

## **Innkeeper 131**

The Innkeeper

Chapter 131: Beasts take the stage

Lex walked away quickly, showing excitement on his face. As much as he wanted to disappear immediately, it occurred to him that he had spent too little time as Leo since this persona was created. The same way the Devils learnt of his name from Z, others might take notice of his quick patterns of appearance and disappearance. Of course, that alone would not be enough to give rise to suspicion about Leo being a fake persona.

Still, Lex believed he should be a little proactive and create a solid background for Leo a little at a time. He needed to spend a little more time with his 'coworkers' the way Harry and John seemed to have developed a relationship. That could wait for now, yet he really should at least check up on Z. The poor kid must have been working hard in his absence.

True to his expectations, Z was hard at work convincing people to leave him alone. As usual, the computers in the store were mostly unused, while the AR rooms were fully booked. Z was trying to convince a horde of aunties that he would not make a good boyfriend for their daughters or granddaughters and that he simply just wanted to be lazy. Yet the more he refused, the more adamant they became in their choice. Lex let out a genuine smile and decided he would meet Z another time.

He disappeared, returning to his apartment. His little feel good moment was over, it was now time to focus on the real task at hand. He stared at the opaque bottle, trying to discern anything. Of course, with his distinct lack of cultivation, he would learn nothing new about the bottle.

He put on his suit and prepared to use a loophole he had discovered to learn the details of this bottle. Unlike with guests, he could not analyze items and identify their properties. Yet what he could do was put his belongings into the Gift shop for sale. As soon as he entered an item in the Gift Shop, a description of that item would appear. All he needed to do was add the bottle to the shop to learn about its properties. This was a little something he discovered after Mary told him to start looking for loopholes. He was a little proud of himself when he did.

Truth be told, he did not anticipate anything harmful in the bottle or the other gifts the Devils had handed out. This was because should such a thing happen, the system would warn him the same way it had warned him about Devils putting trackers on his guests. But he needed to identify what their goal was and any little bit of information would help.

Lex added the bottle to the Gift shop, read its description and quickly removed it. As he suspected, there was no tampering with the item. It's description was:

#### Purified Wraiths blood

The purified blood of a wraith. In this purified form, it has a soothing effect on the soul by strengthening the cohesiveness of the body. Only effective for cultivators below the Foundation realm.

Lex set the bottle aside for later and decided to keep a close eye on the Devils. It was likely that, because they recognized him, their interaction with him was different from the one they had with other guests. He watched a replay of their interactions with a few different guests, and indeed there was a small detail they had missed out on when talking to him. They told all of their guests they will return to the Inn every 100 days or so, so if they were interested in meeting again they can time it accordingly.

Every 100 days signified a dedicated, strategic plan. The Devils definitely had some kind of ulterior motives. Lex would have to watch out. They mentioned wanting to join the Inn, maybe that was their end goal.

Either way, that was a matter for later. He turned his attention back to the various performances and looked for the stages with the largest crowds. He immediately picked out a pattern - whether the performers were Earthlings, soldiers or Beasts, the stages where they were playing music gathered the largest crowds. Maybe it was because such a thing was easier to appreciate and didn't require the level of attention the snake's performance did, or maybe there was a greater hidden secret to the matter. Either way, they were the most popular.

For Earthlings, the music they played was not that of bands or popular songs, but cultural music from unusual or lesser known instruments. He listened to each one, taking in their unique charm. It was as if each instrument had a personality.

The bagpipes, because of course there were bagpipes, were like loud and boisterous children, laughing and playing in the open, sharing their joy with everyone. Lex personally did not understand why people enjoyed listening to it, but he could certainly admit it was great to set a mood.

There were a few different kinds of unusually massive guitars. Lex could not identify what they were or what was special about them - he was not trained in music theory - but it sounded nice enough to gather crowds and that's what mattered.

He recognized the zither, but only because he'd seen it mentioned in so many novels. It sounded nice, but not as soul shakingly beautiful as it had been described in the novels. Of course, in the novels, the instrument was also always being played by a devastatingly beautiful girl who, often enough, ended up being the protagonists' love interest. Just to be safe, Lex decided to keep a distance from the bearded old man who was playing the instrument.

There were a few different variations on drums as well. There was one particular one that was being played by hand instead of sticks, which had a rhythm and tempo the others could not match. The man playing the drums by hand also happened to be a cultivator, much like the ballerina, so it made sense that his craft seemed better than the rest.

Yet out of all the various musical performances, once again, Lex's favorite was the one being performed by Beasts. On a particular stage, birds sat in organized rows and sang in a coordination that would put symphonies to shame. Parrots, Mockingbirds, Ravens, Blue jays and many more different kinds of birds Lex either did not know the names of or had never seen before combined their voices together to produce music that was so sweet and pure to listen to.

Lex closed his eyes and let himself be swept away by the sounds. It was filled with a freshness and vitality that was hard to explain. It was like the first gust of wind in the early morning after a night of rain, like the soft tickle of dew felt on bare feet. It felt like a deep breath of fresh mountain air, chilly enough to wake you up but not enough to cause you to tremble.

Lex enjoyed the music for an unexpectedly long time. Prior to this, he was confident that the humans would have this competition in the bag, but suddenly he wasn't so sure.

Still, there were many other stages to visit and Lex went through them one by one. He saw Igishima's display - the tree that needed time to prepare. His stage was covered in soil, out of which grew a field of flowers. In the center stood the tree, tall and firm, overlooking its children. The flowers bloomed and waned in a wave, traveling from one corner to another. Each flower lived just long enough to let out its beautiful smell, which, when combined with the smells of the other flowers, made Lex feel a freshness entirely different from the ones the birds made him feel.

It was so unusual, Lex had never used his sense of smell so much and so consistently without losing the ability to distinguish smells. Yet here it was, happening clearly and with direction. Even without the smell, watching the flowers move in such an organized way was already entertaining, yet the smells only elevated the performance. This was most likely another strong contender.

He viewed the other performances, each one unique and interesting in their own way. He could not say for his guests, maybe they would enjoy a different kind of entertainment, but Lex thoroughly enjoyed himself. He felt like this was the perfect activity for a vacation. It was not strenuous, yet was interesting and exciting enough to keep him captivated. There was no doubt that a lot of them were waiting for the second portion of the games, however. As enjoyable as these performances were, there was always a crowd ready to watch the excitement of battle.

With that, the day slowly passed and the first part of the cultural event came to a close. The guests could sleep here, or they could return to their planet, as the next portion would only begin in the morning.

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### Chapter 132: The small family

As the day came to a close, most people returned to their planets. Still, with only a few of them choosing to stay at the Inn, there were a couple hundred people roaming the grounds. The usual peaceful atmosphere was still full of the buzz of many conversations taking place at the same time. The seats at the restaurant were full and so were the garden chairs outside. Most people who wanted to eat did so in their rooms or in the coliseum, simply because they had nowhere else to sit.

As proud as Lex was of everything he had done, and as much as he was growing the Inn, it was not ready to facilitate hundreds of people at once, let alone thousands. It was also not conducive to the Beasts, as he could shrink their size to make them fit in, but he wanted to make facilities that would allow them to stay their own size comfortably.

This was a stark reminder for him that, even with the millions he had earned and spent, the Inn wasn't as developed as it could be. Realistically speaking, any decent hotel in a normal city could accommodate more people than his Inn could comfortably. He always needed to be thinking of ways in which he could improve.

As he watched the hundreds of people, some of whom were simply sitting in the grass, having a picnic, he decided to take notes on things to improve. This event was like a round of testing for a new app, so that flaws could be determined and fixed.

Firstly, he needed more places to sit. But he needed to be creative with his solution, as he didn't want a giant structure that would be empty and useless at any time he had fewer guests. Of course, maybe there would come a time where he constantly had a lot of guests, in which case his giant structure would always be in use. Yet in his heart, Lex wanted the manor to remain unchanged. He did not want to increase its size to accommodate the growing number of guests.

There was another solution to this. Maybe he could leave the manor as is and build larger structures somewhere far away. This way, he could use the manor or guests with a high enough prestige level, or he could only take the guests he really liked there. But for that he would need to expand the size of the Midnight world as well.

Midnight world - that's what he decided to call the separate realm or space his Inn resided in, as he couldn't just keep referring to them as the grounds or the hills or even the inn.

Next, if the Inn really was supposed to be a vacation spot, he needed to add more activities. Even on vacation, if a person did not have anything to do for an extended period of time, they would get bored. Right now, if a guest wanted to go swimming, the only option they had was the tiny lake near the Recovery room. Considering the size of the lake, it was not a good option.

Fortunately, all was not lost. At least he had improved options in terms of food by adding the spiritual food, which was a big hit amongst the Earthlings. The soldiers were used to farmed spiritual food, so they treated it as usual and ate it casually, while Nibiru was an extremely vibrant world that gave birth to many spiritual plants and vegetables. For the Beasts, it was also ordinary. For the Earthlings, it was an amazing delicacy that not only tasted phenomenal; it aided their health and cultivation.

Either way, whether it was maintaining a high standard or providing an out of reach service, for different guests the spiritual food had accomplished different kinds of success and Lex was happy with that.

This was an independent happiness that Lex felt, aside from the 12,333 MP Lex had made from the food! Not to mention, he had sold 10 of his Midnight Inn suits, netting him another 90,000 MP! He also earned another 7000 MP from selling more commemorative coins and 7000 MP from his various services.

This brought his new total to 212,733 MP! He looked into why his income from the various services was the least and quickly came to a conclusion. Whether it was the Meditation room, Training room,

Mystery trial, Barber shop or Battle Ax, they could only provide service to one person at a time. It was already a big deal to earn so much. With those rooms, the way to earn more was to have more of them to cater to multiple guests rather than increase their prices.

Adding multiple of those would also make the place more crowded, but he did not mind expanding Main street. After all, that was the whole point of putting everything together.

Lex was constantly scanning the Inn, checking on all his guests, when he spotted something in the Recovery room.

Marlo, who had lost access to the Meditation room when he briefly visited Earth, was standing inside a particular recovery pod room with another woman, looking down at the person in the pod.

They were both staring silently, and continued to do so as long as Lex watched. A quick rewind showed Lex that they had been that way for a few days now. Occasionally, Marlo left to go into a Recovery pod himself so his body's condition still wasn't stabilized, but would promptly return once he was good enough.

Curious about the situation, Lex checked the woman's status.

Name: Sophia Ramos/Bravi

Age: 60

Sex: Female

Cultivation Details: Golden Core Mid

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: That is one emotional lady! Do not approach her in crocs, mismatched socks or smelling like food.

Lex was slightly confused about why her name had a slash in it, but suddenly understood that this was Marlos' wife. Larry had told him rumors about her relationship with the madman, but it seemed there was more to it. Lex checked the status of the person in the Recovery pod.

Name: Rafael Carter Bravi

Age: 37

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: crippled

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Condition:

The patient's body is extremely damaged! The patient suffers from hundreds of hairline fractures, amputated limbs, torn muscles and ligaments, a missing lung, failing kidneys, failing liver, severely damaged spine, fractured skull, severe brain damage, missing teeth, missing eyes, missing nose and a severely atrophied soul. It would be impossible to keep the patient alive with only the Recovery pod, but an unidentifiable source of vitality has been detected in the patient's heart - the only organ completely undamaged.

Assuming the vitality is continuously produced, it would take the patient 3 weeks and 4 days to reach optimum health in the Recovery pod. Further treatment via ORR (organic reconstruction room) is then recommended. The soul will require treatment, but no such facility is currently available at the Inn. Please figure out the necessary treatment on your own

Remarks: If it is one's destiny to die, the universe itself cannot stop it. If one is destined to live, then the universe itself will bend itself around you to provide the conditions for you to live.

Lex was startled when he read the status. This was clearly Marlo's son! He had never heard of Marlo having a kid, let alone one that was in such a bad condition. Maybe this was the reason why he and his wife had such a bad falling out.

It was also the first time he got a recommendation for the ORR. So far, he hadn't even set a price for that, as no guest had used it. That was because, for it to be usable, the patient's cultivation had to be below Lex's. Since Rafael's cultivation was crippled, he was technically below Lex.

For a moment, Lex hesitated. Considering his relationship with Marlo, he felt he should go say something. Or at least, he should let him know about the ORR. Yet at the same time, he felt awkward approaching the man in such a situation.

Finally, after letting out an exhausted sigh, Lex decided to go talk to the couple. The longer he waited, the more awkward he would become.

Teleporting right outside the Recovery pod room, Lex knocked. The sound startled the couple, as for the duration of their stay, no one had interrupted them. Marlo opened the door and felt a strange kind of relief when he saw the Innkeeper.

"Innkeeper," he greeted with a nod, his voice low and absent of his usual energy.

"Marlo," Lex acknowledged the man with a corresponding nod.

"Please come in. This is my wife, Sophia. Sophia, this is the Innkeeper that I was telling you about."

"Hello," she said simply, her gaze quickly returning to her son.

"I noticed you've spent the last few days here, so I thought I'd come in and check on the patient myself. I have some good news for you as well as some bad news for you. What would you like to hear first?"

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### Chapter 133: What happened

Upon mention of checking in on the patient, the couple's necks snapped towards the Innkeeper with the speed and ferocity of a fired bullet. They had been in close communication with nurse Jubilation since they appeared, but she could not provide them with any information.

Truth be told, Sophia was very hesitant to bring her son here in the first place. His condition was extremely fragile and had been preserved using special means in her Ramos family. Unlike her, a cultivation and battle maniac, her family's area of influence was in herbs and medicine. They were one of the most prominent families, if not the most prominent family, when it came to refining medicine to aid in cultivation.

In their oldest and most secretive plantation grew a tree so old that it surpassed any historical records. It was an average sized tree and looked no different from a regular pine tree. One could not sense any spiritual energy from it, nor could they detect any anomaly. Combined with the fact that it was in a forest, its speciality was almost undetectable. It was only by accident that the Ramos family had discovered its use, and then slowly discovered its peculiarity.

The pinecones from that tree could be removed, and then replaced with any kind of plant or herb, and the tree would nurture it endlessly. A normal plant would gain spiritual effects in only a few weeks, and spiritual plants would be strengthened in only a few months. The affinity, type or requirements of the plants seemed to be completely irrelevant, as that tree would nurture them all.

This was a closely guarded secret of her family, and even its code name was simple 'Pine tree' to avoid arousing curiosity to anyone who might one day steal or stumble upon confidential documents.

While Sophia herself had no knowledge or interest in medicinal matters, her parents were another matter. Therefore, when Rafael was injured, they were able to react immediately. Using a special technique, they wrapped the then young man in a hemp bandage and coated his skin with an artificial sap. Then, treating him like a plant, they attached him to the tree.

Like this, the boy had continued to live for almost 15 years. But he had only continued to live, he was not healing. So when a few days ago Marlo returned and claimed he had discovered a way to heal their son, she was desperate to believe him, but she did not dare to hope.

If they removed him from the tree, it was unknown if he would live long enough to go anywhere. He may as well die within a few minutes.

Filled with her built up rage, frustration and desperation, she attacked Marlo with a ferocity she had never before revealed. After letting her vent a little, Marlo finally used his strength to stop her. He did not have time to waste, as not only was his own body's condition unstable, he knew full well that the situation on Earth was rapidly deteriorating.

As much as he wanted her to understand reason and come with him willingly, he would have to force things until they reached the Inn. With strength that far surpassed anything he had before, Marlo controlled his wife and traveled to Spain in the fastest jet he had. Once there, he brought her directly to the tree. At this point, she had stopped struggling and was only filled with a desperate prayer in her heart that what Marlo said was true.

Removing Rafael from the tree would endanger his life, which was a decision she, as a mother, simply could not take. As much as she knew that this was not a solution, as much as she knew that Marlo would not joke about such things, she could not make herself do it. Ultimately, all she could do was watch as Marlo did everything.

Marlo removed the artificial fruit and revealed his son's body. He did not stop to look at it, to reminisce or feel sorrow or pity. He directly poured a bottle of Botlam's Dew down the kid's throat and used a Golden key, transporting the three of them to the Inn.

Everything after that had been very uneventful so far. While Rafael did not die immediately, like Sophia suspected he would, despite being in the Recovery pod he did not seem to be getting better. Wasn't this only slightly different from how things were before?

During this time Marlo had explained to her what the Inn was, as well as what he knew about the Innkeeper. Which is why his arrival, along with him saying that he had some news about the 'patient', immediately attracted her attention.

"The good news," Sophia said immediately.

Lex smiled, as even without the need for the suit, he could feel her motherly love.

"The good news is that in 3 weeks and 4 days, the patient will be completely healed. After that, you can take him to the Organic Reconstruction room, where he will be able to regrow his missing limbs."

Elation and happiness hit Sophia like a tsunami. She chose to blindly accept what the man said, despite it being against common sense. Considering Rafael's condition, how could he possibly be healed so quickly, if at all? In truth, this was not quick at all. It must be remembered that even Marlo, a golden core cultivator, healed much quicker than that. The fact that it would take three weeks was a true testament to how devastatingly injured the boy was. In fact, his status had clearly stated that without the aid of whatever it was in his heart that kept him alive, the Recovery pod would not be able to heal him at all.

Sophia was desperate for any kind of good news, which is why she gladly accepted it, but Marlo frowned. If, after three weeks, his son would be healed, why was there still some bad news?

"And what about the bad news?" Marlo asked heavily.

"The bad news is that the patient's injury exceeds just his body. His soul has atrophied, and will require treatment as well, otherwise even when he is healed, he will not wake up. Unfortunately, at the moment, the Inn does not have the facility to heal the soul."

From her newfound zenith, Sophia quickly fell to her nadir. Belonging to a family focused on medicine, she knew exactly how difficult it was healing injuries to the soul. Simply put, her family had never actually succeeded in aiding anyone with a damaged soul. Resources that could affect the soul were practically nonexistent.

"You said 'at the moment'. Does that mean you could get something to heal the soul later?"

"Three weeks is a long time. It is entirely possible that such a facility may be available by then. Even if not by then, down the line, getting something like is highly likely. Of course, if you do not wish to wait, you can put up a request for treasures or medicine that heals the soul in the Guild room. You can pay in unique treasures or simply MP, and just wait for another guest to fulfill the request. You could also look for such treasures on your own in your own world.

"This is not a dead end, just another hurdle that you must face. How long it takes to overcome such a hurdle is the only thing that remains a question."

The parents felt a wave of relief mixed with distress hit them. Rafael's injury had truly weighed on them for a long, long time. Now that an end to their undesired journey was in sight, they became even more impatient, yet could not allow themselves to make a mistake.

"If you don't mind me asking, do you know how the patient was injured to such a degree? I'm afraid if it wasn't for the artifact in the patient's heart, even the Recovery pod would not be able to keep him alive let alone heal him."

His question was multifaceted. Firstly, he was curious about what actually happened to Rafael and how exactly he managed to live after getting injured so horribly. Even his soul was seriously damaged, so it could not have been something simple. Secondly, he was curious about what the artifact was in his heart that could keep him alive. If Lex could find something like that for himself, it would aid him greatly in case he ever got injured.

Yet their immediate response told Lex that the couple knew nothing about the artifact as they looked at each other with confused yet questioning gazes.

Finally, Marlo let out a sigh and said, "Come, let's take a walk. I'll tell you about my son."

Leaving Sophia to watch over Rafael, the two silently walked out of the room. There were a few moments where Marlo let sorrow show on his face, but he quickly controlled himself and brought himself back to normal. He wasn't exactly in his mischievous state, but anyone who looked at him would not be able to tell that this was a grieving father.

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Chapter 134: A mission

Marlo and Lex continued to walk in silence. The soft buzz of the various crowds in the distance was a nice change to the usual serenity of the Inn, and it lightened the mood considerably. This was a good thing, in Lex's opinion, as the situation was not hopeless. With time, Rafael would eventually be healed - even of his soul injuries. Lex had no doubt that if he continued to upgrade his Recovery room, a feature to heal the soul would eventually show up.

In fact, he was even certain that somewhere down the line, he would acquire a way to heal Rafael's crippled cultivation. That was not to say he would immediately return to his previous power, but that he would regain the ability to cultivate.

Having one's cultivation crippled was a strange thing, similar to Marlo's crippled golden core. Even those below the Golden core who had their cultivation crippled would not be able to cultivate ordinarily, even if their body healed completely. Lex did not know or understand the reason behind this, but that's just the way things were.

Eventually the two reached the hills where the Meditation room was located. Compared to the rest of the Midnight world, there were fewer people here. The night sky, lit with sky lanterns, made it seem like the stars were hanging just overhead. It made one feel like if one reached out their hand, they might just be able to capture it. But of course, it just seemed like that. Even the avian Beasts present in the Midnight world would be kept from touching them, just for safety purposes.

"Rafael was born just a couple years after we got married," Marlo said suddenly, his voice deep and somber. "He was a chubby little kid, and would play with just about anyone who would give him any attention.

"All his life, his mother spoiled him way too much. I was also approaching my peak back then, and combined with my family's background and Sophia's, there was no one who didn't try to fawn on him. Compared to the life I had lived, filled with pain and struggle and nonstop fighting, his life was too cushy.

"Maybe I should have been happy that I had managed to protect my son from suffering like I had, but back then all I could think of was that if he lived like this, he would grow up to be weak. So, I pushed him hard.

"From an early age, I started training his body. I started embedding discipline into his very bones. I treated him like a soldier, not like a son. To optimize the development of his muscles, I put the kid through medical baths. Too much strain on his bones would be bad at an early age, so I had him practice yoga to increase his muscle flexibility as I gave him combat training.

"He was seven years old when I made him kill his first human."

At this point, Marlo went silent again. He did not look sad or regretful, and his voice was steady. One would assume he was talking about something nonconsequential, like buying shoes. Only he himself knew how much anguish he suffered.

"I made many mistakes in raising him, but the worst of it was comparing his life to my own. At each level, at each achievement, at each breakthrough, I would tell him that I had it much worse than him when I was his age, yet had far more achievements. I was not trying to tear him down. All I meant was that he had better facilities than I did, so that he could surpass me. More than anything, I wanted him to be better than I ever was. More than anything, I wanted him to be more successful than me.

"The kid was good. He took everything I threw at him and worked hard to overcome every challenge. But at some point...I don't even know when, his personality changed. He went from being that happy, friendly kid to someone desperate. He was training desperately, working desperately...searching desperately for anything that would make him good enough. Instead of training him, showing him how he could be great, all I did was constantly remind him that he was not as good as me at his age."

Another bout of silence came, this time hanging between the two men longer. Marlo was completely stoic. Someone who did not know him would assume he was completely fine, yet anyone who knew Marlo's regular personality would understand just how extraordinary this was.

"Many years later, when I heard the Morrison family was training their heir crazily, I forced them to accept me as one of his teachers. Instead of pushing him forcefully, I taught the kid at every level how he should be thinking, how he should overcome each challenge, and how he should view the world. I could not let someone else make the same mistakes I did.

"Although the kid was training at a level beyond what anyone his age should be doing, he never developed the same desperation that Rafael did. All because of a simple choice - the choice to quit whenever he wanted. That simple choice turned everything that was happening from something that was being forced upon him, to something he chose to do. Every time he overcame an obstacle, it was a result of his own training. Every time he completed a mission, it was his own success rather than his family's. Every time he felt overwhelmed, it was his own choice to continue rather than something that was forced upon him.

"Such a small difference, to be honest, brought about such a tremendous change. Instead of becoming desperate like Rafael, the kid has grown into a confident young man - because everything he did was something he chose to do to better himself, rather than something his family chose for him. If only I had done the same with my own kid.

"Back then I didn't see the problem, but I warped his personality. I wish I could say that the reason Rafael is in his current condition is because an enemy of mine attacked him, or he was ambushed, or something evil happened. Yet the simple truth is, he forced himself to cultivate too hard. He pushed himself beyond his body's limits.

"In his early twenties, he was about to break into the Foundation realm. It can't compare with that Alexander kid, but then again, he never had the same amount of resources either. But he forced the breakthrough before he was ready, which caused the spiritual energy inside his body to destabilize and explode.

"Back on Earth, cultivation techniques are tested for their stability, to ensure their chances of deviation are minimum, but it's impossible to eliminate them. His poor state of mind, his desperation to succeed, all led him down this path.

"Sophia and I weren't home when this happened, but fortunately, his grandparents were. They managed to keep him alive, but that's about all they could do. It was impossible to treat him.

"Sophia blamed me. She said I killed her son by pushing him too hard. To be frank, I can't honestly say she is wrong.

"You know, when I think back to that time, I can't remember what the rush was. I can't remember why I was in such a hurry to have him grow stronger so quickly. We had all the time in the world. Instead of pushing him to be as miserable as I was, I should have been teaching him how to live. Instead of having him kill people, I should have been teaching him how to defend himself and live the life he wanted to live. I just... I can't remember."

As Marlo vented his feelings, Lex said nothing. He was not sure what he should be saying anyway, and he was not tactless enough to ask him about the artifact again while he was telling him about his son. But this did reveal to Lex another question he had been wondering about.

It always felt peculiar to him, a multimillionaire high leveled cultivator spending his time teaching self defense class to a bunch of nobodies. But suddenly, Lex understood. Through them, Marlo was trying to relieve some of his guilt. He was doing for them what he wished he had done for his son. By teaching them to survive, he was giving them enough time to live long enough to actually enjoy their lives. From

his expression, one could not tell that the mad giant was in pain, but if one analyzed his actions it was plain as day.

"As for the artifact," Marlo continued, "I have no idea what you are talking about. As much as I wished it was something I gave him, neither I nor Sophia have any treasures that would allow someone to continue to live in such a beaten up state. It's something we can only ask him once I find a way to heal his soul," Marlo said, with unwavering determination.

There was no pain in his voice, no regret in his eyes. There was only a mission.

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Chapter 135: Qualifying rounds

Marlo and Lex did not talk much after that. He simply escorted the former giant to the Guild room and showed him how he could put up requests. Marlo directly put up several requests, from information about the soul and soul related items, to treasures and medicine that could aid in the healing of the soul.

At some point after they left, one of the Devils stumbled into the Guild room and saw the various quests related to souls. This only increased their confidence that the Innkeeper or his subordinates were greatly interested in the soul. He passed their information back to his superiors, who started making various plans.

Just like that, the night passed quietly and quickly. Most of the guests had no need for sleep in the short term due to their cultivation, and thus spent the entire night awake. Some of them enjoyed picnics, some of them stargazed, some of them waited for their turn in the Battle Ax of the Mystery trials. Those last two had quickly become the most popular attractions of the Inn.

Most guests from Earth, however, spent the night in their rooms, cultivating. The rooms did not have the amplification effect of the Meditation room, yet for the Earthlings cultivating here was already amplified enough. In a single night there had been various breakthroughs in minor and major realms.

Lex himself stayed awake for quite a while. For some reason, he found it very peaceful watching his guests enjoy themselves at his inn. No, he was not awakening his inner voyeur! It filled him with a sense of pride and accomplishment that people were enjoying his hard work.

Eventually, though, he went back to his room to sleep for a few hours. He could, of course, continue to stay awake and he would still be fine the next day, but there was no reason not to be well rested.

Early in the morning, Lex woke up and checked on all the winners for the qualifying round. There were ten qualifiers, but he learnt that one of them - the ballerina he had seen yesterday - had dropped out for some reason and so only nine were left.

Of the nine, Lex had already seen a few. The orchestra of birds was included, naturally, along with Igishima's display. The last performance to be included into the qualifiers was by a single, unusual Beast that Lex must have missed. It's body's shape was like that of a jaguar, yet it's body was made out of a silverish liquid. Every time it moved it felt like looking at water moving in a sealed bottle. Lex must have missed this performance, and was quite interested in it. He had never seen something like that. He was so intrigued he even checked its status.

Name: Rezin

Age: 1

Sex: -

Cultivation Details: Initial Foundation realm

Species: Mercury Gloubin

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Remarks: Extremely, extremely toxic! Do not touch (or date) under any circumstances!

Lex raised an eyebrow as he wondered if this Beast was actually made out of mercury, or was that just a name? Whatever the case, since it managed to be a finalist, he was sure it would put on a good performance.

Other than the Beasts, there was one other qualifier that was composed of two soldiers, while the remaining qualifiers were all from Earth. Lex honestly did not know whether to be surprised or not when he recognized one of Earth's finalists as a youtuber.

She was a... Lex almost blushed when he recalled the first ever remark he got from the system about his YouTube history. She was an ASMR artist but also had another channel where was a solo vocalist and did covers for songs. Lex had never heard her covers...

Lex quickly gathered his thoughts and began preparing for the qualifying rounds. He needed to step up on the sales and earn more MP before the next round began. There was a reason for this. Due to his unexpectedly high cost for his bodyguard, he had actually not finished paying for the combat portion of the games. This was the real reason he was so focused on selling merchandise. As of now, he had enough to ensure that the games would actually happen, but considering that Mary told him he needed to ace this quest, he wanted to go all in. The more MP he had to spend, the better he could make it out to be.

During the night, he had sold three more suits and made another 3000 MP from the Battle Ax alone! The rest of the services and the coins, along with the items from the gift shop generated 4000 MP, making his overnight total to be 34,000 MP. That brought his total to 249,733 MP! By the end of the day, he should have crossed 250,000 MP, which was his minimum requirement. It was unlikely, but if he sold enough suits and brought his total up to 500,000 MP, then that would be ideal.

Something that must be noted was that the three suit purchases last night were not from humans, but Beasts who were impressed by Little Blue's own suit. Somewhere around the Inn, three rams were walking around wearing a suit.

At 9 am, fireworks went off at the coliseum, letting the guests know that the event was about to begin. Many of the guests came, but most watched the event from their rooms. This time, each performance would happen one at a time to let everyone appreciate them completely. As such, they didn't need to be at the coliseum and watched in the comfort of their privacy.

Soon the event began. The birds gave the first performance, and their light but sweet voice was a refreshing way to begin the day. Most of the guests enjoyed the performance thoroughly, and since they performed a new music piece this time, even those who had already seen them before were entertained.

The birds were followed by the duo of soldiers. They wore some dress that Lex assumed was traditional to where they were from, but on Earth was recognized as a sundress most commonly worn by women during the summer. Their performance, despite their unusual image to the Earthlings, was genuinely entertaining despite being simple. They were fighting.

Each held a massive and unwieldy looking blade and clashed head on! It was a display of unfettered strength, yet at the same time, had the elegance of a sophisticated dance. As far as Lex could tell, this was not a rehearsed skit. They were genuinely fighting, and often, genuinely getting hurt. Massive cuts and gashes were carved into their bodies, but their traditional dress quickly wrapped itself around each wound, preventing it from bleeding. As the performance progressed, the dress went from looking like a sundress to skin tight sportswear.

The two soldiers had the ability to dodge or block, but they didn't do that. Each attack was met only with another attack, and the one with greater strength or technique would come out as the winner. Eventually, the show came to a close when one of the soldiers could no longer hold on to the blade and it went flying away.

Contrary to other performances Lex had seen, this was not pleasurable entertaining but thrilling instead! It received loud applause despite its simplicity and received greater crowd engagement than Lex had seen before.

The next performance was Igishima's. Like before, his performance was filled with a lot of visual stimulation. The colors of various flowers as they moved and aged melded with one another to give birth to a living, moving piece of art. That, along with its stimulation of the sense of smell, gave a performance that many members of the audience enjoyed. Unfortunately, it was not as engaging as the soldiers, so this was likely the trees end in the performances.

Next was the YouTuber. Hers was a very simple performance. She sat on a stool at center stage and sang softly. There was no accompanying music, just her voice as she sang her own version of Hallelujah.

As simple and straightforward as it was, Lex had to admit that he was surprised by how much he enjoyed it. He doubted that she would win the competition, but there was no question about the fact that she would gain many fans today. In fact, a part of him wondered if he should hire her as a singer for the Inn. Her singing, along with live music, would really create a special ambiance at the restaurant.

That was followed by another performance by the Earthlings. It was a band. They played a few songs, and the insanely quick tempo and rhythm of the drummer as well as the masterful performance of the guitarist who was playing an electric guitar won the praise of much of the audience - even the Beasts.

After that came Rezin, the liquid Jaguar. Lex himself was very interested in seeing just what this unique Beast would do.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 136: Right out of an anime

When the performance began, there was not much to it. Rezin walked around the stage in circles, the liquid that made up his body bobbing back and forth as if in an invisible container. One moment it was as if it had a complete head, but as the liquid receded, it seemed as if it was just a neck. The liquid did not spill, nor did it move around outside the clear border that defined the jaguar's shape.

Had the jaguar not been moving, Lex could have mistaken it for the most clear glass container. Yet it was moving, and as it slowly picked up the pace the liquid started moving even more violently.

Suddenly Rezin let out a roar and leaped into the air, its liquid body quickly changing shape to that of a sparrow. The now bird glided through the air in an elegant display, before flapping its wings right before it hit the stage. With each flap, Rezin changed into the shape of a different bird, flying higher with increasing speed.

When Rezin reached its crescendo, it changed to the shape of a human and dove like a swimmer about to enter the water. Right before it hit the stage floor, it changed shape again and turned into a snake, slithering onto the ground.

Rezin continued its performance for a few minutes more, entertaining the guests as it switched form. The few Beasts watching were intrigued while most of the humans watched it as a spectacle. Ragnar and his followers, however, looked on with a grave look in their eyes. In front of Ragnar were a few reports, some containing the information his soldiers were able to collect about Nibiru, while the rest were about the Midnight Inn. There was a distinct lack of reports on Earth in the pile.

Both had interesting information, but right now, Ragnar was concerned with the reports on Nibiru. At first, he had thought that Nibiru was just another planet that was heavily populated with Beasts. It was not unusual and considering that the definition of 'Beasts' used by humans included most non-

humanoid or insectoid living creatures, they were some of the most common kinds of planets that supported life in the universe.

But quickly, an anomaly was spotted. Since the Beasts were not unified and did not have the concept of keeping matters confidential, any person who was even slightly friendly with any of the Beasts was able to extract a lot of information about the planet. What Ragnar had learnt was that Nibiru hosted an extremely high number of extremely rare bloodlines and Beasts.

An excellent example was the Mercury Gloubin performing on stage. This was one of the most deadly Beasts in the entire known universe. It did not need to fight. It could simply use its liquid body to intrude into the body of cultivators with realms much higher than itself and poison them. A single drop of its body could eliminate an entire Star class civilization should it want to do so.

Another example was the sentient tree, Igishima. It did not qualify as a Beast, but that did not change the fact that a sentient spiritual plant was so rare that entire civilizations would go to war to obtain it. Such a tree could greatly aid in the cultivation of spiritual plants and was greatly coveted by the Galactic Pharmacology Society, also known more traditionally as the Pill Refining society.

The two Beasts, Greens Haven and Blood Fang, were suspected to have rare and valuable bloodlines as well. This was not to mention, after Ragnar did a little research, he discovered that the Three toed Bradious clan that the sloth Golden Hair was actually a clan that ruled over an entire galaxy.

Such a thing must not be underestimated, even by a force such as the Jotun Empire. Since they controlled many galaxies, they knew exactly how much strength it took to take control and maintain control of an entire galaxy. This was not to mention that some forces were strong enough to take control of multiple galaxies, but actually chose not to. This was because, even with control over an entire galaxy, actually harvesting and using the resources of that galaxy was not an easy task. Even the Jotun Empire did not fully utilize the resources of any one of the galaxies under their control.

There were even more examples of rare Beasts on Nibiru, and if Ragnar knew that the Sovereign Galactic Turtle he'd seen in the Inn also came from there, he would be even more sure that there was something unusual about this planet.

All of that aside, what truly caught Ragnar's attention was a rumor. It was a simple rumor, with little evidence to support it, but still was not one he could ignore. It was a rumor that a mermaid existed in Nibiru. While Ragnar could ignore all other potential gains or dangers, a mermaid he could not ignore.

"Anthony, compile a report. Make a list of all known and suspected Beasts found in Nibiru, and also add the suspected presence of a mermaid in the report. Send the report directly to the Royal Family. Let me know when it's done."

"Yes sir," Anthony replied, and quickly got to work. Other than Ragnar's assistant, Anthony had another identity, which was actually the main reason he got assigned to Ragnar as an assistant. He was distantly related to the Royal family of Jotun. His relation was not enough to be anyone important, but still he served as a means of communication with the royal family in case of an emergency. Such was a common practice, and each General level and above in the Jotun army had such an assistant.

This was because if normally Ragnar wanted an audience with the royal family, he would need to go through proper procedure, which would take too long. This was a shortcut. A shortcut that Ragnar was using for the first time. Considering his mission, he could not divert his attention towards Nibiru. The royal family would decide how to deal with the situation.

In a different room, Havval El'Yun, the Serpent King of the Jade Sea stood before the sloth. The serpent had a serious and angry look in his eyes, but the sloth was enjoying Rezin's performance. Greens Haven stood in the back with a somewhat defeated look on its face.

"This is a dereliction of duty!" Havval roared at the sloth, barely containing itself. "Your laziness has resulted in great losses! You did not even make your presence known when you arrived and slept through many millennia of destruction! Had I known a representative was on the planet, how could I have let the Kinari tribe fall? Only a single descendant lives!"

"Life and death are a part of nature, child. As painful as it may be, as important as some may be to you, to the universe, all lives are equal."

"DO NOT..." Havval began roaring, but despite his anger controlled himself. After suppressing his anger, he spoke again, in an aggressive but quieter tone, "The child is in danger. The shark tribes have discovered the effects of their blood and have devoured almost the entire tribe. I was able to hide her, but the shark tribes have become too strong. They will challenge my reign, and I do not know the outcome. She must be taken off the planet, somewhere safe. The humans will no doubt hear of the tribe's existence."

For the first time, the sloth frowned a little. After a moment, it seemed to make a decision.

"I will be taking some of the Beasts to the Mammoths soon. Have the girl ready, I will take her too. If you want to send someone else as well, for your service, I will allow it. But I will not interfere between your feud with the sharks. They are as much residents of Nibiru as you."

"I do not need your help in my fight, sloth! Were I not held down by duty and responsibility, the whole planet would be under my reign. I do not ask for your aid, just that you perform your own duty."

With that Havval gave the sloth a derisive look and left. He had no interest in the games, nor did he care for Greens Haven who was standing in the corner. He had to ready the mermaid and his daughter so that they could leave prepared. Once they were safely off the planet, Havvel would have no more constraints. He would be able to finally begin his conquest. Though he had not earned the honor of being called a Dragon yet, he would snatch the title with his own claws. And even that would be just the beginning of his journey.

In the background, the last three performances took place - an artist who could make a painting and then enter it, changing it from within, a standup comedian who got an unusually large audience response and finally an entire cast of actors and actresses that performed a play that resonated with almost all the humans as well as the Beasts.

After a short break, the finale would begin and the selected two performances would take place. Yet Lex was not paying attention to that. He was focused on the status of the comedian. He could not believe what he was seeing. If he did not know better, he would think the comedian had walked out of a harem anime.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 137: Incubus

The comedian's status was quite interesting to Lex.

Name: James Brent

Age: 21

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: Mortal

Species: Human

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Bloodline: Incubus

Remarks: Ensure that he does not elope with any Inn staff! It will be too embarrassing!

Right off the bat, the first thing that stood out to Lex was that James' species was identified as only human, but he had the bloodline of an Incubus. He did not know if actual Incubi were different in any way from what he knew in stories from Earth, but they were definitely not supposed to be human. So either he had some way to hide details from his scan, or the reality of things were more complicated than they appeared.

The second thing he noted was that, supposedly, Incubi and Succubi were supposed to hold untold charm towards the opposite sex, yet James' charisma was resonating not only with all the humans present, it was even affecting beasts! Yet despite influencing so many, Lex saw none of them having any sexual reaction to anything James said or did. Maybe that part of Earthen lore was incorrect.

The thing that surprised most, however, was that James was a mortal but his influence, though subtle, affected even those multiple cultivation realms above him. In his heart, Lex treated this as one of the most dangerous abilities he had come across yet.

The reason he was sure this was an ability or effect that James was having instead of natural, normal charisma, was because he could feel himself being protected by the system from it. Yet for some reason, the system was not preventing the guests from the effect, the way it protected them from the natural aura of his bodyguard.

Lex made a mental note to learn more about James. Though he was not sure how he felt about it yet, because according to Earthen lore Incubi were demons, he did keep in mind that such an influential person could make a good addition to the Inn.

Should things have been different, Ragnar and Golden Hair would have also picked up on James' anomaly, yet since they were busy, and the effect was not malicious, they did not pick up on it.

Since the qualifying rounds had ended, there was a short lunch break. This was not specifically timed so that the guests would eat his spiritual food. Not at all. That was, to say the least, the farthest thing on Lex's mind. Absolutely!

In his heart, Lex actually felt an itch to mingle a little with his guests. He wanted to ask them what they thought of the event so far, and what they would like to see in the combat portion of the games. But he had a feeling that they would be too formal in front of the Innkeeper, so donning his Leo persona, he stepped out to the coliseum.

The first person he headed towards was Harry. He still needed to establish a relationship with his 'coworkers' for this persona, and Harry seemed friendly enough.

"Hey, you're Harry, right? My name's Leo, owner of the Gamers den. We haven't had a chance to meet."

Harry, who looked a little pale from overworking himself, looked at the jolly fellow in surprise. Indeed, although Harry had seen him around they had never gotten a chance to get to know one another.

"Yeah, though I've had the opportunity to meet Z. You work the fellow too hard."

Leo laughed, as if he had heard a hilarious joke and said, "That kid needs to be a little more social. If no one came and talked to him, he would watch anime all day everyday! But I try to show up and share some of his burden, but it's hard for me to disappear back on Earth. The folks would get suspicious if they don't know where I am or can't reach me."

With this simple statement he created a strong alibi for why he couldn't stay much at the Inn. Anyone who heard it would assume that he had many people around him who would notice if he were gone for long intervals. Lex planned on repeating versions of this statement while staying as vague as possible to let people fill in their own assumptions.

It worked, Harry immediately realized how inconvenient it would be for him to come here if he weren't living alone. All he needed to do was keep track of his appointments back on Earth and he could spend the rest of his time at the Inn. He hadn't done so yet, but he was planning on giving up his apartment on Earth as well. This way he wouldn't need to pay rent, and he could live in his room at the Inn all the time.

"Yeah, it must be tough. It's easy for me since I live alone, but I can imagine the hassle of trying to dodge people so you can come to the Inn."

"It's okay, I've gotten used to it. What do you think of the Midnight Games so far?"

Like that, the duo continued to chat and started getting comfortable with one another. It helped that Harry was enjoying the games and kept complimenting them, which directly fed Lex's ego.

After a short break, the finalists were announced. To Lex's great surprise, the finalists were the YouTuber and the comedian! He truly was not expecting such an outcome. Since he had decided to watch the finale with Harry to give his Leo persona more presence, he had to be very discreet when checking how exactly those two had become the winners.

As it turned out, despite their few numbers, the Beasts became the deciding factors. Unlike the humans, who spent a lot of time thinking about things on a deeper level, and gauging how much or how little they liked things, the Beasts were a lot more straightforward. They liked simplicity, and relied more on their instincts than humans. While the other performances had depth and complexity to them, these two performances resonated with them so much that their enjoyment was overwhelming.

So while the humans enjoyed each performance, because they were more analytical and critical, their enjoyment was also measured. Long story short, those two were the winners. It seemed regardless of whichever one of them won, Earth already had the prize in the bag.

The comedian went up on stage again, and gave his performance. It was unfortunate that he didn't have many more jokes so much of his performance was a repeat. His effect on the crowd was tempered due to that, but it also allowed Lex to carefully understand how much of his influence was his own natural charisma and talent, and how much of it was the effect of the bloodline.

"There's something a little strange about this comedian, don't you think?" Leo asked Harry.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, he's repeating his jokes, but people are still finding him to be hilarious. I just think it's a little curious. It's not an easy thing to have so many people like you so quickly."

Harry stopped to think about it, and wondered if he could notice something strange. Yet before he could think of anything, a voice came from behind them.

"You are very sharp. It's the effect of a bloodline, and a very high level one at that. All bloodlines naturally affect all living beings around them in a certain way."

John stepped up beside them, revealing a smirk. He was not happy because he knew the answer, but because he had managed to save up enough MP to go to the Mystery trial many more times.

What his reaction would be when he discovered the long queue at the Mystery trial was unknown.

"Mary, why is the Inn not stopping the effect of this bloodline?" Lex asked in his mind.

"Because it's not detrimental in any way to any of the guests. Were it to harm the guests physically or spiritually, the way your bodyguard's aura from his bloodline would have, the system will intervene."

"Do you know what his bloodline is?" Leo asked John

"No, it's not developed enough for me to identify, but I can tell it's powerful. If he were to cultivate his body, its effects would grow and eventually I'd be able to tell."

"Do you know a lot about bloodlines? Can you tell me?" Leo asked again with excitement. John would be a good source of information.

"Yeah sure..." John started, but then froze. An idea occurred to him and after clearing his throat he said, "Since you are my colleague, I don't mind sharing some information with you. But I must charge you 1000MP per topic."

"Sure, I don't mind," Leo said quickly, before John had a chance to change his mind. He suddenly felt so much better knowing there was someone he could ask questions. Not that Mary didn't answer his questions, but every time he heard he didn't have enough authority he felt like choking the system.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 138: Bloodlines

Soon after, the comedian went offstage, and the YouTuber went on. Similar to her last performance, she sat on stage alone on a stool. Her excitement was clearly visible on her face, though Lex did not think she cared for the award that would be granted to the entire planet. Clearly, whoever had brought her had promised her other prizes should she manage to get first place.

After taking a few moments to calm herself, she began her performance. This time she sang the song 'A thousand years'. Her voice was melodic and sweet and had great harmony. Still, it was surprising to Lex that this is what the Beasts appreciated. He could have sworn that the two fighters smashing each other's guts out was more appealing to them. Guess he learnt his lesson on stereotyping.

For a few minutes, the Inn went silent. The YouTubers' voice could be heard in every corner, and all the guests stopped whatever they were doing to enjoy the song. The birds and parrots native to the Inn arrived at the coliseum and started flying in circles around the stage.

Even Little Blue, who had been throwing a tantrum, stopped to listen, much to the relief of the Gardener as only he was watching the whale.

The Sovereign Galactic Turtle did not stop what he was doing, as he was busy using the Devil/fertilizer to nurture the three rare seeds Le had given it, yet gently bobbed its head along.

For the first time, Lex noticed that cultivators and Beasts alike were captivated by the young woman's voice, despite her being a complete mortal and having no bloodline to help her. Lex could not help but think of the ballerina at this moment. Had she not dropped out, would she have made it to the finals?

The thought was fleeting, and Lex quickly forgot about it as he lost himself in the moment. Hers was the quickest performance, yet its impact was undeniable. Once the performance ended, it was officially the end of the first part of the show.

Lex suddenly realized that at this moment he should have gone on stage to announce the winners, and share some details about the next portion of the games. But he was standing next to Harry and John, and it would be extremely suspicious if he suddenly disappeared, right before the Innkeeper appeared. He could not tell if this was just a result of him being forgetful or his tumor was affecting his decision making again. Either way, he needed to handle it.

After considering what to do for a moment, he made his decision. An announcement was heard across the Inn.

"The winner for the first portion will be declared at 6 pm, along with the details for the combat portion of the Games."

With that, those who were waiting for the prize ceremony relaxed. It also gave them time to call everyone who was absent so that they could also attend the ceremony. Once again, it all seemed planned for the benefit of the guests, and not at all like a planning debacle, which it actually was.

"It seems like the ceremony is a few hours away," Leo said, turning to John. "How about you tell me about bloodlines in the meantime?"

"Oh, do you already have 1000 MP saved up? Your Gamers den must make more MP than I realized. Sure, follow me to my room. I would rather not have such conversations in public."

Leo almost flinched as he realized another mistake. His income from the Gamers' den wasn't that much considering the cost of renting a PC was only 1MP, yet he dismissed the 1000 MP because he was considering his massive supply of MP as Lex. Leo should have tried to negotiate down the cost. This huge sum would also limit how many questions he could ask at a time. But what was done was done, there was no use in crying over spilt milk.

"Sure, let's go. Harry, do you want to join us?"

"Uh, can I?" he asked hesitantly.

"Of course, since I'm paying anyway there's no reason you shouldn't take advantage."

With that, the three of them retreated to Battle Ax. Even now, there were a few people waiting to avail John's services, but he was taking a break for the rest of the day and told them as much.

Inside the trio made themselves comfortable as Leo sent John the 1000 MP. This was a hefty amount, no doubt, but the understanding was that anytime Lex had questions about bloodlines John would answer them now.

"Bloodlines are a vague concept," John began, his voice deeper than normal. "There is a general understanding of how they work based on many millennia of study, but there will occasionally be a new bloodline that contradicts previously understood convention, which is why they are not considered having strict rules.

"When talking of bloodlines, the first question that comes up is, what is the difference between a being with a bloodline and one without? This is because, even in the same species, there can be various bloodlines. The clearest example is the previous human who had a bloodline, but there are so many other humans present here who do not.

"The effect of bloodlines can be expressed in two main ways. The first is the effect on the person carrying the bloodline, and the second is the effect on those near the carrier. Usually, the effect on the person carrying the bloodline is some kind of enhancement to strength or ability, while to those near the carrier are some kind of suppression. I am being as general as possible, because bloodlines really are too varied and have too many effects.

"For example, the human performer. His bloodline did not seem to suppress those around him, but had some kind of charm effect. In Beasts, the role of bloodlines is more common and apparent. A Beast with a bloodline will have an easier time growing stronger, but its growth will be guided according to its bloodline. Here, they also suffer a drawback which is that if they encounter another Beast with the same bloodline, the one with a weaker or thinner bloodline will suffer an innate suppression.

"The second question that is asked often is how is a bloodline formed? Even this has a few different answers. The purest bloodlines are formed as a result of cultivation. When a being reaches a very high

level of cultivation, his or her bloodline naturally gains certain abilities or attributes according to how that being cultivated.

"For example, if a human cultivator who is focused on cultivating with a technique with an affinity for fire reaches a high enough level, his bloodline will gain attributes that support fire based techniques. If that human has any children after that, a bloodline that aids in cultivating fire based techniques will be formed and passed on to his descendants.

"The second, and the most common way, that bloodlines are formed is through the descendants of two different species. For example, if a human and a devil were to have a child, while the child will be born in the same species as the mother, the child will also inherit a bloodline that mixes the strengths of both races.

"The third way, and perhaps the most unstable way, that produces special bloodlines is to absorb the blood essence of any being with a much higher cultivation than oneself. To succeed in this there are many precautions one must take, and one has to be very careful when selecting the blood essence. Any mistake or complication can easily end up in death. For those that survive the mistake may end up with a bloodline that is more detrimental than beneficial. This kind of bloodline also rarely passes down to descendants, and may pass many generations before showing up again.

"But this kind of bloodline is also the easiest to upgrade or grow, due to its unstable nature. All one has to do is continue to absorb the same or similar bloodlines at a higher realm or concentration. Usually, only those who are unable to continue cultivating choose such a path."

John kept giving the two a lecture, and they both listened avidly. They were both newcomers to the world of cultivation and their knowledge and experience was extremely lacking. They asked him various questions, and as if he were a living library John was able to give them all the answers they required. John's depth of knowledge was truly commendable, but then, considering his profession at the Inn, such a fact should already have been obvious.

John was incredibly patient in answering all their questions, as his actual profession, an assassin, also required an insurmountable level of patience.

Just as the conversation was coming to a close, and Leo started thinking of excuses to leave, Harry asked, "Hey John, is it okay if I ask questions unrelated to this as well? I can also pay, I've saved up enough."

"Sure, I see no harm," the man replied with a smile. It seemed poverty was no longer written in his destiny, as the MP came towards him without him even putting in any effort.

"I want to know how to raise the level of my soul."

John raised an interested eyebrow, and Leo froze where he stood. Maybe he should stick around a little longer.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 139: Simple prizes

Once the topic of the soul was touched upon, both Leo and John became interested. Leo because he himself was looking for ways to stabilize his soul, while John because it was such a rare topic for low level cultivators. Even at higher realms, while it was more important to take note of, rarely would anyone specifically focus on it.

Harry sent John the MP, which prompted him to wake from his stupor.

"If you're interested in the soul, you're very lucky to have met me. Few people are as knowledgeable about the soul as I. It's not a topic many focus on. Let's start with what the soul actually is.

"The soul is the very foundation for any living being. A being can live without a spirit, and it can live without a body, and occasionally even without both, but in order for a being to be alive it must have a soul!

"Souls are the only common feature shared by all living beings, yet at the same time, for something so common, it is the most elusive. As rare as they are, you will often come across natural treasures that aid in spirit or body cultivation, but hardly ever will you come across something that aids in the growth of the soul. In common cultivation convention, you only start actively strengthening the soul when you reach the Nascent realm.

"Cultivation techniques that focus on using or strengthening the soul are so rare that even I have never actually seen them." John paused for a moment and eyed Harry. He already knew that Harry was practicing some strange technique that used his soul strength to affect his clients. It was something he

had never come across before. Had the situation been different, maybe he would have been tempted to 'ask' Harry the details about his cultivation. Now though, John was properly terrified of the Innkeeper and was on his best behavior. There were some enemies even assassins would not dare cross.

"If you want me to make techniques that aid in strengthening your soul, I cannot help you. But I am familiar with some of the most common treasures that can aid in soul cultivation, so I can provide you with some guidance there.

"Much like spirit stones, which contain pure spirit energy, there are soul stones that can be used. But the thing about soul stones is that they can be used by anyone at all to strengthen their soul, which is why they are absolutely rare. Like spirit stones, they also come in different levels of strength and purity, but again, they are so rare that you are unlikely to encounter one easily.

"The next best thing for someone at your level to use is Angel dust, Faerie grass or Purified Wraiths blood. Angel dust is incredibly powerful, yet at the same time very stable and nurturing so it can be used even at your low level. But to get some, you would have to buy it from the Angels. It's expensive and rare, but at least you know the source. The Purified Wraith's blood is a product sold by Devils. If you have the guts, you can go buy it from them.

"The Faerie grass is probably the best option for you, as it's a naturally occurring treasure. But it is extremely, extremely rare. The good news is that it only works for low level cultivators, so the chances of you finding it are much higher than any of the others.

"The next best way, but an incredibly slow way, for you to increase your soul strength is to completely exhaust it and then let it recover naturally. The way your body builds muscle after great exertion, the soul also grows. It might be somewhat beneficial to you at your current level, but in the long run it's so slow that the natural growth experienced by your soul when you cultivate, though limited, out paces it."

John paused again, because he knew this was what Harry was most interested in and wanted to give him time to absorb the information. But since he had been paid to give information on the soul, he would do his job properly. His pride demanded it.

"While nurturing a soul is incredibly difficult, harming it on the other hand is very easy, which is why soul protection treasures are very valuable. One of the ways..." Though he tried to hide it, his excitement when talking about all the ways to kill a person by harming their soul came out just a little.

The basic summary of everything he said that Leo took away was that if he found a way to hurt souls, under the Nascent realm he'd become extremely dangerous. It also gave him a better idea of how incredible Regal Embrace was as it allowed his soul to heal naturally alongside his body, something that was otherwise unthinkable. No souls healed on their own and would always require external aid.

Once John was done, Leo excused himself and teleported away. Shedding his persona, Lex donned his suit once more and readied himself for the award ceremony. He'd learnt a lot of important things that would help him a lot in the cultivation of his soul, but those were things he would focus on after the Midnight Games.

He spent the next few hours meditating. He'd noticed himself making more and more mistakes recently, something he could not allow himself to do as the Innkeeper. He had to calm his mind and, preferably, get in the state of 'flow' that he'd gotten in earlier somehow. Unfortunately, the state eluded him once again.

As a backup, he explained his plan to Marry in great detail to vet for any obvious mistakes. Fortunately there were none. He repeated his plan to himself a couple of times to prepare. He didn't understand why he still felt nervous. He'd already addressed these people a few times, you'd think he'd be used to it by now.

He put all such thoughts out of his mind, took a deep breath, and focused on the task at hand. He teleported out to the main stage wearing the warm, gentle smile that the Innkeeper often wore.

"How quickly the performances have already ended," he said looking at the full coliseum. Unlike during the performances when everyone was in their rooms, this time everyone sat out in the open. It was a sign of respect towards the Innkeeper.

"The performances, in my humble opinion, were stellar. It was great to see so many similarities in culture, not only across various worlds, but across many species as well. It just shows, whether it's a display of strength, beauty, art or music, everyone can appreciate it. I hope this event serves as a foundation for a friendship that will last the ages.

"I could continue to stand here and compliment each performance endlessly, but I think it would be best if we just got on with the show. So, without any more delays, I would like to announce the winner of the first portion of the Midnight Games.

"Alissa Harmony from Earth, congratulations on putting on a performance that moved the heart and soul of your audience. Please, stand so that you may be recognized."

In the crowd, the young youtuber stood up feeling a rush of exhilaration without comparison. She was dressed in a long red gown which complimented fair skin and blushing cheeks splendidly. Lex almost felt bad that the award was being shared by the whole planet without a special prize for her, but he also knew that as a mortal she would be in great danger if she received any prizes from him. No one would harm her at the Inn, of course, but back on Earth someone may not be able to control their greed.

"Naturally since there is a winner, there must be an award. But this time, the prize is not only for the winner, but the whole planet that they represent. The first prize is for all the performers of Earth. Whenever someone on your planet gives a performance that is able to resonate with enough people, they will automatically be invited to perform at the Midnight Inn. Of course, whether they accept or not is up to them, but should they accept they will be able to perform for audiences from across the universe!"

This was completely a prize for the performers and not a secret way for Lex to get free and frequent entertaining events at the Inn. No sir, it only benefited the performers.

"The second and final award, though simple, can be shared by the entire planet. After one month, a new hidden realm will be opened on Earth containing the heritage of an ancient cultivator, and will remain open for one entire year. What kind of treasures you can reap will be completely up to you, but whatever they may be, this will be a great opportunity."

The Innkeeper spoke in his usual casual tone, but whether it was the humans, the Devils or the Beasts, they all had a change in expression. This was no 'simple' prize.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 140: Gather your armies

Whether they be called minor realms, hidden realms, secret realms, pocket dimensions or anything else, the concept was the same. It was basically a separate pocket of space, disconnected from the main universe. Sometimes they formed naturally, and in some cases, a very high leveled cultivator could open them up on their own.

These separate dimensions had their own ecosystem and existed in their own sustained balance. Sometimes, this ecosystem was extremely hazardous and could not support life. But in cases like this, such realms often give birth to extremely precious and rare treasures, whether they be in the form of precious ores, liquids, gasses or anything else. Most of the time, however, these realms had a very stable environment, rich in spiritual energy.

If these realms were left untouched by outside interference, they often gave birth to extremely powerful Beasts or other species with incredibly high talents. Most such realms found on Earth were extremely small and were full of opportunities for anyone to take. They opened at fixed or random intervals, and so could only be treated as places for small, quick incursions. That was also why, after so many years, these realms still had not been stripped of all their treasures - they just didn't have the time to do so.

Having a realm remain open for one year continuously was unheard of on Earth, which is why they could not believe it. This was too good to be true. This was not mentioning that the realm the Innkeeper was talking about was most likely a new realm to the Earthlings, so far unexplored.

The reason why Sloth of the Beasts, and the remaining Devils were surprised was completely different. Space was complex beyond what most people could normally comprehend. Most people saw it as a linear existence. Some incredibly intelligent scientists on Earth theorized the nature of space to be curved. Yet high leveled cultivators who could directly feel the complexity of space knew just how much more complicated than that it was.

Based on the assumption that the realm the Innkeeper opened for Earth was one that was already anchored to Earth, his achievement was already amazing. Finding and artificially opening hidden realms without causing them to collapse and retain their stable ecosystem required a deep understanding of space beyond what was normally seen. This was completely ignoring the level of cultivation required.

But there was another possibility, one that was truly mind blowing. Hidden realms that were anchored to a planet moved in space alongside the planet as it not only orbited its sun, but as its solar system moved in the universe. This is why they could be opened repeatedly in the same place on the planet multiple times. But some hidden realms had no anchors and moved through space like a leaf flying through the wind.

These hidden realms were much more difficult to find, to the point where one might not be discovered in a hundred thousand years. Once they were found, they needed to be artificially anchored to a point before they could be opened, yet doing so would tamper with the internal ecosystem of the hidden

realm. Being able to anchor it without tampering with the ecosystem was even rarer than finding such a realm, and then maintaining the opening for a long time was even harder.

Whether the Innkeeper had achieved the former or the latter, both were extremely impressive. And daunting. It also led to the possibility that the Inn existed in a hidden realm that the Innkeeper either discovered or created - whichever the case, the result was very telling about the Innkeepers' capabilities.

Lex, of course, had no idea about the various complexities involving him opening such a realm. All he knew was that he selected one of the cheapest prizes the system offered. The prize would be different depending on which planet won, as the same realm could not be accessed by all three planets. Whatever the truth of the matter was, Lex was pleased to see that his prize had thoroughly impressed the crowd. If only he knew the true ramifications of what he had done.

In one of the rooms in the coliseum sat two beings that appeared to be human. They 'appeared' to be human, because one of them was Loretta in a completely different disguise. This time when she came to the Inn she avoided all the Devils. In fact, she avoided meeting anyone. She appeared, rented the room, and hadn't left since. The 'man' who was sitting beside her had only appeared yesterday. He watched the Innkeeper with great interest and observed each and every action of his. He analyzed every word and focused on every expression he made.

"He is somewhat interesting," the man said softly to Loretta. He was not worried about being overheard because they had, naturally, set up their own isolation formation in the room. "I cannot get a read on his cultivation, but the Celestial I've basically seen through. When the Innkeeper is not around, he monitors the whole Inn. But as soon as the Innkeeper appears, he follows the Innkeeper closely. If I didn't know better, I would say the Celestial is acting like a bodyguard."

The man had managed to get all this information without using his spiritual sense, which may have alerted the Innkeeper. How exactly he obtained this information, though, was a mystery.

"If the Innkeeper needs a bodyguard, maybe he's not that strong," Loretta said. They themselves had not seen the Innkeeper make a move personally, so there was still some room for speculation. But realistically speaking, no one believed the Innkeeper was weak.

"It's unlikely. He is most probably just using the Celestial as a deterrent, and so that he himself does not need to make a move. This way, he can keep his spiritual signature hidden. This Innkeeper may be some

old acquaintance we previously thought dead, and by not making a move personally, he can continue to hide his identity."

The man thought for a moment before he continued. "There is also the possibility he is from the unknown regions of space. That would make things more tricky."

"So, what do you think we should do?"

"For now, wait. I want to see exactly how he will conduct his 'games'. According to what you told me, the contestants are limited to Foundation and Golden Core realms, but I've had a few secret guards assigned to each node. How will he avoid them, I wonder?"

Loretta nodded, silently accepting what the man said. All they had to do now was wait.

In a different room, a lone human sat as he watched the Innkeeper. He had a mischievous grin on his face, and under his breath he also kept muttering 'interesting'. In front of him lay a report personally written by Ragnar.

Back on stage, Lex only waited for a couple of moments for his audience to absorb the details of his reward before he continued his speech.

"With that concluded, let's now turn our attention to the combat portion of the Midnight Games. There are ten nodes that need to be destroyed, and so there will be ten games. The first five of those games will be played by the Foundation realm contestants, and the latter five by the Golden Core contestants.

"Going along with the theme of five, each planet may bring five thousand contestants for the Foundation and Golden core stages each. But I advise you to take this matter very seriously, as even though they are titled 'games', each round will be fraught with real danger. Once you enter the round, until victory or defeat is determined, your life is very much in real danger.

"The games will take place one by one, and only the survivors of the first game can enter the second. The teams for each world will enter the round at the same time and it's entirely up to you if you want to work together, work independently or even sabotage one another.

"At the end of each round, all three worlds will gain points based on three things: total number of zombie kills by contestants of that world, total contribution to the destruction of the node and total number of survivors.

"The rounds will be played in a siege format, with the zombies defending and the three worlds attacking. However, during each round unexpected events may occur that make each round more interesting.

"The combat portion of the Midnight Games will begin in exactly 24 hours, and all contestants for the first five games must be registered and present in the Inn at that time or they won't get an opportunity to participate."

The Innkeeper paused for a moment, and looked at the serious faces of his various guests.

"We've already seen how the three worlds live when they have harmony. Now it's time to see how they perform during times of war. I encourage you all to do your best, as the prizes for this portion of the games will only be better than the previous ones, not worse."

Not giving them any time for questions, Lex disappeared from the stage. They had much to prepare and it was best if they utilized their time properly.

Even the sloth, who was so far uninterested in competing, turned to look at Greens Haven and said, "gather your armies. We must win this award."