

### Chapter 13 Bluebird Portal

#### Bluebird Portal

Even though Lex was at the peak of his physical fitness, he felt exhausted when he got home. He'd picked up an inordinate amount of Chinese take out on his way as well as a pack of cigarettes. He wasn't really a smoker, he'd paid extra attention to ensure he never got addicted, and never kept any on him. He'd only occasionally buy them when he was feeling stressed, and would quickly discard the pack after smoking a few.

Setting his food down on a table and turning on Netflix he quickly set the table with plates, juices, some water and chopsticks. But before he started his feast he pulled a stool by his open window, lit his cigarette and took a long, deep drag. It had been a few weeks since he last smoked, it felt nice. He took this time to look out on the traffic below, the people coming and going, the sounds of the city and everything else in between. Even with all its hustle and bustle, viewed from a distance the rhythm of the city seemed so peaceful. When he finally finished his smoke Lex quickly blew whatever smoke he could out of the window and sprayed some air freshener.

He washed his hands and sat down, ready to consume more food than was probably healthy and let his thoughts wander. So far there was limited progress towards making more MP, meaning there was none. He couldn't complete any quests right now, and since Bastet and Falak hadn't left their rooms there was no opportunity to try and sell them stuff from the gift shop. If his luck panned out someone might find the golden key he left behind and actually be able to use it, but there was no telling when that might be. He could try and see if there was some way he could give keys to cultivators. Or at least find an opportunity to have them 'discover' it on their own, since he felt it was unsafe to let anyone know he had any connection to them.

In cultivation novels the protagonist always auctioned items off or sold them to some giant trading company but that was unlikely here, as he literally had no idea what technology, typical or spiritual, could be used to trace the key back to him. Not to mention, he was absolutely sure the 'token' he was given had some kind of tracking function as well so he didn't want to take any

unnecessary risks. If nothing changed, the best opportunity he could see was to wait a week and travel to the new world to see what opportunities it presented. But he would have to prepare for that as well, in whatever way he could.

At some point through his meal he scanned his token and entered the Bluebird online portal to investigate it's features, and they were numerous. There were forums, chat rooms, news that wasn't available to the public, trading platforms and much much more. He took his time going through the portal the rest of the day. Every few hours he'd ask Mary if Bastet left her room, and the answer was always no.

He also learnt a lot of basic information that he'd been missing for a while. The first and most important thing he learnt was the first few cultivation levels:

1. Mortals (normal people)
2. Body Tempering (using spiritual energy to temper the body so it could absorb spiritual energy at later cultivation levels)
3. Qi Training (beginning to absorb spiritual energy in the body)
4. Foundation Realm (use the absorbed spiritual energy to create a foundation)
5. Golden Core (form a core in the body to store concentrated spiritual energy)

Cultivation levels above Golden core were not mentioned at all, and even Golden core themselves were mentioned with extreme reverence.

Something interesting he encountered was a cultivation version of the social media platform Twitter called Tempest, where many high leveled cultivators had huge followings, along with various companies and organizations. Most cultivators, he discovered, were at body tempering and Qi cultivation, with the numbers dropping drastically when it came to Foundation realm. Any random Foundation cultivator had at least a few million followers from over the globe.

Another interesting thing he discovered was what was normally referred to as spiritual equipment in novels was called Spirit Tech, and had a huge variety. The prices varied too, so he found household spirit tech for cleaning, tidying, laundry and even cooking for relatively cheap. But he also found body armor

and weapons the prices for which went in the hundreds of thousands even at the cheapest models. Furthermore one had to present one's token when receiving such items and undergo some verification. Some random but interesting spirit tech Lex saw included fully functioning prosthetics, bioengineered nanobots that the user injected in his or her body that automatically healed the user whenever they got hurt, a various assortments of flying devices and fully immersive VR!

He also saw various seminars that were held monthly for multiple organizations. Lex checked a few to see what kind of organizations there were, since he'd heard about them so much, and broadly categorized them into three different groups: ones that conducted R & D, those that procured various resources and those that simply banded people together to protect themselves and their interests. Most organizations only gave very loose descriptions of their activities and purposes, such as developing the latest on spiritual farming technologies or mining for Blue Teltaro (whatever that is). For more details you would have to join, but what they did provide was a very detailed list of benefits they provided for each member. None of this specifically sounded illegal to Lex, but the level of secrecy made him cautious.

Another thing he found, something that interested him specifically, was a self-defense class for beginner cultivators. For someone going to another planet, this sounded essential. He tried to find the closest one to him and signup, and his first class would be in a couple of days.

The last thing that he discovered, and the thing that completely surprised him, was the fact that cultivators were already inhabiting the moon and mars! And not just a few! Apparently there were quite a few cities there already, with extensive travel between the celestial bodies! Considering that he could travel between worlds this should not have been such a huge surprise, but this completely changed a fundamental truth he maintained about the world he lived in. It came as a bigger surprise than he could have imagined. But traveling to either the Moon or Mars wasn't easy, he had to meet a few requirements, but he was kind of excited about that possibility as well.

Just a few days ago he thought life was so boring, and now suddenly it was so exciting!

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## Chapter 14 Marlo's Self Defense for beginners

### Marlo's Self Defense for beginners

At a specific penthouse in New York, a small child had dozed off in the living room in front of the TV. Drool flowed down the side of his face and the various colors of the cartoon that were flashing on his innocent face made him look very adorable. His mother, who was standing over him, was smiling at her child – but her smile was tinged with sadness and anxiety.

After a short while she picked him up and took him to bed, before tucking herself in beside him. She noticed he had some kind of golden toy key in his hand, but he was holding onto it too tightly so she didn't try to force it from him.

It was just the two of them living there, and it was the last of her inheritance she had received from her family. For the past few weeks she had been trying to find a job, but she'd never worked anywhere in her life. Although she'd graduated from a prestigious college, that was over a decade ago. Without any relevant experience no one was willing to take a chance on her. She could ask someone she knew for a favor and try to get a job that way, however up until now she had been too proud to do so. Maybe it was time to put away her pride soon. She closed her eyes and tried to go to sleep, tears streaming down her face..

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Next morning Lex stretched and as he tried to rouse his drowsy self. It was 11 am so he couldn't even say he was waking up early. In fact he wasn't waking up at all. Last night he'd turned on his PC to play a few games and blow off some steam, but he was enthralled when he discovered his reaction speed and accuracy had improved immensely. Game after game he broke all his previous records, and he was on the longest win streak of his life. His excitement had gripped him and regardless of what game he played, his performance had improved readily. Briefly he even considered starting a career as a video game streamer, though tragically he had to force himself

away from that thought as his focus had to remain the Midnight Inn. Still, he played until right now when he could no longer ignore his rumbling stomach.

Forcefully tearing himself away from the computer he washed his face before finding himself in front of the TV again, with various Chinese leftovers in front of him. Truly it had been a while since he had been so decadent. After enjoying himself by enveloping himself in laziness for a couple more hours he changed into a track suit and went out. There was no progress on the Inn but he couldn't really let things rest without putting in any work at all. Jessica told him he was using too much strength in his handshake, and in fact last night he ended up breaking a keyboard completely in his excitement while gaming. There was an assortment of other things in his apartment that had suffered some damage due to his carelessness such as furniture, door knobs, walls and even his shower during a slipping incident.

He had to learn how to better control his strength, and currently through exercise was the only thing he could think of. Tomorrow he would have his first self-defense lesson for new cultivators and he would use that opportunity to ask about it, but until then he would have to make do. *innread.com*

He started with a light jog, focusing completely on his legs and the strength he used. He controlled his stride as best as he could and did his best to control how much force he was using. Unfortunately after around half an hour a careless misstep caused him to completely tear his joggers.

He bought himself several new pairs and spent the day utilizing his time focusing on trying to control his strength. He wouldn't admit it, but secretly he felt very giddy every time he 'accidentally' tore a shirt while flexing too much.

The next day he woke up bright and early and got ready for his first class. He wasn't sure what to expect, however he dressed up in a new tracksuit he purchased yesterday. At 7:50am he found himself in front of a private auditorium with a security guard at the entrance. He flashed his Bluebird token to the man who promptly moved out of the way and let Lex in.

Inside he discovered that there were only a few people, two girls and five guys who were chatting softly with one another. In the center of the auditorium was a large arena with padded floors and a large man, sitting on a folding chair with his eyes closed. When he entered the group of 7 who were chatting turned to look at him, and after a moment one of the guys waved him over.

"Hey man, name's Larry. You a new member too?"

“Yeah, name’s Lex” he replied, observing the rather frail looking man. He noticed that none of the 7 people looked very fit or muscular, though he was sure they were at least cultivators since that was the minimum requirement to attend this class. It was a little strange, as though he couldn’t consider himself very muscular, his body was in much better shape than before. He used to think that cultivating naturally made one look more fit but that might not be the case it seemed.

“Welcome, welcome. We’re all new as well, it’s only been a few weeks myself since I became a cultivator. More people should be coming soon I guess, since the first class is free. This is a great chance to make a few connections, if you know what I mean.” Larry winked at Lex before subtly hinting towards the two women in the group.

Lex smiled weakly. Even as a cultivator, this guy’s focus was only on girls. The others from the group introduced themselves, and it seemed all the people here were rogue cultivators who had either inherited cultivation from their families or found cultivation manuals somewhere by accident. It seemed that was a more common occurrence than Lex had imagined.

What surprised Lex the most however, was that all five guys planned on joining the military once after today’s free self defense lesson. Apparently the army offered the best benefits to lone cultivators and helped them further their cultivation. The two girls were friends and didn’t share any details on their plans, however Lex got the sense that they also were either going to join or already had joined some organization.

Another thing he learnt was that almost all of them took a few weeks to stabilize their cultivation before they felt confident enough in their control over their strength. Apparently it was very common for new cultivators to be unable to control themselves, even worse than he was it seemed.

A few more people came as time went by, and at 8:30 the large man finally opened his eyes and got up from his chair. Although he made no noise, he grabbed everyone’s attention. Aware of the effect he had on the crowd he grinned slyly and spoke, “Welcome to Marlo’s Self Defense for new cultivators. Everyone here has entered a new world of cultivation. Some of you may be familiar with this world already, and some of you may be new. Either way, let me be the one to help you take your first steps as you begin your new life.”

His words were welcoming, but the manic excitement in his eyes, his wild hair, patchy stubble and his muscle bulging, towering figure told a different story. Lex gulped. Were all cultivators a little crazy?

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## Chapter 15 Sudden Quest

“Come come, enter the arena everyone!” Marlo exclaimed, his body shaking with vigor as he spoke. “Everyone line up next to each other and let me take a look at you!” *innread.com*

Everyone quickly lined up nervously and stared at the giant man who was towering above them. Though he was not using his cultivation to pressure them, just his presence seemed to achieve the effect.

“15 young and talented people, ready to join my class,” he said, his tone sounding all too rehearsed. “15 people with hopes and dreams of success and triumph, of glamor and gold. But first you have to live long enough to achieve that. According to a survey in 2019, only 47% of people who became body cultivators in that year progressed in their cultivation, 29% stagnated exactly where they were and the remaining 24% died!” He paused for a moment to let everyone absorb that information.

Lex could not speak for others, but that percentage truly surprised him. One fourth of all new cultivators that year died! That was scarily high, and this was supposed to be a civilized society with organizations such as Bluebird maintaining the peace.

“Now I’m not saying that everyone who died was killed, but you’d have to look far and hard for a body cultivator who died of something like a heart attack! That’s why, if you want to survive and grow, you should always consider your security! If you progress too fast, you might attract the attention of someone who’s cultivation has been lagging, wondering if you have some kind of treasure that helped you along. If you progress too slow, you might attract the

ire of someone who thinks you're using up resources that could be better used by them instead. The world is full of dangerous people, and one must know how to protect yourself!

“And that’s why you are here today! To learn to protect yourself, and survive!” Marlo was practically yelling with excitement at this point, a wild grin painting his face. “But today, we won’t be doing any personalized training. No, today you will only be getting a taste of the hard work and dedication that will be required for you to take this course. That’s why the first lesson is free, so that if you don’t think you can do it, you can leave! Once you enroll in the course you cannot quit! It’ll be in your contract! I have a reputation to uphold, and I can’t have people saying that my students are easy to get rid of. So don’t bother introducing your names and backgrounds yet. First, introduce me to your guts! Introduce me to your will! Introduce me to the passion in your hearts to seize the cultivation world and snatch all its glory!” Marlo burst into a manic laughter that shook the entire arena and his overwhelming persona had all but intimidated most of his class into running away right then and there. Lex himself was considering never coming back after the introductory class, this guy was just a little too much!

That is, until he heard a notification from the system!

Sudden Quest initiated: With a great personality and abundant energy, Marlo is a great candidate to serve as a valet for the Inn! Hire Marlo as your first valet!

Quest Time limit: 1 month

Quest Reward: 1 small staff dormitory, 1000MP, +1 Midnight Inn Level

Quest failure punishment: -1000MP (if host is unable to pay, it will result in immediate death!)

Lex’s eyes nearly popped out of his head when he read the notification, and he was filled with a mix of excitement and anxiety! A sudden quest was a good way to earn some rewards that he sorely needed right now, but the punishment for failure was too steep! And the quest didn’t seem easy either, this Marlo fellow was too excitable. He had no idea how he would recruit him! How would...

Lex’s thoughts were abruptly interrupted by Marlo who finally stopped laughing and clapped his hands, upon which 15 uniformed, identical looking

men entered the room and stood before each of the participants, a stoic look on their faces.

“These are my minions, ordered from Rent-a-minion! Each one of them will teach you how to defend against a certain kind of attack, and then attack you! The only way to stop is to successfully block the attack! Otherwise they will not stop unless you pass out! So you better pay attention, and do your best!”

Everyone was shocked! What kind of class was it where they attacked the student until they passed out?! But before anyone could voice a complaint, each student was approached by a minion.

The one that approached Lex showed him various moves he could use. The minion would try to distract him with a punch, and then trip him backwards by putting a leg behind Lex's and pushing him. Lex would first have to avoid the punch and then the attempt to trip him. He could do so by simply stepping back, blocking, evading, counterattacking and more. The minion, although not very talkative, spoke slowly and calmly, a large contrast to Marlo, and gave many demonstrations to Lex on each possible maneuver he could do. He repeated as many times as Lex asked, but when Lex asked something unrelated to the content of the class, such as what exactly was Rent-a-minion, the minion would not answer.

Finally, after 20 minutes Lex felt ready to start. In this time many of the other students had already started, and they were all being taught to avoid different kinds of attacks. The only common theme was that everyone who had started was beaten up. One of the students, a young fellow, quickly asked to quit and said he wanted to stop. Unfortunately, the minion did not stop. He just kept attacking! Eventually the man accidentally tripped backwards and evaded the minions attack, triggering the condition for the minion to stop. As soon as he realized the minion had stopped, he ran out of the class with a mix of crying and yelling at Marlo! Marlo however only laughed and seemed to enjoy being scolded. All the other students however were thoroughly scared. That's why Lex made sure to absorb everything the minion had to teach before he started.

The result? He gravely underestimated the speed of the minion and got punched right in the face, not even gaining the opportunity to avoid the rest of the attack! Fortunately, the punch didn't seem to hurt him and much as it hurt the other students, and other than being slightly shocked he was fine. The minions speed wasn't otherworldly or insanely fast, it was just the normal speed for someone trained in combat. As someone who had never been in a

fight before though, Lex gravely underestimated just how fast that regular speed was.

He picked himself up and readied himself for the minions next attack, fueled by a mix of vindictive energy aimed at the minion and a desire to succeed. The second time he successfully dodged the punch, but it was by pulling back too fast! That caused him to lose his balance momentarily, a flaw the minion took quick advantage of! The third time, trying not to move in such a haphazard way as last time Lex tried to be more deliberate in his dodge, but was punched again!

This continued for over an hour! Almost all the other students had succeeded accidentally or passed out. Two of the students had succeeded flawlessly and were invited by Marlo for a private talk. Only Lex was still continuing at this point. It was mostly because the minions' attacks were unable to actually hurt Lex, though they did irritate him endlessly. He didn't get tired either from all the exercise, nor had his will to succeed diminished! He even forgot about why he was doing this, his focus was only on being able to evade the minion perfectly.

That wasn't to say he hadn't made progress. More than once he had actually dodged the minion and twice even blocked him, but Lex was never satisfied as he knew that so long as the fight continued after those 2 attacks his dodges and blocks left him in a bad position to continue.

Eventually, Marlo stopped him, waking him from his reverie of practice. But when he stopped and looked towards Marlo, who was grinning at him malevolently, his entire body trembled. This giant dude was definitely crazy. Lex was worried for his future.

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