating in them meant provoking the Devils as enemies, they would need to run a cost-benefit analysis.

For the Jotun soldiers, it was even simpler. They were there to fill the numbers and act as soldiers. Only Ragnar and his entourage had the authority to speak here. As for why Ragnar was silent? Some of it was because of the weight of what the Innkeeper said, but mostly because he was staring at the Devil the Innkeeper called Loretta. He did not know the identity of this Devil, but he knew very well that there was a high importance target amongst the Devils called Loretta. Could this really be the same one? And if so, how did the Innkeeper know? Despite the empire's best efforts, they were not able to get a lot of details about this 'Loretta'.

The Devil's, of course, were filled with a hostile silence. They were ready to attack at their leader's order. It was true that the Innkeeper's attitude depicted him as an extremely strong individual who treated an entire planet as nothing more than a plaything, but then again, were they as Devils any weaker? Their might was feared by even the strongest across the universe, and their influence undeniable.

Yet the reason Loretta herself was silent was because of the shock! How did the Innkeeper know her identity? It was impossible! Her disguise was perfect, and even those stronger than her should not have been able to determine who she was. Unless, of course, the Innkeeper was even stronger than they had first suspected.

"Speaking of an itch," Lex continued, deciding this was the perfect time to complete the latest quest he had just received.

"Since I was in the middle of my introduction for the Midnight Games, I did not bother addressing this. But you have interrupted to address grievances, so this will have to serve as an opportune moment. My Inn has some rules, not too many, and I don't need to share them because it is considered common sense. Yet I understand that there are many species across the universe, and they have a unique concept for what entails common sense. So I will take this time to elaborate on some of the rules.

"All guests are welcome, regardless of their age, background, species, affiliation, or anything else. Yet what is not welcome is a hostile attitude. Attacking, threatening or harming any guest or employee of the Inn is completely unacceptable. On three separate incidents, your zombies have found their way to my Inn and directly attacked me! But I do not blame you for others' actions, so that is fine. Yet now, in my presence, your fellow Devil has been planting tracers on a number of my guests. Tell me, Loretta, should I now hold all your Devils accountable for his actions, since you came together? Or just that single delinquent?"

Suddenly all the guests besides the Devils froze, and started sweeping themselves for the so-called tracers. Instantly, the coliseum was filled with hundreds of spirit senses, yet none of them were able to locate the tracers. How could it be that easy? After all, the Devil's cultivation was much higher than the rest, and even Lex himself, with access to knowledge of everything happening in the Inn, didn't notice until the quest.

The quest stated that one of the Devil's had been planting tracers on various guests in order to trace them back to their planets, and that as the Innkeeper he could not allow such hostile behavior to go unnoticed! He not only had to eliminate the tracers, he had to punish the Devil in question.

The guests were beginning to get confused, as none of them were able to find the tracers. Lex did not break his eye contact with Loretta during this time, and was able to pick up the surprise in her eyes. Yet before she responded, one of the Devils made a move! He was too fast for Lex to even spot, let alone react to. One moment he was sitting behind Loretta, the next he was in front of Lex with a dagger pointed towards Lex's skull.

In fact, the Devil did not mean to stop or slow down enough to be seen. He was aiming to stab Lex through the skull, but right as he was exactly one foot away from Lex, he froze! None of the guests were able to see the Devil make a move, other than Ragnar and a particular sloth.

Without flinching or reacting at all, Lex turned to look casually from Loretta towards the black dagger that was pointed towards him. He could physically feel the sinister intent planted within that dagger, and let alone a stab, Lex knew that if the dagger had even touched him, he would have died. So why had the demon stopped? Because behind him stood Lex's bodyguard, with his hand placed on the Devil's shoulder.

Several audible gasps could be heard from the audience as people came to realize what had just happened. Someone had tried to attack the Innkeeper so quickly they were not even able to notice! A wave of fear filled the guests as they looked at the Devils, who were still sitting there casually. Some members of the audience, however, were staring at the bodyguard in absolute horror!

'A Celestial!' John screamed in his mind as he did his best to stop himself from trembling. What kind of insane maniac was he working for, that also had a Celestial working for him? What ridiculous kind of existence could even convince those arrogant freaks to work for him?

"It appears as though the punishment shall go to the delinquent alone," Lex said, looking at Loretta. "When you dispose of him, please do so neatly. It would be a shame to waste excellent fertilizer," Lex told the bodyguard.

The bodyguard chuckled despite himself, as he could not believe the Innkeeper had the guts to kill a devil? But what did it matter to him? Indeed, as John had guessed, this bodyguard was from a race known as Celestials. There was no one in the universe they feared! He performed no visible action, but the Devil fell down, dead. As soon as the corpse hit the ground, Lex received the quest complete notification. For now, he ignored the notification and sent the body to the greenhouse.

He smiled at Loretta, as if he did not just order the death of her companion, and said, "Please don't think this means that you are not welcome here. So long as you follow the rules, you're more than welcome to stay. You may even participate in the Games though, unfortunately, I will not be able to change the conditions of the Games for you so you will still be fighting zombies."

But how could Loretta be in the mood to stay here any longer? The Innkeeper had a freaking Celestial working for him! Not to mention, he looked right through her disguise. Despite arranging for the Devil's to attend this meeting along with a small army of zombies, it seemed that they had underestimated the Midnight Inn.

They may need to rethink the kind of relationship they wanted to have with this newly encountered organization. Not that they feared the Inn, but they would suffer more than they would gain by being enemies. Moreover, she now needed to deal with the aftermath of the death of a Devil under her command. The Jotum Empire would serve as an adequate scapegoat - especially since Ragnar was here. Even with her status and power, she did not consider assigning blame to the Celestial that did the deed, or the anomaly that could casually order one around.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 116: I'm running out of titles

The coliseum was once again filled with silence. The tension was palpable, and though no one was actively exerting the pressure of their cultivation, some of the weaker Earthlings felt like they were going to faint. Yet even with such a scene, there were a few who did not take the situation too seriously.

Firstly, as could be predicted, was Marlo. The former behemoth sat comfortably in his chair near the 5 Nascent cultivators, with a table laid out in front of him. He was casually eating some Egg Fried Rice with a side of Dry Beef Chilli, as if he were watching a movie in his bedroom. Second was the sloth. It was asleep. The third, sitting amongst the Beasts, was actually a tree. Well, technically, it was not sitting; it

was standing. It had rolled up all its roots beneath it, and stood firmly in its seat. Its focus was not on what was happening in the coliseum, but on shaking off the birds that would keep coming to sit in its branches. The endeavor was truly frustrating.

"I see," Loretta finally replied calmly. "Thank you for clearing up that misunderstanding. Please, continue with your explanation. I am eager to hear the details of the games."

Lex smiled approvingly at her, as if an adult proud of a little girl who finally managed to calculate $1 + 1$ when she first started school.

"I'm glad you understand. Games are only fun when everyone participates. If you have to keep changing the rules of the game because of a few people, then it affects everyone's enjoyment."

Lex's words were polite, but who there did not understand the naked threat in his words.

While Lex was exchanging words with the Devil, the Celestial bodyguard was looking around at the crowd with an internal frown. Earlier, he was hidden, so it made sense that his natural aura was not affecting everyone. Yet now that he was out in the open, they were still unaffected. He was not used to so many beings existing so casually in his presence. He noticed a few here and there who recognized who, or rather, what he was and that filled them with an appropriate amount of dread, yet seeing the rest completely unaware bothered him. When in his life had he gone anywhere without entire nations kneeling at even the reminiscent of his aura?

"Are you the one restraining my aura?" he asked the Innkeeper, clearly unsatisfied. He did not bother using his spirit sense, and asked directly. When had he, as a Celestial, needed to care for subtlety or keeping others' faces? He intended to have the Innkeeper end the restraint on his aura, or else he may have to consider whether this quest was worth his effort.

Lex looked at his bodyguard and immediately understood that he was unsatisfied. This put him in a bit of a dilemma as he had no way to deal with the bodyguard should he renege on his duty, but for now, he could not show weakness.

"Naturally. Since your aura is not a conscious attack on my guests, it is naturally suppressed in my Inn, and there is no punishment for it. After all, how can I let my guests randomly suffer for no reason?"

In less than a millionth of a second after Lex finished speaking, the bodyguard was about to display his displeasure towards Lex, after all, since the Innkeeper required a bodyguard, he must be weaker than the bodyguard himself! Yet before he could act he heard a system notification in a tone he'd never heard before!

"Alert! Alert! Quest interference detected! Quest parameters changed! The punishment for quest failure has changed!

"New quest parameters: Ensure the safety of everyone in the Midnight Inn for the duration of the quest!

New quest failure punishment: Cultivation will be completely sealed for 0.5 years!"

"System, what is going on? Why did the quest change? This has never happened before?"

"Checking host authority...host authority is insufficient to learn details...using special bloodline clearance...host authority partially accepted...host authority suppressed...please raise your authority to learn the answer!"

His special bloodline clearance was suppressed! Yet another situation he had never encountered. At this point he could only speculate, yet the reason was most likely the Innkeeper warning him. How the Innkeeper could influence his system, he did not know. For now, he decided to behave - after all, being suppressed was also a novel feeling for him. The Innkeeper was more mysterious than he seemed.

"Interesting," he murmured and disappeared.

Seeing his bodyguard disappear, Lex was internally relieved, but did not let it show on his face. He believed that the bodyguard behaved because his system restrained him. Everyone in the audience believed that the Innkeeper must have admonished his bodyguard secretly, which scared the very few who recognized the Celestial. Even the bodyguard himself believed it was the Innkeepers' doing. No one knew that a tiny, floating projection of a girl hovered behind Lex's head, looking at where the bodyguard had once stood. She snorted, then disappeared.

"Now, as I was saying. There are ten very important nodes that keep the formation protecting the spawning portal protected. As a result, there will be ten games, five for Foundation realm cultivators

and five for Golden Core cultivators. Each game will include all planets participating at the same time, and will be a group effort for each planet rather than an individual's efforts. The success or failure of each game will give each planet a certain number of points. Once all the games are concluded, the planet with the highest number of points will win. As for what will happen to the spawning portal once the games are over? That has nothing to do with the games, so it won't affect the outcome of the Midnight Games."

Lex smiled and was about to proceed to the questions portion of this meeting when something occurred to him.

"Naturally, since it's a team effort, if certain team members from a planet try to sabotage the game, they will be immediately disqualified and removed."

He did not look at or point towards anyone as he said this, but the Devils grimaced and the Jotun soldiers breathed a sigh of relief. As much as Ragnar was interested in the reward, so long as the portal was revealed, he would consider it reward enough, which is why he never cared if the zombies or devils would try to participate and sabotage. In fact, he hoped such low leveled Devils would participate and give him the opportunity to kill them.

"If anyone has any questions, please feel free to ask."

Silence once again filled the air as they all waited for someone to ask the first question. It did not take long, however, before a Marlo who had just finished his meal stood up and asked, "Is there an age limit on the cultivators for the games?"

"No, so long as you fall within the category, anyone can participate."

"And how safe are the games?"

This was a question many people had in mind, and one Lex had also fretted over a lot. He did not want a lot of people to die, so he did his best to make it as safe as possible. Yet he was limited by his funds, and was unable to make it completely safe.

"The difficulty of each game will be based on the cultivation. But it will ultimately still be dangerous, and anyone who is not careful risks losing his life. This is one of the reasons that the games will be based on teamwork rather than individual games, to support and protect one another to achieve the goal. How well the contestants use this is up to them."

Marlo did not seem disappointed by the answer, and sat down with a grin. Unfortunately, he did not realize that even though his new cultivation method was incomplete, he no longer qualified as a Golden Core cultivator.

The tree that had previously been shaking away the birds raised a single root, as if raising its hand to be called on.

Lex looked at the tree's status and called out to it.

"Yes, Igishima, what is your question?"

The tree had no mouth so Lex expected it to speak using its spirit sense, yet who could have expected its leaves to start vibrating rapidly, causing a sound akin to the voice of a young lady to come out?

"I will need a few days to set up for the culture show. Is that fine?"

"Yes, it is not a problem. As soon as this meeting ends, anyone who wants to participate can register, and those that need to prepare beforehand can start doing so. The Inn will cooperate with your needs."

Once a few questions were asked, the guests became more comfortable asking questions and more and more started opening up. This continued for a while before Ragnar gave one of the men beside him a look, prompting him to stand up to ask a question.

"I have a question that's not strictly related to the games, I hope you don't mind," he said, flashing the Innkeeper an apologetic smile. This man did not look bulky or muscular like the rest of the Jotun soldiers. In fact, standing next to them his clear skin and delicate physique seemed even more prominent. It made one wonder how such a character ended up alongside these elite soldiers.

"Go ahead." Lex was looking forward to interacting more with the Jotun soldiers. He planned to learn more about this so-called 'known universe' from them since eventually he was bound to have guests from planets in this territory. The more knowledge he had, the lesser his chances of making an ignorant mistake.

"Is it alright if, during the Midnight Games, the empire sets up a recruitment stall?"

Lex raised an eyebrow in curiosity. This truly was not what he was expecting.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 117: Sudden conclusion

Lex was immediately faced with a conundrum. His decision here would set a precedent and would impact his future relationship with the many powers of the universe. On the one hand, he thought that this might be a good way of earning some MP and could charge them for the stall. On the other hand, should such a presence become a permanent part of his Inn it would automatically tag him as an ally or subordinate of the Jotun Empire to new powers.

This was because he was sure that if he allowed them such a stall, they would try to keep it permanent. Not to mention, should the Jotun Empire realize they can get a permanent residence here, they won't hesitate to set up a permanent stall.

He weighed the pros and cons in his head for a moment. Ultimately, the decision was completely up to him, and since he was feeling good, he allowed it - with some rules.

"For the duration of the event, you may host a stall for recruitment.

However, you must follow some rules. You cannot solicit others, only if they come to you can you try to recruit them. You cannot coerce my guests, and you cannot manipulate them using their lack of understanding. You must explain to them in detail what you may recruit them for. Furthermore, I will assign a staff member to accompany you in your stall for the duration of its existence."

The lanky man thanked the Innkeeper as he did not mind those rules, but before he could sit back down, a voice he was not expecting to hear again spoke up.

"In that case, you won't mind if the Devils want to set up such a stall as well, right?" asked Loretta.

The question not only froze the man, it stilled Ragnar's heart as well as everyone else's. Lex internally cursed himself. He had just told himself that if he allowed one, others would also follow, but conveniently forgot that another major force was also here.

"Naturally, so long as you follow all the rules, there should be no problem," Lex replied to her.

Loretta smiled, and let no satisfaction or reluctance show. She may have been testing the Innkeepers' so called 'neutrality' or may have been trying to create a divide between Lex and the Jotun Empire.

Whatever the case, Lex already knew that if he catered to everyone, he would make some people dissatisfied. Yet even if it were not the rules of the Inn itself, he would have done the same thing.

There was a momentary pause in the questions, but this time the Queen stood up and asked, "How do we bring the participants to the Inn for each portion? And what about guests? How many people can we bring to view the Games? Or can we watch the Games from our planets?"

"Good questions," Lex said, glad things were getting back on topic, instead of being mired with politics.

"Each of the leaders who were invited to this meeting will be given a certain number of keys that they can take back to their planet to give to the participating guests. Each key will bring in 10 guests maximum. Should you require more keys, you can purchase them directly from your personal holographic assistants. The same is true for the audience as well - each leader will get keys for audience members. If you want to bring more, you can purchase the keys.

"Anyone will be able to watch the Games live from the coliseum or anywhere else in the Inn, but not on your own planets."

With that question, things came back into flow, and more people started asking questions again. One enthusiastic Beast asked if he could travel to other 'planets' from the Inn, which sparked everyone's curiosity, to which Lex answered not at the moment, perhaps in the future.

More questions came, mostly about what kind of display would qualify as 'culture'. Lex left it as open to interpretation as possible, setting only a very few restrictions. Most of the restrictions actually originated from the Devil's questions, who at some point decided to participate as well.

The restrictions were along the lines of no killing, no torture, no corrupting the souls of the damned, no furys - eh no, what he meant to say was, no human or animal amalgamation tests, etc.

Finally, after a while, the questions came to a close, and just as Lex was about to conclude the meeting, a sloth raised its hand.

"Yes?" Les asked

"I do not have a question," the sloth said lazily, "but I have a humble request for the other planets."

Intrigued, Lex raised an eyebrow.

"I have noticed that no Beasts were invited from the other two planets. If you have any, I would request that you invite them as well, and give them an opportunity to broaden their horizons. I would also like to meet them."

Lex was not expecting such a request, but saw no reason to interfere, so he only looked on in silence at the other groups.

While the Earthlings were hesitating, one of the Devil's spoke. "Beasts, we have a few back in Garvitz. We could bring some, if you feel lonely."

"That would be splendid," the sloth replied, as if ignorant of the sinister tone of the Devil.

"Be careful dealing with the Devils, sloth," Ragnar finally spoke. "They are treacherous."

"Thank you for your warning, young human. But Nibiru is not a planet with an allegiance. We can handle some trials."

The sloth's reply raised quite a few eyebrows, as so far the Beasts had only displayed a complete lack of knowledge of the universe, let alone their own planet's name. It seemed things were not so simple.

"We will extend the invitation," the Queen answered the sloth. "Though whether or not they attend is out of our control."

Seeing that matter settled, Ragnar stood up as well and said and looked towards the Innkeeper, as if seeking permission to speak. Seeing Lex nod, he said, "I too have a request. Before you all return, I would like to have an individual meeting with the leaders of your planet."

Without missing a beat, Loretta asked, "You want a meeting? Even with us?"

"Especially with you," Ragnar said, not hiding his aggression at all. It was only out to respect or perhaps fear of the Innkeeper that he had kept himself restrained so far.

"It seems to me that everyone is done with questions. If that is the case, let's conclude the meeting," said Lex. Yet before he could say anything else, Marlo stood up abruptly, as if to emphasize that he had one last question.

"Yes?" Lex asked in a tired voice, sure that this would not be a productive question.

"I remember hearing something about a combat arena? Can I challenge other guests to fights?"

"Not during the Midnight Games," Lex stated flatly. "I think that should do it for now. You all can ask your personal holograms if you have anything else. Feel free to stay as long as you want, though my suggestion is that you return to start preparations."

With those words said, Lex disappeared from view, heading straight to his apartment. As soon as he returned, his previous state of 'flow' that he was in broke. From being absolutely okay, he quickly went panting heavily. His rosy skin went pale and Lex started sweating. He felt the energy drain out of him like water leaking from a tank, and his previously clear head started fogging up. Unable to understand what was happening, Lex tried to stay awake, but collapsed the very next moment.

He had been absolutely fine just up until a few minutes ago, but suddenly started feeling like he needed to wrap things up. At first he ignored the feeling, but the feeling only grew till it became apparent something was incredibly wrong. His initial plan was to stay around much longer and keep an eye on how his guests reacted to the information he provided. He especially wanted to spy on the meetings Ragnar was planning, yet in the end, he had to return to his apartment.

What he did not know was that his ability to enter a 'flow' and perform absolutely perfectly according to the situation was not a normal state. It fed heavily on his spirit, or mental energy. In fact, had his spirit not stabilized just in time for the meeting he would not have been able to maintain that state for nearly as long.

This was not to say that he could not have held the meeting without being in such a state, but he definitely would not have handled things as well - especially with the pressure of the Devils and the Jotun Empire.

Since his cultivation was low, he could not accurately gauge his mental energy. Normally when he was running out, he would feel a physical signal from his body, such as mental exhaustion or fatigue, but his state of 'flow' allowed him to ignore it. Well, he could ignore it right up until the last moment. Had he not ended the meeting quickly, he would have collapsed in front of everyone.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 118: Ragnar starts to move

The Innkeepers' sudden departure left the audience in an awkward silence. When was the last time any of them had been dismissed in such a cavalier manner? Yet the Innkeeper leaving in such a manner did not arouse any suspicion, but only strengthened the perception that he was much stronger than them and that he really was only treating these as games.

Summoning his holographic assistant, Ragnar asked, "Is there some place I can have a private meeting? Some place I won't be overheard?"

"Naturally," the hologram answered. "You can rent one of our regular rooms, all of which comes with natural sound insulation and complete protection from outside snooping. You can also rent a room within the coliseum, which has the same benefits. Please note, should you choose to rent a room in the coliseum, the longest you can rent for is the duration of the event."

"Good, we'll rent a room in the coliseum till the event ends," he told the hologram, not bothering to ask about the price. It didn't make a difference though, the price was the same.

Turning to his followers, he started giving instructions immediately.

"Have the soldiers split up. Have the reconnaissance team 1 through 5 undergo the tour, and have team 6 explore on their own. Have the rest of the soldiers positioned within view of the zombies, and keep tabs on their movements. Have delegations approach each of the planet's leaders and set a time for a meeting. I've marked down the suspected leaders for the Beasts as well as the humans, but you can ask around just to be sure.

"Also, have Alpha team 1 follow the Devil's every move. No need to be subtle about it, I want them to know that we're following them. Send back someone to Vegus Minima to submit a preliminary report of events to the Command Carrier. But for now, in the report, no need to mention the trigger terms 'Loretta' or 'Celestial'. In fact, let all the soldiers know, all information about the Midnight Inn is considered platinum level confidential. Also, pass word to the commanders on Vegus Magnum and Vegus Prime to adjust their searching method according to the new information we have about the formation

"Once done with the report, have them run a full database search on the names Nibiru and Earth. I want to know any information we have about them. Slag, you're with me. It's time you gave your report."

As soon as Ragnar was done speaking, his soldiers dispersed in an orderly fashion, moving with direction and purpose. Their clear focus and discipline impressed the Earthlings, who were watching from afar. The display told them that their chances at the combat portion of the Games would be weak, yet some of them wanted to try anyway.

Ragnar and his entourage teleported directly into the room that he had rented. The first thing Ragnar did was sweep the room with his spiritual senses very thoroughly. When he found nothing, and noticed that his senses were not able to pry into neighboring rooms, he felt reassured. That did not mean he left things as is.

Simple eye contact with one of his followers prompted him to start setting up seclusion formation around the room. This would prevent prying spiritual senses from entering, as well as stop any signals

from the room going out. The signal block was to stop any recon device, formation or treasure they may have missed.

Their actions were practiced and professional, and only ten minutes later the already secure room became even harder to spy on. But they were not done yet. Each man in the room summoned their private assistant and told them to give them some privacy until they left the room. The assistants obliged and disappeared.

Immediately it occurred to Ragnar that this could be a potential loophole in the Inns' security. If the rooms really were as private as they claimed, and if even the assistants were sent away, someone could easily commit murder in their room. Of course, getting someone into your room and then having them dismiss their assistant without arousing suspicion was a difficult task in itself. Maybe there were other ways in which the Inn provided security, but those were thoughts for another time.

"Lieutenant Slag, I've already gone through the report you compiled," Ragnar said, looking at the man. "Is there anything else of importance you would like to bring attention to? Speak freely."

"Yes sir! After investigating the Inn and its guests for the past few days, there are a few things I've speculated on. I could not investigate the guests too closely without offending the Innkeeper, but I took this opportunity to converse with almost everyone and have come to certain inferences.

"Firstly, in the time I've been here, I've only seen guests from Vegus Minima, Earth and Nibiru. Yet the Innkeeper claims that they have guests from all over the universe. Assuming that is true, I suspect that there is more than one Inn. The Inns should be divided either by the level of the planets, or more likely, there should be a separate Inn for a certain given quadrant of space. If that were true, this specific Inn might be the newest one which is why it is still only accepting guests from three planets. From time to time the Innkeeper disappears, so it would make sense if he was handling matters at the other Inns. Of course, I have no proof of this, so this is mere speculation.

"Secondly, from my analysis of the event and my conversation with guests who have stayed at the Inn previously, I suspect I may have gained insight into the true reason behind the Midnight Games. On the premise that there were no outside interference such as that of the Devils or our Empire, the three planets selected all would have civilizations below Star level. None of them would have exceeded the scope of their own solar systems. Keeping this knowledge in mind, along with the various facilities provided at the Inn that promote nurturing and trade, I believe the goal of the Innkeeper is to accelerate the growth of these planets or civilizations.

"Thirdly, I did not get an opportunity to meet guests from Nibiru, other than an incident where a Beast attacked the Innkeeper, so I have no information on them. Yet I did meet a lot of them from Earth, and spotted some guests I suspect are from Vegus Minima, but cannot confirm because they kept avoiding me.

"Earth seems to be a human dominant planet with no clear cut planet wide ruler. I cannot ascertain the level of the average cultivators, but I had a run in with two elites. One of them was a youth at the Foundation realm named Alexander. I did not even need my spirit sense to determine that his cultivation has few, if any weaknesses, and that he has great potential to grow. The second was a man named Marlo. You saw him at the coliseum, he's the one who asked the question about the combat arena."

At this point, Slag stopped for a moment. He would never even consider hiding information from his General, yet this next bit embarrassed him greatly and was not easy to say.

"My encounter with Marlo may not have been...under the best of circumstances. Seeing the potential of the youth, and the fact that he was from a planet supposedly free from intergalactic influence, I attempted to recruit him. Unfortunately, it seems Alexander was Marlo's student and the other did not take kindly to my recruitment attempt.

"Using one hand, with his cultivation sealed, Marlo defeated me in a competition of strength while I used my full force."

His last statement alarmed not only Ragnar, but the rest in the room. None of them knew Slag personally, how could they be expected to know each soldier when they had hundreds of thousands under their command? Yet the fact that he was a Lieutenant spoke for itself. It was impossible to gain rank unless you had the equivalent strength. However, he was defeated one handed?

"Fortunately, they did not drop pretenses and maintained a non-hostile relationship with me following. Marlo subsequently asked me various times to join if he could join the empire, but it is blatantly obvious that he has ulterior motives. I dared not promise him anything.

"Other than them, I encountered a businessman from Earth named Will. He was extremely eager to discuss potential trade opportunities. I told him I would refer him to the appropriate people when the time came."

Ragnar listened to Slag's report very seriously, but at the last statement, he could not stop himself from showing a smile. Ragnar had read Slag's report during the meeting, and also checked up on Slag's history in the army, as well as his personality report.

Very similar to Ragnar himself, Slag was an orphan and lived his entire life parallel to, or in the army. His early education had been in an Army Public School, and at age 15 he had enrolled into an army boarding school. His life and career path had been mostly straightforward, similar to Ragnar himself.

So then how could Ragnar not understand that when Slag said that he would refer Will to the appropriate people, what he really meant was he had no knowledge of trade and would let someone else carry that headache. Honestly, even at their level, the army was full of muscle heads. Ragnar was a very serious man, but even then, as someone who had spent every waking moment of his life in the army, how could he not be amused by the simple plights of his soldiers?

The Innkeeper

Chapter 119: Fruit of his labor

1 second. That was exactly how long it took for Ragnar to absorb all the information Slag had given him, remove the unnecessary parts, focus on things he thought were unimportant but actually might be, and form his own theories different from what Slag originally thought. He was quick not because the information was brief, but because his thoughts worked imperceptibly faster than normal humans.

There was one, very important thing that Slag had not realized in his assessment of the Inn. His mistake wasn't really his fault actually, it was a result of his understanding of the universe being limited.

Guessing on the possibility of there being other Inns was not something that could be done at the moment, because early conjecture without sufficient evidence would blind them to other possibilities and cause them to misinterpret new evidence to somehow fit into the narrative they thought most likely.

It also led to an entirely different line of thought such as, were there different Innkeepers for each Inn, or did the same one manage them all? How were they formed? Where did they exist? How were they hidden?

All of these questions were extremely important, but also distractions. Everything had to be done in a systematic manner, haphazardly making guesses would lead to inefficiency. One of the first things that needed to be focused on was where the Inn was.

Before arriving at the Inn, Ragnar had equipped a special device that would transmit his location to any Jotun carrier, planet, server, satellite, or basically anything that could connect to their main database. He did not expect to get a result immediately, but based on their latest technology, if within 24 hours the signals were unable to reach such a device, it would lead to a few very interesting possibilities.

The first and foremost of those was that the Inn was in an alternate space, cut off from the main universe. This was the most likely option, as such a thing wasn't altogether uncommon. Another possibility was that his signals were somehow blocked. This was a little more unlikely. This signal was based on the newest technology that most did not even know existed yet. Basically, so long as any form of energy existed, the signal could use it to carry itself forward. This went beyond just common forms of energy such as kinetic, light, gravitational, spirit etc. Even higher forms of energy, that most beings could not even perceive or interact with, could be used as a medium.

Another possibility, one that Ragnar thought had a high chance of being correct, was that the Inn was so far from anywhere in the known universe that it was taking much longer for the signal to be transmitted.

Such a theory also meant that the entity known as the Midnight Inn was a power from the uncharted territories of the universe, and the Innkeeper was a cultivator that no existing topmost cultivator had ever interacted with yet. This theory was troublesome.

Still, he would not speculate until he had more information.

"Good. You will follow me from now on, and if you think of any new information you may inform me directly via spirit sense. Anthony, start running tests immediately. I want to know the density of the spiritual energy, the gravity index, the day cycle, the oxygen concentration of the air, basically everything there is to know about this place!"

"Yes sir," answered the relatively weak looking man who had asked Lex about setting up a recruitment stall.

Without waiting to see what they did, Ragnar exited the room, Slag following behind him. Outside a soldier was waiting for him.

"Did the Devils agree to the meeting?"

"Yes sir, they've invited you to their room for the meeting. All of them are there, none of them have split from the main room. Only one is waiting outside for you to invite you in."

"Good, let's go."

Ragnar decided to meet the Devils first as he had a very important task he wanted to complete. With the other delegates, there were actual important matters that needed to be discussed. With the Devils, Ragnar simply wanted to vent by insulting them!

The man had spent over a thousand years fighting devils, and had long since evolved past mundane emotions as hating Devils for righteous reasons. The way he saw it now was simple. Since they were the enemy, he would take pleasure in their discomfort.

"You can only enter alone," the Devil standing outside their room told Ragnar as he approached. He had a mischievous smile as he waited for Ragnar to argue with him, but this Devil had never interacted with Ragnar before. How could he know the butcher's personality?

"Then let's get on with it," he said bluntly, as if he could not have cared less even if he tried. Ragnar did not put even a second thought into the fact that he had discovered a security flaw in the room earlier. As far as he was concerned, nothing would make him happier if the Devils would ambush him in the room.

The remaining soldiers stood face to face with the Devil as he teleported Ragnar inside. They grinned at him, as if welcoming any trouble he would cause. These were the elitist soldiers in their battalion. If they didn't face a near death experience every day, it would feel like they were wasting their time.

Inside the room, several Devils sat on sofas and on the bed, like a group of friends hanging out. Somehow, they already had drinks and food in the room and there was one, particularly emo-looking Devil playing a musical instrument in the corner. What did an emo Devil look like? Like an 80 year old

man dressed like a teenager, with a single piercing that looked out of place and long unbrushed hair that covered his eyes.

Loretta was sitting in the corner, eating jumbo shrimp with a look that screamed avarice. This was the first time she had tried a 'shrimp' and had decided that she loved them.

"Tell me, Loretta, you wouldn't happen to be Stefan's daughter, would you? Or would it be son? Or some other third thing that I don't know the name for?"

Ragnar's voice was very serious, as if he was not asking a question and insulting her at the same time.

"Why would you link me with Stefan, General? Do I look like a progeny of the elves?" she asked in return, unbothered by the man's attempt at an insult.

"Not really. But I've already killed three of his sons. I thought killing one of his daughters would be a nice change of pace."

Though this time he was not insulting her, the hostility he received from the Devils was manifold. Basking in their killing intent, Ragnar revealed a generous smile, as if he were receiving the most relaxing of massages.

After glaring at the man for a moment, Loretta relaxed again. "I'm a little disappointed, General. Is that why you came here? To insult us? I would have expected a little more from the Son of the Empire.

Ragnar grinned and looked around the room. He looked each Devil in the eyes, and none turned away from his gaze as if challenging him. Both parties knew that in a situation where a Celestial could potentially be offended, there would be no combat. That effectively turned any interaction between the parties moot as they could not fight, and would not parley. In that case, it really did seem that Ragnar only came to insult them.

Finally, when he had looked each Devil in the eye, he turned back to Loretta and said, "12 Devils. Other than Warheil Heil Fendal, who is a confirmed anomaly, the rest don't seem to have an affiliation with Stefan the seditious. That means it's already time for the new generation to enter the battlefield, and

you're probably the first, right? I'm sure the alliance will be interested to know that things are about to get heated once again."

Without waiting for a response, Ragnar left the room. He would have liked to stay and bask in their discomfort, but he could not risk letting them realize what he had actually done.

The new generation of Devils sat there ignoring the man known as Hell's Butcher, unaware that he had absorbed all of their auras in a special recording device implanted in his eyes. They thought he only meant to provoke them, yet how could such an important man waste his precious time just to antagonize them?

Soon, they would learn of his cunning.

"Who's next?" Ragnar asked his soldier, already moving away from the room.

The humans of Earth seem to be conducting a meeting of their own at the moment, so the Beasts of Nibiru will be next. Only the sloth and deer agreed to meet, the rest have either already returned home or started preparing for the games.

"Lead me to them," he said, as he started planning out his moves in his head. So far, this meeting had been very fruitful for the Empire. He was eager to see what other gains he could harvest.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 120: Fiery Mammoths

Unlike the Devils, the Beasts did not rent a room to host the meeting in. The sloth and the deer both were simply sitting in the grass that hosted the meditation room, chatting amongst themselves.

"I don't understand," said Greens Haven. "You say that it is your job to protect 'Nibiru' and select talented Beasts, but why have I never heard of you? Or of any Beasts getting selected?"

"The universe is a cruel place," the sloth said slowly, suppressing a yawn. "Staying on a small planet, living out a peaceful life is already a great gift. Only the most talented can be selected to be transferred off planet. Not all Beasts have a powerful presence in the universe. If those talents belonged to a species

that do, It is my job to send them there. If those talents do not belong to a species that have such a presence, then they are most likely subordinate to someone else. In that case, I would send the talents to the superior species."

"Then what is the qualification to be classified as a 'talent'?" Green Haven asked. Its question was asked casually as it seemed to have already accepted that it was not good enough. After all, it had never heard of any Beast stronger than itself, and its predecessors who had reached its level did not know of the sloth either so obviously, their realm was not good enough.

The sloth did not answer immediately, but looked at its single hair that had a golden tip. It really liked it.

"Actually, you and that little wolf have already surpassed the qualification level. When we return, I can get in touch to find out who will be recruiting you."

The deer was astounded. What did it mean they had already surpassed the qualification? Why then had they never heard of anyone else being recruited?

"Then how come you waited so long? I've been in this realm for hundreds of years."

"I was sleeping," the sloth replied, as if it was the most natural answer ever.

The deer was dumbfounded. HOW LONG HAD THE SLOTH BEEN SLEEPING?

But before their conversation could continue, a party of very strong humans approached them. Even though Greens Haven knew that they were safe at the Inn, the thought of humans stronger than itself made it feel unsettled. Yet the sloth besides it was also very strong, so that reassured it a little.

"Greetings. I am Ragnar Asulf of the Jotun Empire. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me."

"Greetings, Ragnar Asulf of the Jotum Empire," the sloth replied with declining energy. For some reason, the atmosphere at the Inn made it feel so comfortable all it did was want to sleep.

Both the deer and Ragnar watched the sloth, waiting for it to introduce itself, but only saw it struggle to keep its eyes open.

"Greetings Ragnar Asulf of the Jotun Empire. I am Green Havens," the deer introduced itself loudly, hoping to wake up the sloth. Its knowledge of the universe still bordered on nonexistent, but it was beginning to get concerned for being assigned such an irresponsible Beast.

Startled awake the sloth looked around, before remembering where it was. "I am...I am...I am..." the sloth said a few times, suddenly realizing it did not remember its own name. "You can call me Golden Hair of the Three-toed Bradious clan," the sloth proclaimed, renaming itself.

Ragnar quickly went through all the Beast clans he knew of, but could not recall this clan. Still, that did not mean that this clan was small or weak. The universe was vast and Ragnar's only concern had always been the demons, so it made sense that he was not familiar with it.

"It is well that you came," Golden Hair continued, "the others at the meeting promised to fulfill my request to bring the Beasts of their planets - only you did not. I request you again, bring the Beasts and expose them to broader horizons. They should not miss out on such an opportunity."

Greens Haven looked at the sloth with a confused look, wondering if it realized how many Beasts had missed out on opportunities because it was sleeping.

"Our presence on Vegus Minima is fairly new, and we have not had time to establish relations with the Beasts yet. However, I will try to reach out to them. If they are willing, I will invite them."

"Thank you," the sloth said simply. Its eyelids started to get heavy again, and Ragnar recognized the potential for an awkward silence building up once again, so he decided to be upfront with his questions - it was quite clear that a long conversation was out of the question.

"Earlier you said that your planet is not without allegiance. I was wondering to whom you were referring. The Jotun Empire has many allies, it could turn out that our relations are deep."

"Nibiru is one of the nurturing planets controlled by the Fiery Mammoth clan," the sloth replied with eyes practically closed. His answer doused any interest Ragnar had in building an alliance. In fact, he was

suddenly grateful that the Devils were ready to create some trouble for the sloth. He hoped that they would succeed.

"I can see that you have important matters to deal with so I won't take up more of your time. I look forward to seeing your performance in the Games." With that Ragnar quickly left. It almost seemed like he was doing his best not to run away. Suddenly, on observing the humans reaction at hearing the answer to his question, Greens Haven was very concerned for its future.

"Anthony, when we get back I want you to compile a report on our latest status on relations with the Fiery Mammoth clan. Also, send someone back to Minima Vegus to immediately request a diplomatic relations officer from home base. I refuse to deal with this myself."

"Yes sir," Anthony replied, but looked at the General with pity in his eyes. They were too far from home base, it would take weeks for a qualified officer to come, meaning Ragnar would still have to deal with it should a situation arise. Furthermore, there was no need to look up relations as everyone was clear on what the status was. Who here did not know that scandalous story? It was the talk of the empire for centuries, when one of the noble families of the Empire had...

Anthony shuddered. His rank was too low to gossip about such things. All he could say was, some men really had...heavy...tastes.

"What's next?" Ragnar asked, already setting the matter behind him.

"The humans from Earth are still conducting their own meeting. The meeting with the Devils and Beasts went by faster than expected, so we still have some time. Might I recommend that you tour the Inn in the meantime."

"Slag, do you have a recommendation for what I should investigate first?"

"Of the services I've tried so far, Battle Ax and the Recovery room are very interesting. Although they have limited effect on higher level cultivators, they are still worth investigating. Other than those, I would recommend investigating the Mystery trial, but that takes a long time so you should wait till after the meeting for that. Apparently, there is a prize for completing the trial, but I have been unable to do so. Yet despite that, I gained a lot during my various attempts at the trial. True to its name, it is very mysterious."

"Understood. Let's investigate Battle Ax first."

The soldiers made their way to Battle Ax, only to find a large crowd already waiting. Most of the Beasts had already left the Inn, so it was the humans of Earth that crowded around the building. As most of them were at the Foundation realm and had limited resources and heritages, a chance to get a technique based on your own requirements was unbelievable to them. As soon as the first person discovered this hidden treasure, its popularity exploded!

John could not be happier and was working nonstop. Yet even with his expertise, each technique would take a few hours at the least. His greatest regret was that he could not split himself so that he could work on more work.

Similar to the Battle Ax, there were crowds outside the training room and Gamers Den as well. If Lex were awake he would have used this opportunity to buy more Training and Meditation rooms to meet the demand, but he was asleep so for now the problem would persist.

The crowd at Gamers Den didn't consist of Earthlings, oddly enough. They were already familiar with the games so they had no interest. It was the soldiers who had discovered the AR gaming mode that Lex had installed for Chen's 'training' that crowded that building, much to Z's chagrin. He had never dealt with so many people before. He hated it. All he wanted was to watch some Tv, was that too much to ask?