

Innkeeper 141

The Innkeeper

Chapter 141: Mobilizing forces

The reward of a new hidden realm was extremely enticing to every party present. The potential of a reward the Innkeeper said was even more valuable directly affected everyone's plans.

The lazy sloth that originally could not be bothered at all with the Midnight Games suddenly returned to Nibiru and, for the first time, made his presence known worldwide. There was no drowsiness in his eyes as he flew over the various continents of the planet, scanning all beings with his spiritual senses. Just getting the strongest Beasts at the Foundation and Golden Core would not work. He needed the proper cohesiveness of an army, or at least various smaller units, who could work together.

Originally, he had planned to use this time to evaluate the Beasts from Earth and Vegus Minima, very few of whom had actually arrived. Now he had just met them, flashed them with his cultivation level, and told them that he would meet with them once the next event finally began. If they waited for him, they might receive some benefits. If not, Golden Hair no longer cared as much.

Greens Haven was also mobilizing his subordinates while Blood Fang, who had already prepared to fight, was directly informed by the sloth that he would be taking command. At first the wolf was dissatisfied, as even though the sloth was stronger, it did not mean the wolf was a coward and would easily hand over command of its forces. Yet the sloth pacified the wolf easily by guiding it on how it could further transform its Inferior Lykaios bloodline, something that it had been trying to do its whole life.

Since the reward would be shared by the whole planet instead of an individual, Blood Fang decided to temporarily give the sloth control of its various forces.

The Earthlings' reaction was just as substantial. Immediately, the five Nascants called a meeting and started discussing their plans. There were multiple things they needed to take into account when deciding their actions. Their first priority was Earth.

Despite their best efforts to negotiate with the rebels, their efforts remained unrewarded. They needed to leave enough forces on Earth to protect their interests which, unfortunately, meant it was impossible for them to send an army of five thousand Golden Core cultivators to fight. This was especially so since,

on Earth, Golden Core cultivators were no longer considered soldiers and were at the very top level of each force.

With such a glaring disadvantage, they directly decided to forgo trying to win the combat portion of the games. They would instead negotiate with the Jotun Empire and try to gain the greatest advantages they could in exchange for helping the Empire attain victory.

This in itself would not be an easy feat, as their relationship with the empire had undergone an undesirable change. They were not able to accept Ragnar's deal of recruiting 1.5 million people unless the Inn acted as a conduit for transporting them, nor were they willing to give up Earth's location. The fallout from that was not as bad as they expected. When they informed Anthony of their decision, he seemed to have expected as much. The real difficulty was then in deciding what further benefits they could gain from one another.

Anthony was in no way as flexible as Ragnar had been during their meeting and maintained a superior stance throughout every subsequent meeting they had. Though he did not explicitly say so, his actions strongly let them know that they had nothing to give to the Empire outside of their performance during the games.

Now with such a prize up for grabs, the Earthlings' support became more valuable. The families decided amongst themselves what exactly they wanted and how much they were willing to contribute. It went without saying that most of them wanted resources to promote their Nascent cultivation. Only Fateh and Brandon decided to put the needs of their families first. With the decision made, the five of them went to find Anthony and begin a new round of negotiations.

The soldiers from the Empire had the mildest reaction. This wasn't because they did not want the award - on the contrary, the award was extremely important to them. Access to a hidden realm could provide them with precious resources that would aid them in their conquest, even on the other two Vegus planets. Even though the Empire itself was immeasurably rich, distant waters could not put out nearby fires.

No, the soldiers had the mildest reaction because they had planned on doing their best from the very getgo. Tens of thousands of their soldiers were already on standby, awaiting their orders. The games wouldn't even be that different from their normal jobs, as they were tasked with killing zombies anyway.

Gathering up Foundation realm soldiers had been a slight - emphasis on 'slight' - problem for them. This was because Foundation realm was actually too low a level for them to be considered active service

soldiers. Their proper designation was trainee soldiers. But even as trainees, they were strong enough to outclass most others at their level.

For the Empire, this was slightly akin to asking high school level kids to undertake a dangerous yet important task. The difference being these 'high school kids' were heavily trained for the task. There was no doubt that to an imaginative mind, such a situation would be akin to an integral story arc for one of those 'high school kids' that would actually be the main character of a novel. Maybe some of those trainees even thought of themselves as such. Only time would tell what their results were.

As soon as the details for the games were announced, in a calm and orderly fashion orders were passed out and before the Earthlings even arrived to ask for a meeting, ten thousand fully geared soldiers appeared at the Inn. The sight of five thousand peak Golden Core soldiers and five thousand peak Foundation realm soldiers was extraordinary. They exuded a battle hardened aura and their expressions were thirsty for combat.

The five earthlings, though not unexposed to massive armies, stopped where they stood and stared in awe at the sight. Their battle intent was reigned in, to not offend the Innkeeper, yet just their visage was enough to send shivers down the earthlings' spines. Their confidence in negotiating diminished a bit, as it truly did not seem like the Empire would need any help.

While all this was going on, the Devils did not remain idle either. The mysterious man and Loretta continued to sit in the room, as they had long since already given out their orders. The two remaining Devils did not know that Loretta was still here, but even if they did, it would not matter. They were quite looking forward to seeing the Empires' reactions once they were done.

Ahjour, the Devil with the sabertooth fangs summoned his personal assistant. Looking at a miniversion of himself, he said, "There is an important matter we need to discuss with the Innkeeper. Is it possible for us to meet with him?"

"I can pass along a message to the Innkeeper. What shall I say it is about?"

"Why, our participation in the Midnight Games, of course," he replied, giving a toothy grin. The Devil was trying to look sincere but his giant fangs and sharp teeth made him look menacing instead.

"I will pass along the message. Please wait," the hologram said, and disappeared.

Lex, who was observing the various reactions everyone was having, was fairly surprised to learn that someone was asking for an audience with him. When he learnt the request was from the two Devils, he frowned a bit. He supposed it was too much to hope that they wouldn't create any trouble when he was so openly targeting them.

"You wanted to see me?" he asked with a warm smile, appearing before the two.

"My most sincere apologies for disturbing you Innkeeper," said Creel, his dark eyes trained on Lex. "But I just had a small question. I thought it would be best to ask you, instead of making my own assumptions."

"There is no need for apologies. Ask away."

"Since only five thousand participants are allowed by each planet, when we bring forth our participants, how will it be decided whether our participants enter or the humans? This is not really an issue we can hash out with the humans on Vegus Minima. They don't really seem amenable to our cause."

It was a good thing that Lex was wearing the Host Attire suit because otherwise his eyes would have been stretched open when he realized the glaring flaw in his plan for the games. The planet Vegus Minima was shared by the Devils and the humans, and so both would technically be allowed to bring forth participants. The rules of the event set by him dictated it be so, and the system would not allow him to prevent them from participating, since they represented the planet as well.

Lex sighed internally as he quickly thought of solutions.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 142: Half

Lex's brain went into overdrive. Within less than a single second, he tried to find various solutions. He tried blocking the devils from entering, simply because it was the easiest solution. Yet before he began the event, he had to decide on its rules and format. Everything that happened was based on those rules. Let alone Lex, even the system could not randomly change the rules once the event had started. Since the parameters of 'anyone from that planet' had been defined - albeit a loose definition - Lex could do nothing to prevent their participation.

As a developer himself, Lex understood the logic behind it. Often a client would ask him to 'simply remove something' or to create a magic button that simply performed a certain action. Yet, as simple as these requests sounded conceptually, the complexity behind even the tiniest of details was not to be underestimated.

Then Lex tried to identify them as a separate entity and give them a separate quota of soldiers, but that didn't work either. He tried adding them as a part of the original zombies that were defending the node, but it could not work. He tried a dozen other solutions, but none of them bore fruit. Eventually, Lex was only left with one option that Lex had wanted to avoid.

After checking if his last solution would work, Lex looked at Creel and said, "I thought the answer was fairly obvious. But I guess it was an oversight of mine, considering the kind of relationship you have with each other. Since you both share the planet, you can fill half the quota for participants each. If you two can come to a compromise on your own then you can decide the split, otherwise each will get exactly fifty percent."

Creel grinned at the answer. Truthfully, the devils knew that the moment the nodes underwent any interference, fluctuations in their protection formation would give away their location. It was only a matter of time before the devils lost control of Vegus Minima because, to them, it was only another farm. They weren't putting any serious effort into protecting it. But at the same time, there was no reason to make it too easy for the humans to reclaim their planet.

"That is splendid," the devil answered. "We will begin preparations immediately."

"Good luck," Lex said, and teleported away.

He felt a little bad for the Jotuns, but he was literally the one that said participants could sabotage one another. When he said that, he simply thought that the planets would at most kill-steal from each other to deprive points, since it was still in their best interest to destroy the nodes. Yet now, there was another element of complexity to the games.

The previous favorites to win, the Jotun Empire, were suddenly at a great disadvantage. The beasts might have the greatest chances of winning now. At the same time, all three of them were at a greater disadvantage now as well.

"I suppose I should let the Jotuns know as well," Lex thought. It was too bad. He was looking forward to their army's performance the next day. They looked so impressive just standing and posing, he was sure they would have given a phenomenal performance at full force.

Back at the makeshift Jotun Empire operations camp, which was nothing more than a room that Anthony had rented, a meeting was taking place between Anthony and the Earthlings.

"Listen here, pal," Brandon said, frustration and anger evident in his voice. "We are here offering an alliance, not begging for scraps. We came to you first because of the sincerity that Ragnar showed us. That does not mean you are our only option. We can just as easily go to the beasts from Nibiru. I'm sure they're interested in the prize as well by now."

Anthony looked at the five dangerously. His personality was very different from that of Ragnar.

Ragnar, despite his brutal and savage nature, was very softhearted when it came to humans. He always wanted to nurture them and help them grow. Perhaps this is what happened after thousands of years of fighting a war, liberating humans from the demons' control. Anthony, on the other hand, was ingrained with the arrogance not only of his noble birth but also that of coming from a superior civilization. His usual complicity came from the fact that Ragnar was a man who had proved himself time and time again, and was worthy of commanding him.

These plebeians, on the other hand, had not yet earned his respect. It was not that he was against accepting their alliance, but that they were clearly asking for too much! The massive amounts of resources required to raise three Nascants all the way to the peak of the realm were honestly not so much to Anthony. It was the damned cultivation techniques that the other two requested that were absurd!

They had very specific requirements for the cultivation techniques, which were not impossible for the Empire to fulfill. It was the caliber of the techniques that was the problem. This was not mentioning the instructors they requested, as well as the various banks of knowledge of medicine and advanced technology! A few demands were acceptable, but they were asking for too much!

"If you find us lacking, then feel free to go and cooperate with those animals. It is of no consequence to me if you wish to put your forces in harm's way. If they really do accept your proposals and decide to

cooperate with you, I wish you the best of luck. How the distinct lack of discipline and engineered precision of an experienced army will put your own forces in greater risk is no concern of mine."

"We would not consider cooperating with someone else if you at least negotiated! You have not changed your initial offer even a single time!"

"You should be grateful," Anthony finally said, no longer having the patience to hide what he was thinking, "that you are even allowed an opportunity to fight alongside a Jotun army. The battle experience your soldiers will gain will be invaluable. It is not something you can gain with working from beasts. You..." Anthony was going to continue his tirade but was interrupted when his personal attendant appeared and mentally passed a message from the Innkeeper.

The revelation that their number of participants was cut in half disturbed Anthony greatly, but was not enough to demoralize him. Just as the announcements for the details of the game were announced, Ragnar told Anthony to take charge of their deployment and strategy during the games.

Ragnar would return to Vegus Minima and begin a planet wide assault. He needed to be present on the planet to launch their attack as soon as the formation protecting the spawning portal revealed itself. He also needed to make sure the devils didn't do anything desperate, just as they were about to lose the planet. Due to certain precedents, it was unlikely they would forcefully destroy the planet before abandoning it, but they could do a various number of frustrating things.

That left Anthony to decide on his own what his objectives were and how he wanted to achieve them. Winning the competition was a greatly attractive opportunity, but much more important than that was ensuring that each of the nodes was destroyed. Even if they had to purposefully give up on winning the prize, their first priority must always be that.

After deciding how he wanted to proceed, he turned his attention back to the Earthlings. Truthfully, he still disdained them. Yet his training did not let him ignore any potential useful tool in war.

"I will inform you of two things, and that will conclude our meeting. What you decide to do after you hear those things is up to you, but I will not waste more time explaining myself.

"First, the devils will also be participating in the Midnight Games. Their participation has cut down the number of recruits we can send to half. This was something you would learn eventually, so there was no point in hiding this from you.

"The second thing I want to tell you is that 'negotiations' take place between two equals. When one is in a superior position than the other, they do not negotiate, they dictate the terms. Even with our forces cut in half, I personally don't think that you will be our equal. I think that despite our disadvantage, Earth will still perform the weakest out of everyone.

"But, considering the situation, I will give you an opportunity. I will give you the chance to prove if you are my equal, and deserve to negotiate with us. If, during the first game, Earth is able to accumulate points even remotely close to that of the Jotun Empire, then you can negotiate with me. If not, then you can fall in line and take what you're given, or you can choose to see if the beasts give you a better offer."

With his piece said, Anthony invited them to leave. Though not something he enjoyed, Anthony could also play a few mind games. By making their performance the foundation for further cooperation, he would prompt them to do their absolute best. Had they been promised rewards before the battle even began, their soldiers still would have fought, but would have kept more of a survival mentality.

Regardless of the outcome, the Earthlings would achieve their goals, so they would do what they could while being safe. But by making the reward based on performance, their soldiers would have to fight with everything and take more risks. Going forward, they would need to continue that level of performance to assure successful cooperation.

At that point, whether the Earthlings decided to help the Empire or the Beasts, it would not change the fact that they would be fighting their hardest.

Anthony was busy with his own schemes while the five Nascants held another meeting to decide their future line of action. Unfortunately for all of them, Alexander Morrison was going to be the one participating in the games, and he had plans of his own.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 143: Alexander the arrogant

Helen stood silently in the soft, dim light. For the greater part of an hour, she had not moved an inch. She only watched the teenager as he meditated. Initially, she could barely see anything, but as her eyes

adjusted to the darkness, she found herself mesmerized by the intense, focused look on Alexander's face. It was not the look of someone searching for peace in meditation, but that of a warrior preparing for combat.

Right now, Helen was in Alexander's private security bunker. She had been with him for the past few days, and just a while ago Alexander had asked to take care of a few things. When she returned, she found him like this in the small gym inside the bunker.

When she had arrived, he had already been meditating, but she could tell by his heavy breathing and sweat covered body that he had only recently finished working out. She did not want to disturb him, so she waited. But at some point, when she found herself biting her lower lip, and staring as the sweat roll down his slightly swollen arms, she realized that she needed to distance herself from the man. Otherwise, despite her decision to look for someone who loved and valued her the way she wanted, she might just spend the rest of her life just like this: standing in the darkness, watching the contours of his face in silence as he strode forward, farther and farther from her reach.

While Helen was battling her inner demons and gearing up to make a difficult decision, Alexander was going through an ordeal of his own. He was doing his best to harness the raging energy coursing through his body.

It was not as simple as it sounded, not only because he had just recently completed his breakthrough into the Foundation realm in body cultivation as well, thanks to the many zombie cores he used. No, his energy had been raging as if he was just about to fight an entire war on his own. This was because his body was reacting to his will and what he had been planning. But even then, as much as he appreciated and needed the energy, it had to be firmly under his own control.

One may wonder, considering Alexander's background, why he was never arrogant towards others. Some may speculate it was a result of proper upbringing, or that his endless training had tempered Alexander's arrogance. But that was far from the truth.

Son to excellent parents, grandson to the best of the best, heir to the Morrison family, an only child and trained rigorously not only to surpass his peers but many of his seniors as well, Alexander did not need to act arrogant - it was ingrained into his very bones. But despite all that, he did not behave rudely or with an aura of superiority to those around him. This was because, to Alexander, such petty behavior could not encompass his innate arrogance. Alexander's arrogance could be described and encompassed in only two words: absolute control!

This was a lesson his grandmother, the person he was closest to in his family, had taught him. His excellence, his superiority, his endless dedication could all only be truly displayed when he was in absolute control. This meant his demeanor, his speech, even his gait were all a certain way because that's how he wanted to display them.

Some may think that such rigid control may be unhealthy and may limit his emotional growth, but it was quite the contrary. He did not stop himself from feeling or thinking about certain things, just how he exhibited or reacted to them. For example, if something made him angry, he would not randomly lash out. He would measure the situation and make a decision accordingly. This was a fancy way of saying he did not do things in a reaction to something, but because he chose to. Oftentimes, based on the situation, the result may end up being the same, but it was the mentality that made all the difference. He never did things because he had to, but because he chose to.

So then, in a world where he was practically destined to be the best, and his greatest challenges came in the form of pushing himself, Alexander's arrogance remained hidden away from view.

Even when Hammad was attempting to assassinate Alexander, he did not behave arrogantly, not because it was not the appropriate reaction, but because he deemed them unworthy of the response. Hammad was not even significant enough of a threat for Alexander to display a behavior letting him know that Alexander thought of the assassin as beneath him. To the young man, he was merely playing a game of chess with predetermined moves - one that would result in his own victory.

This was similarly why RussianPrincess77 had been able to elicit such a strong reaction from him. She was a piece in the chess game he never anticipated. She had earned the right of his curiosity, but still not enough for his curiosity to rule him and dictate his actions.

But the Midnight Games, they provided him with a stage he never knew he craved. On Earth, the only possible rivals to his family were all actually secretly allies. There was nothing in his life that challenged him from his core. That was not to say that he found everything easy - far from it. Yet, things were only difficult because they were new to him. With the guidance and training of his family, there was nothing he could not overcome.

Yet in the Midnight Games, there was a challenge waiting for him that offered no protection. There was no safety net provided by his family, no secret bodyguards, no backup plans. The only thing he could rely on was his own ability. And, as if such a tantalizing new experience was not enough, he was suddenly brought face to face with forces that far outmatched and outclassed anything the Earth had to offer. For the first time in his life, he did not have the advantage simply by existing - and that excited him in a way he had never experienced before.

It was exactly for this reason he decided the moment he learned that the Midnight Games would have a combat portion that he would participate no matter what, so long as he was eligible. And, as if guided by the hand of destiny itself, he had just stepped into the realm that allowed him to participate.

But, true to his mantra of absolute control, he did not let anyone see his seething excitement. He simply started making plans in the background, unknown even to his own family. This was because of a certain fact even his family forgot. The day he reached the Foundation realm, he no longer needed to listen to anyone, and wielded the full authority of his family.

He finally opened his eyes to the image of the teenage girl standing in the distance, looking at him. His sudden gaze made her tremble softly, as if she was unprepared for the power and hunger in his eyes.

"Have they sent the location?" he asked with a level voice, standing up.

"Yes," she replied in a whisper for some reason. She did not even realize that she was doing so.

"Get ready. We'll leave in ten."

Helen did not reply and just stood by and watched him leave the room. Alexander took a quick shower and dressed casually in black pants and a white button shirt with blue flower patterns on it in a Hawaiian style.

Outside the bunker, it was a bright and sunny day. Putting on a pair of aviators, Alexander got in the driver's seat of a silver convertible Porsche and immediately sped off. Helen was already sitting in the passenger seat, but for some reason would not even look at him. She just watched the beautiful scenery as the duo drove towards their destination. It was her first time in Brazil so she was just admiring its beauty. That was the excuse she was repeating to herself.

It was unfortunate that, because she was turned away the entire time, Alexander did not notice her slightly blushed cheeks and missed out on some beautiful scenery himself. But with the wind blowing in his hair, the vibration of the purring engine felt through the steering wheel, the song 'Unstoppable' blasting on the speakers, Alexander was feeling good. In fact, he was feeling very good.

So while various forces plotted and planned, not only for the upcoming games for the dominance of each of their respective worlds, he, as a yet unknown player, was simply enjoying himself. Even he did not know that by acting according to own wishes for the first time in his life, he was planting the seeds for a legend that would one day rock the very universe.

Softly, without realizing it, he started humming along to the song. He was unstoppable today.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 144: Ready, set, start gambling

Alexander and Helen drove all the way to a private airport, far away from any town or city. It was not the kind of place you could accidentally stumble into. After confirming his identity, the two of them were led to a hangar with a military helicopter. Getting in the pilot's seats, the two of them hurried through the takeoff protocols and left.

Alexander was naturally trained to pilot all vehicles so that he could deal with any situation, and Helen, who had been trained to be a wife to a cultivator, excelled in various seemingly random skills. Piloting an aircraft was just one of her many talents. This was exactly why among his close friend's group - when he still had one - Alexander would usually trust Helen with a request rather than the others. As much as he tried to hide it, he found it difficult to relate to the usual unengaged and unmotivated rich kids his age. At least Helen always applied herself in whatever she was doing.

About an hour after they started flying over land completely untouched by civilization, they suddenly found themselves in a very well hidden base in a valley. After having his identity confirmed, the two teenagers landed in one of the Morrison family's hidden military bases. While the Morrisons had a minimum military presence on Earth, it wasn't as if they had none. Yet today, the base was a lot busier than usual.

Before the Midnight Games began, Alexander had spent some time talking to some of the other guests. He had learnt from Chen that Vegus Minima was not the only planet that humans populated within that solar system. Despite that, the other planets were not mentioned by the Innkeeper when he announced the upcoming event.

That led Alexander to suspect that only people from the named planets would be able to participate. While he shared his suspicions with his family so that they would make any preparations they needed to, it was only after carefully selecting soldiers for his own small battalion.

Technically, organizing a personal battalion for himself would take longer and more careful planning, but this would suffice for his current needs. After careful and deliberate consideration, he selected 1000 of the best Foundation realm soldiers under his family's command. Originally, he thought that the number was overkill, and that there was no way he would need so many to follow him in the games. As it turned out, the number was still not large enough. But it would have to suffice.

Moving any number of troops from one planet to another took time. The only reason he'd even been able to gather 1000 Foundation experts was because most of them were already on Earth. The ones he had sent from Mars were only the elite few.

"How is their battle readiness, commander?" Alexander asked the man in-charge of this base.

"They're fully armed, fully prepped and fully briefed. We can have them ready to go in 30 minutes."

"Excellent. Do it. I want to be out of here ASAP."

The commander nodded and quickly ran off, screaming some commands in the distance. The teenagers simply remained where they were and watched as a 1000 soldiers fell into 100 straight lines in front of them.

Alexander naturally did not know all of them, but he had had detailed conversations with all the team captains. They had rehearsed different formations and covered a lot of what to do should communication be disrupted during the games. But, since Alexander had only theoretical knowledge in leading troops and no practical experience, he expected there to be a learning curve, which is why all the captains were also wearing cameras. Alexander would later on review the footage to see how his orders actually reflected on how he could improve.

Once he was satisfied, he nodded towards Helen, who opened a bag full of keys. A few hours ago he had her go to the Inn and retrieve them. According to the latest update he had received, Earth had not registered any of their participants yet at all. They were involved in whatever they were planning and had not made any actual moves yet. Or, even if they were making moves on Earth, they had not reached the Inn yet, which was great for him.

Once everyone had the keys, Alexander gave the command and they all simultaneously teleported away with a flash of light.

They appeared at the Inn in a relatively open area, away from the buildings and the manor. Yet almost instantly, their presence was noticed by the various guests. Their numbers were fewer, and they did not carry the same aura as the Jotun soldiers, but they looked impressive nonetheless.

"I'd like to register for the tournament," Alexander said to his personal hologram, the same as every one of his soldiers was doing.

"No problem, just give me a moment to start the registration process. We just need to make sure you are eligible to enter the tournament."

He could not feel the system scan him, but after just a few moments, he saw a holographic screen appear in his vision.

Contestant Name: Alexander Morrison

Contestant Affiliation: Earth

Contestant ID: E0001

Contestant Points: 0

In just a few more minutes, the rest of his troop was registered as well, the last one receiving the ID E1001. The E represented Earth, and the numbers represented the order in which they registered. Once the tournament started, there would, of course, be a rankings board and with thousands of names it would be difficult to identify which planet each participant belonged to. The ID number would make it easier.

"Your registration is complete," the hologram said politely. "Please refrain from returning to your world during the period of the games. If you are not present when a game begins, you will automatically be disqualified."

"Sure," Alexander replied casually.

The teenager expected that soon he would be summoned by his grandfather and the others, inquiring over his entry and why he didn't at least coordinate with them first. But oddly enough, the summon didn't come. It was ironic then that the highest echelon of Earth remained ignorant of the army that entered under the banner of their planet because they were in a meeting, yet everyone else learned of it.

It would be a few hours more before the Earthling realized what had happened and quickly reacted. What their reaction was and how it affected their plans, only time would tell. Lex was too busy to pay attention to what was happening at the Inn.

As for what Lex was doing? He had returned to Earth and was looking up some information on the latest idea he had. Not that he couldn't figure it out on his own, but he wanted to know how he could benefit the most.

As for what he was looking at specifically? Why, he was looking up how to set up gambling at the Inn. More specifically, he wanted to know how to set up the stakes. There was no way in hell that he would go around setting up stakes that gave twice or thrice the returns for a single bet. He had read enough light novels to know that all it took was some lucky, MC type character and a very unlikely bet to completely destroy his setup.

For a moment, he wondered if he was being corrupted. He himself had never gambled in his life. He hadn't even bought a lottery ticket, but now he was setting up gambling on an interstellar scale.

Then he saw a Banana store that sold phones for thousands of dollars and then sold the chargers separately. He then realized he was not corrupt. He was simply embracing the human heritage of pursuing profit. When dealing with so many species across the universe, it was important that he remembered his roots.

Just like that, the hours flew by and the time came close and closer to the beginning of the games. The Inn became unprecedentedly crowded. Thousands upon thousands of soldiers filled the once empty gardens. Anticipating such a situation, Lex had preemptively taken care of things.

Sending the soldiers into their separate individual rooms may cause a problem later for their commanders, so he had three makeshift bases built representing the three worlds. Hundreds of tents

filled each of the base, taking care of everything from temporary housing, dining, plumbing to even things like meeting rooms and storage tents.

The three armies looked vastly different. Even though two of the armies consisted of humans, the ones from Earth were wearing a mix of kevlar and Spirit-tech while the ones from the Jotun Empire appeared to be wearing armor that looked like it came out of a renaissance fair. The beasts, of course, were not wearing any armor, but the fact that many of them were shrunk to the maximum height cap made it evident that once the time came, they would be of a formidable size.

It was three armies, because as of yet the devils had not brought theirs. But he had no doubts that they would make it in time. Lex almost wanted to take a picture. In fact, once the idea came to him, he could not get it out of his head. Taking out his phone he took a few snaps of everything secretly. This would be a great story to tell one day.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 145: Lex's woes

Lex was sitting in his room, casually sipping a cappuccino, observing his Inn. Setting up the three bases had cost him 30,000 MP, and he deposited another 220,000 MP in setting the stage for the remainder of the games. That 250,000 MP expenditure wiped out most of the accumulation over the past few days, but fortunately, the truth was quite different.

This was a direct result of the many soldiers and beasts at the Inn. Even though Lex had notified the Jotun leaders that the zombies would likely participate, they did not bother to send back their soldiers. Those 10,000, along with the eventual 10,000 beasts that eventually arrived, made his Inn tremendously crowded. Earth had only summoned 5000 of the Foundation soldiers that would participate in the games, as they absolutely could not afford to bring so many Golden Core cultivators and have them simply wait.

Even though they had their individual bases, they did not stay there all the time. At this point, the Inn's lack of growth in size became an issue, as there was no place that remained free of guests. Even the forest surrounding the greenhouse was full of crowds by now. They mistook the formation surrounding the forest for some kind of puzzle or game, keeping in theme with the rest of points of interest at the Inn. The sloth and the devils had been unable to reach the middle, fortunately, and Ragnar had not tried, so Lex's farm was safe.

The farm, ironically, became Lex's main source of income during this period. His services were not made to handle such a load of guests and were thus always at capacity, and so limited his daily income. But his spirit food, at the cost of 10 MP a meal, could simultaneously feed many.

Just counting the soldiers, the 25,000 soldiers and their meals three times a day earned him a whopping 750,000 MP! But there were not only these few, as most of the guests who had participated during the first portion of the games also came and went at varying frequencies. He also managed to sell five more of his MI suits.

This resulted in him making a total of 810,000 MP in the last 1 day. Naturally, with his spirit food literally being his cash crop, he was especially concerned with not running low on supply. He had stored as much as he could leading up to the event, and using the Liger as fertilizer had greatly helped in boosting production, though he had no idea why that would accelerate production speed instead of affecting yield quality. Still, the area of his farm was limited and so could only produce a limited amount at a time.

While Lex could do nothing about increasing the size of the farm, at least at the moment, he spent 100,000 MP upgrading the greenhouse to the maximum amount his authority would allow. That upgrade, along with the tremendous aid provided by the Sovereign Galactic turtle, ensured that he would be able to barely meet the demand. For now.

As much as Lex enjoyed the feeling of sitting on a pile of MP, he used another 500,000 MP as the deposit for setting up gambling through the event panel. He would get the deposit back along with whatever profit he made once the event was over, so it was a sacrifice he was willing to make.

Lex let out a sigh as he rubbed his head. Managing an event with thousands of people, even with the help of the system, was a great hassle. He had decided, after this event was over, he would take a break and maybe go on a vacation himself.

He was constantly on crisis control. As it turned out, while he was enjoying the cultural show, Gerard, under the command of Mary, had been working nonstop. Although there were no upfront fights anymore, there were more than a few minor altercations between humans and beasts.

This was mainly a result of beasts still thinking of humans beneath them, and not realizing their actions or words were offensive. More than once, one of the giant beasts had almost stepped on a human, and was only stopped in time by his guards. Another series of incidents that happened with embarrassing frequency was Earthling cultivators getting high and not being able to handle it.

They were too used to the kind of substances produced on Earth, which barely had any effect on them once they cultivated. Yet many of the guests from Minima Vegus, who were mostly locals of the planet who had been accepted into one of the cities built by the empire, brought a supply that the Earthlings just could not handle. These did not end up in fights or arguments, but Lex did not like having intoxicated guests lying around. Eventually, he had to make an announcement limiting such substances to their rooms only.

There was still another group who were causing Lex problems that left feeling severe, crippling fear because more than once he had reacted similarly to how his parents used to react to him when he was young.

This was a group of over 100 students from Troy academy, the school that Alexander was technically still a student of as well. These students, naturally being connected to the crème de la crème of Earthen society, were given the opportunity to come here when enough of their parents visited the Inn and discovered how amazing it was, especially for cultivation.

The dean of the school, as a man of great influence, happened to be one of the earliest humans to be invited by the five families when they were still recruiting people for the cultural show.

Once he had seen everything for himself, and was assured by the five families that the Inn was safe, immediately coordinated with the parents he was able to meet at the Inn and organized a field trip. These students were only the first batch to arrive. More would join later.

Truth be told, Lex did not mind the kids. In fact, he thought many of them were pretty clever and fun. But when they kept inadvertently leading Gerard into racing with the other chauffeurs, kept trying to climb Little Blue to ride, kept flirting with Velma, and more than once tried to convince the girls to go skinny dip in the tiny lake, as the person responsible for everything Lex had to deal with the situations.

He needed to find permanent, nonaggressive solutions, as he could not keep following the kids repeating 'no'. The skinny dipping incident especially nearly gave him a heart attack. They were all underage! Lex did not want to go to moral jail!

Rubbing his forehead, Lex cast a look towards the Gamer's den. The bright side in all of this was that Z had seemed to find a friend. At least, he thought they were friends. There was a girl with an appearance

similar to Z's age sitting with him, watching an anime called Full Wooden Alchemist, both of them struggling to hold back their tears. He wished them both the best.

Just as Lex was watching a group of kids who had discovered Icarus' wings, just trying to imagine what kind of trouble they were about to cause, something happened to divert his attention.

The devil's army had finally arrived at the Minima Vegus camp in a predictably sinister fashion. They did not have the discipline of the human armies, nor did they have the naturally aggressive aura of predators that reeked off the beasts. But hundreds of partially rotting corpses astride various sized zombie beasts that were rotting as well made them intimidating in a way that could not be replicated. Just their presence was an assault of nauseating smells.

But that was not all. The army of zombies was not being led by a devil, as Lex had expected. Standing at the forefront was a seven feet tall massive humanoid being covered in an armor that looked more like a collection of scales of various animals than anything forged. Since the requisite to join the games were that they had to be from the planet, Lex assumed that this must be another kind of demon that the devils had assigned on the planet to lead the zombies.

He was only partially correct, as while this demon did lead the zombie armies, it was born and raised on Minima Vegus. The devils had merely discovered and used it, not sent it to the planet.

Curiosity got the best of Lex and he checked its status.

Name: Pramod

Age: 17

Sex: Male

Cultivation Details: Peak Foundation realm

Species: Nightmare/Heart Demon

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Bloodline: Human

Remarks: Do not invite him over for dinner, lest he eat you up!

Lex frowned. Pramods species was clearly indicated as a demon, yet its bloodline was stated as human. Could humans turn into demons? Or was this one of those instances where two species procreated and gave birth to a being with a unique bloodline?

The Innkeeper

Chapter 146: Yandere zombie

The soldiers of the Empire were naturally the first to notice the newly arrived zombie army after Lex. A hush fell upon the entire camp as they angrily eyed the undead horde, wishing that they could attack. As much as the large forces of the universe treated the demons as natural resources to benefit their cultivation, the lower echelons of all civilizations detested them with a burning passion. Many, if not all, of the soldiers present in the camp had suffered the loss of a close friend or relative at the hands of demons. Of course, this also had to do with the fact that, as soldiers, they were more likely to encounter demons than random people.

But fortunately, their discipline held, and no one made a move. They had already been informed that there was to be no fighting at the Inn. Of course, if the zombies made the first move... But unfortunately, despite their desire to attack, Pramod had a firm hold over them. The demon moved his head, as if looking at the soldiers surrounding him, but there were no eye holes in his scaly armor. Still, after glancing at everyone, he followed his personal hologram as it led him to their part of the camp.

Yet even as he led his army away, unbothered by anyone or anything, another army appeared to take its place. These zombies did not appear to be rotting, and some of them could even be said to look somewhat clean.

These zombies, all in the Golden core realm, had various shapes and figures. Though it was still evident that their form used to be basically humanoid, all sorts of extra limbs grew out of them now. Some of them had scales, some of them had wings, some of them had long black nails and hair long enough to be Rapunzels. Besides looking more disgusting and dangerous, they also looked more intelligent.

These zombies stood in a somewhat casual formation and carefully observed their surroundings. They growled at the humans nearby, but despite their instincts, they stopped themselves from attacking without the need for someone to command them. Yet, even though they did not need to be commanded, a leader was still assigned. But unlike Pramod, the leader this time was a zombie.

A four feet tall, fairly ordinary looking girl stood at the forefront of the army, focusing intently on a small mirror in her hand. Ignoring the various onlookers, she slowly and carefully applied foundation to her face, ensuring that, despite her undead state, no one would be able to tell. In fact, if it weren't for the ridiculously strong demonic aura she was emitting, many would have actually assumed she was a human.

Lex checked her status as well.

Name: Harriot Shelby Ruby Selma Jane

Age: 122

Sex: Female

Cultivation Details: Golden Core

Species: Zombie

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Condition: The patient is suffering from the side effects from a failed artificial animation. The Midnight Inn currently does not have the means to cure the patient.

Remarks: Do not let her fragmented mind, undead body, and devious intent fool you. This is a true yandere in the flesh.

Lex was confused by the unusually long list of first names that made up this zombie's name, and the rest of her status did not make much sense to him, either. Was she, as a zombie, sick? Did zombies need medical attention? Would he one day have a zombie as a guest, who would then try to use the Recovery room?

While Lex was pondering, Harriet seemed to finish up her last-minute makeup. She looked at the crowd with a bright smile and then frolicked away. If one did not see the army of zombies following behind her, they really would believe that this was a little girl having fun.

By now, the rest of the Inn also became aware of the arrival of the zombies. The guests from Earth stood in line at a distance and watched with awe as the hordes disappeared into their own tents. No one had expected such well behaved zombies, and some of them were even a little disappointed at the anticlimactic arrival.

Even Alexander, who was having a serious discussion with his grandfather, was informed of the commotion and came out to observe them. His personal plans did not go over well with the rest of the families, and the fact that he was unwilling to relinquish control of the soldiers following him was a point of contention amongst the humans. Ultimately, they had reached a compromise, but while Alexander was uncaring, the rest of the families were furious at the compromise. Brandon was too supportive of his grandson.

The grandfather and grandson duo stood and observed in silence. While Brandon's thoughts were unknown, Alexander's arm slowly started to tremble as he watched the undead army. His eyes wandered over his future enemies, and the more zombies he saw, the tighter his hand clenched into a fist.

As it happened, Alexander caught sight of Pramod just as the demon was about to enter its tent. The teenager could not determine the other's cultivation, but his intimidating visage attracted the boy's attention. Pramod, as if sensing a gaze upon himself, stopped and turned directly to Alexander, who stood in the distance. The two stared at each other, as if inspecting prey. Alexander could not stop himself from revealing a smile before his hand suddenly stopped trembling. He turned to leave, suddenly becoming indifferent to whatever was happening. He needed to hone his mood before the games began - his excitement was affecting his control.

There were only two hours left before the games began and a lot of people could feel the tension in the air. The soldiers did not get nervous, but as the clock came close and closer to the moment of truth, their murderous aura started to leak.

Movement across the Inn settled down, and slowly everyone returned to their rooms. Even the children from the academy were summoned by their teachers and forced to enter their respective rooms. An artificial silence took hold of the Inn.

An hour before the event began, the Innkeeper appeared at the coliseum. A display of fireworks over the coliseum attracted everyone's attention, letting them know it was time for another announcement. The leaders of various factions made their way to their seats and awaited any news their host had to give.

As if unaware of the mood that had gripped his guests, the Innkeeper let out his usual smile and greeted everyone.

"Welcome, one and all. The time for the next portion has nearly begun, so I thought I would kick things off and start the party."

Lex had been so busy handling the various affairs of the Inn that he did not even realize that he was no longer feeling nervous. He was dealing with things as they came and was so preoccupied with making sure everything went smoothly, he appeared before the largest crowd the Inn had even held without a second thought.

"There are just a few things everyone needs to know before we begin. Firstly, as with the previous performances, you will be able to view the games from anywhere in the Inn. You can choose to focus on any person or army, and your screens will show them. You can also stay in the coliseum and watch as it shows the most heated parts of the games.

"Each game will last 12 hours at most. If the node is not destroyed within that time frame, the game will be considered a loss and no one will receive any points for the destruction of the node though you'll still be able to receive total points for number of participants survived, and individual points per participant for number of zombies killed."

A giant screen appeared above the Innkeeper with a few headings: zombies killed, achievements and total points.

"But where's the excitement of watching such a game if you don't feel involved? Before the match begins, you can bet on your favorite armies and contenders. Which person will have the highest points? Which planet will take the lead? Who will have the highest kills? Will your favorite contender survive the round? Will the node be destroyed, or will the zombies be able to defend it? Show how much confidence you have in those you support with your bets!"

The Innkeeper flashed everyone a grin. All bets could only be placed before each game began, and Lex, aware of the deep background of the Jotun Empire and the devils, had placed an upper cap on each bet. His deposit was only so much, he could not risk it. But that was just a precaution. It was unlikely that anyone would place a single bet with such high stakes.

"When the game begins, each planet's armies will be teleported to a random place and will begin from there. As for what they can expect once they arrive at their location... Well, I can't give everything away now, can I?"

Unlike previous times where the Innkeeper would disappear after each announcement, he walked offstage and took a seat right in front to watch the games. Even he was feeling excited.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 147: And so it begins

All eyes were on the massive numbers above the coliseum as they counted down from 15. The guests, the soldiers, the beasts and the various agents, waiting to report back to their planets as soon as the event began, almost felt as if their heart beats synchronized with the countdown.

Loretta and the mysterious devil watched while sipping some green liquid. As casual as their demeanor seemed at first glance, the slightest increase in pressure as she clenched her teeth said otherwise. The sloth that had practically wrecked havoc back on Nibiru looking for eligible beasts, and for the first time made its presence known on the planet, sat extremely comfortably. It had forgotten that it still could not control its strength, and its very sight could destroy mountains back on Nibiru. It would go back and fix things later. Anthony was standing in his room surrounded by various recording and analysis equipment. He planned on recording each game for analysis and review later.

Lex was also patiently waiting, though he was no longer sitting alone. A couple of the guests he hadn't had the opportunity to meet before came and introduced themselves. To his left sat Akihiko Tanaka, a Japanese man in his fifties. Oddly, despite his apparent vast influence, he had decided not to cultivate. To his right sat a young man named Remy Lavern. He was an interesting person. He directly came up to Lex and informed him he wanted to use the Inn to host a meeting for a secret society and was

wondering what kind of benefits Lex could provide, which as could be expected triggered a quest. Lex told him to come and ask him once the Midnight Games were over - he didn't want to focus on two long quests at the same time.

As the seconds passed and the numbers got lower and lower, the anticipation that filled the air was practically palpable. Alexander, adorned in a thin silver armor that only covered his chest, was completely still. His excitement, his anticipation, his anxiety and everything else that he was feeling were buried deep. A mistake he had made when he met RussianPrincess77 was overconfidence, and Alexander never repeated a mistake twice. Even though he was adamant about doing things his own way, he was treating this extremely seriously. So while everyone was looking in the air as the countdown went from 3, to 2, to 1, Alexander only looked forward and tightened his grip on the sword in his right hand and the briefcase in his left hand.

The next second a bright light flashed across the Inn, momentarily blinding even the strongest cultivator. All the Foundation level armies disappeared. The screens in the air turned on and a wild grassland appeared in view. The plains were vast with nothing but random shrubbery, trees, and tall grass.

The devil besides Loretta frowned as he recognized the area, but this was only the beginning. A massive horde consisting of tens of thousands of zombies of all shapes and sizes suddenly appeared right in the center. About 5 miles away from the zombies in three different directions, three different armies appeared.

The beasts and Earthling still had a moment to adjust, but for the soldiers of the Empire, the battle began immediately!

Right as the event was about to begin, Ragnar had the entire planet under supervision, not only by the several Juggernaut class vessels that surrounded it, but with his own spiritual sense as well. He even had special spatial fluctuation detection devices installed planet wide so that he would know immediately when the various armies arrived on the planet.

But things did not play out according to the simplest and easiest prediction of teleporting the three armies onto the planet, which in a way is exactly what Ragnar expected. The spatial fluctuation devices started beeping, but before anyone had any time to investigate their results, Ragnar physically felt a change in the fabric of space around the planet.

He opened scans of the planet from the Juggernauts view and ten opaque domes became visible on various parts of the planet. He located the closest one and immediately dashed towards it to investigate. Completely ignoring the hordes of zombies that surrounded the dome, Ragnar approached it and tested it out using a device because he was doubtful of his suspicions. But the result corroborated what he thought.

The area within the dome had somehow been transformed into a pocket realm, without actually cutting off the space from the planet itself. How this was possible, Ragnar did not know, nor could he understand. What he was able to determine, though, was that, because the space was not cut off, the pocket dimension shared the same atmosphere and ecosystem as the planet instead of developing one itself. This also allowed the nodes to continue to function, as if they had been teleported away or moved into a pocket dimension cut off from the formation they were supposed to be running the formation would fail.

But that was not all. All zombies above the Golden core realm within the dome were being ejected outside. He suspected that likewise, all zombies above the Foundation realm were being ejected from whichever dome was hosting the current game.

Just as he was about to return, he noticed a particularly strong demon ejected from the dome. A demon of this level was not supposed to be on this planet - clearly it had been hiding near the node, protecting it, but how could it escape the sight of the Innkeeper? Ragnar was now thoroughly convinced that the Innkeeper was many levels above himself.

The General and the demon exchanged looks, but did not engage. Ragnar was still the stronger one, but a fight of their level would activate the formation surrounding this planet. He had no choice but to let the demon leave.

Ragnar returned to his command room and gave the order for an all out attack. While the games handled the destruction of the nodes, he would handle the rest of the planet.

The moment the game began, various beasts and humans disappeared from the Inn. One particular beast reappeared in a jungle, face to face with a massive snake.

"The games have begun," the beast said, "and the sloth is preoccupied. It will not return to Nibiru for at least 12 hours while the games take place. I did not spot Igishima in the coliseum, but it is likely in its room. Considering a lack of response from Red Nation, I think it's still unaware of the situation. It likely won't return before the games end."

"You've done well," the snake replied, its voice much happier than its expression portrayed. "Pass down my orders, begin a full assault! We must take all of its territory before it returns. I'll have a nice surprise waiting for it when it comes back home."

"Yes sir," the beast replied, and immediately left.

On Earth, a virtual meeting was once again taking place in the bunker under the Sahara. But no one was speaking, they were all waiting silently. Eventually, a person appeared in the room as if teleporting from somewhere.

"The games have begun, they will be occupied. But they'll likely return the moment they get news that something is happening, are you sure you want to do this? Why not wait till the Golden core soldiers are committed instead of the Foundation ones?"

"Cowardice will not ignite the flames of revolution," said a feminine voice. "We were preparing to take on their full strength anyway, the disappearance of a few thousand Foundation realm experts is already a great boon. Not to mention, the longer we wait, the longer there is a chance for a mistake. Since the preparations have been made, we will begin now. Pass down the orders. Everyone get into your marked positions and prepare the weapons. In two hours exactly, we'll strike all targets at the same time. Even if the family heads return, the moment we start, it'll be too late for them to do anything."

Without replying, the various holograms started disappearing. In two hours, the destiny of Earth would change.

On the battlefield, Alexander quickly scanned the terrain for potential threats the moment he appeared. Seeing no immediate danger, he sent out a few scouts before kneeling to start the device that looked like a briefcase in his left hand.

It took him a few minutes, which was enough time for his soldiers to secure the surrounding area. Fortunately, there were no enemies nearby, so they would be uninterrupted in the short term. The rest of the human army separated from them, clearly acting under a different commander. Alexander did not mind.

When the device was ready, he took a few steps back and watched as a dozen mini-satellites were launched into the air. When they reached high enough and their rocket trails ended, the satellites activated their cloaking mechanism, hiding them from plain sight. They could still be detected using spiritual sense, they weren't completely covert, but this was good enough. In only a few minutes, Alexander obtained a live projection of the entire terrain. Identifying the location where the Empire's soldiers were clashing with the zombies that arrived with them, Alexander passed out orders and began moving.

Even if he wanted to test himself, he would do it in the smartest and most efficient way.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 148: Cara Deathsworn

The sound of screaming, fighting, explosions and the clashing of metal resounded as Crawford-41 directed his troops. The moment they were teleported, exactly 100 zombies adorning their zombified beasts each assaulted them. Their suicide attack was vicious and extremely lethal. These zombies had some kind of ability that affected a large area which directly immobilized the side of the Jotun forces facing them.

Acidic mucus rained down upon them while sharp bone splinters crashed against their defenses, threatening to split them apart. The ground was split asunder as bloody tentacles erupted from beneath, trying to cut through anything in its path. The roars of over a hundred angry zombie beasts thundered across the army, threatening to tear their ear drums. With claws sharp enough to tear through metal, they slashed at the defending soldiers.

It was as if armageddon was raining down upon the humans. An overwhelming evil was crashing against a small army, one that had gripped the entire universe with fear and hate. Yet even as fire and fury rained upon the humans, like a scene depicting the end times in many religions, the humans stood firm.

Against steel and bone, against bloody maws and spiked claws, against the full strength of this suicide squad, not a single soldier fell.

Shoulder to shoulder, the front line dug in and stood their ground, protecting their brothers and sisters behind them. Death could not scare them and a maelstrom of attacks could not make them stumble. Wielding shields that grew into massive, eight feet tall and three feet wide versions of themselves, these soldiers were the pride of an Empire. Known only as the Bulwark team, they were the dedicated protectors of each Jotun army.

Finally, the zombies reached the soldiers and crashed against the makeshift wall of shields. The beasts rammed their bodies as the zombies used their unusual limbs and claws to cut through the barricade. The very ground shook from the force of the collision, and even the viewers back at the Inn trembled unconsciously as they saw the sight, but true to their prestige, the Bulwark team's defense remained unpenetrated.

From the time the game had started, not even a minute had passed. Yet the moment the zombies crashed against the shields, their momentum was interrupted. This was the opportunity that the Jotun soldiers had been waiting for.

"Squads three and five, circle around and attack from behind. Bulwark team, hold them down!" Crawford-41 commanded. In a calm yet quick way, the soldiers started moving, acting according to their orders.

The purpose of this suicide squad of zombies was to hold the soldiers in place as the rest of the zombies retreated to meet with their main force. Tier 3 zombies, equivalent to Foundation cultivators, started to attain intelligence, but it was still in a very primitive form. They could understand their instinctual desires to feed, and to a degree plan how to get what they wanted, but the concept of teamwork or long-term planning escaped them. The Jotun forces did not know how big the main force of zombies would be, but under the command of a proper leader such as Pramod, their lethality would increase exponentially.

Pramod wanted to get to the main force while maintaining his initial number of zombies, while the Jotun soldiers wanted to stop him, no matter what. While the soldiers fought, Pramod and his mounted units had already gained a huge lead. Soon, a chase would begin that would determine how the rest of the games went.

As strong as the army was, dealing with suicidal enemies was not easy. It took an entire thirty minutes before the zombies were dealt with - with no Jotun casualties or injuries, of course.

Once the suicide zombies had been eliminated, Crawford-41 checked on his soldiers as well as the fallen corpses. After running a quick scan, they realized that these zombies had been poisoned with a deadly, fast acting virus. Had even a single soldier been injured, within minutes he would have died, and then subsequently turned into a zombie. It was unknown if only the 2500 zombies were poisoned, or if all of them were. Depending on the answer, this could be even more dangerous. Furthermore, none of the zombies dropped cores. This was because the devils had attached a collection formation to each node to automatically collect all zombie cores within a certain area. Since they knew a battle was upcoming, there was no reason to leave such a boon to their enemies.

"According to preliminary scans, the chances of this battlefield being sector 776 are incredibly high," a technician informed Crawford-41. "As we move, I'll continue to scan the terrain, which should confirm our location. Once the location has been determined, we can crossmatch our location with a scan of the planet to get a detailed map of the area."

"Good. Once the location has been determined, forward the map to me. Everyone, assume pursuit formation and immediately begin chasing after target 1, but keep an eye out for ambushes. They will not let us catch up easily, but we cannot let them meet up with their main force!"

Needing no further instructions, the soldiers reorganized themselves to facilitate a chase and immediately began. As expected, Pramod had left behind various traps and ambushes to slow them down. The good news was the Jotun soldiers suffered no casualties. The bad news was that Pramod and his army, atop their mounts, were gaining the lead.

While Crawford-41 and his soldiers gave chase, and Alexander and his soldiers made a beeline to cut Pramod off, the rest of the human soldiers had set up a temporary camp and started scouting the area using drones. Their first objective was locating the enemies and understanding the terrain before making a plan of action. It was not as simple as simply fighting the zombies as the Innkeeper had said unexpected things may happen during the games. Since their objective was to get as many points as possible to prove their worth, they had to act accordingly.

Unlike the humans, who all moved with clear purpose, the beasts divided themselves into three different groups, each with their own plans. The largest group was formed of wolves who were originally from Blood Fangs territory. They wasted no time whatsoever and ran off on their own. They were searching for their prey, and would decide what to do once they found them. The second largest group was one made of elephants.

The elephants all boasted a natural advantage in brute strength and defense. They had been forced by the sloth to participate, and behaved begrudgingly. They knew that if they did nothing, there would be hell to pay once the game was over, yet at the same time, they did not want to be too proactive. The sloth might have been a little more lenient had any of the elephants inherited the Fiery Mammoth bloodline, but none of them had. It was not so far as to say that the elephants were disposable, but forcing them to participate in the games, at least, would not get the sloth in trouble.

The third and smallest group was a random collection of strong beasts. Some of them came willingly for the promised rewards by their territory leaders, some of them had been threatened, all of them were uninformed about what they should be doing. Reaching an unspoken consensus, they decided to simply follow the elephants from a distance.

Only thirty minutes had passed and another eleven and a half hours remained, yet even while most were still planning their moves, the crowd at the Inn was going wild!

Everyone was expecting a clash right at the start due to the presence of the zombies, but the ferocity of the fight had taken them by surprise. The humans hooted and chanted for the valiant soldiers, and the five Nascants looked on with the utmost seriousness at the soldiers that surpassed anything they could have imagined. Not a single soldier had died so far, despite the onslaught! It let them know firmly what their place in the universe was.

Lex was especially amazed, this being the first time he'd properly seen cultivators fight. It was a shame that he had to maintain his distant image as the Innkeeper, otherwise he would be chanting with the crowds as well.

Even he did not know what surprises were in store for the participants, so he, too, was watching on in suspense.

Besides the various screens showing what was happening to the participants, another screen depicting the points received a lot of attention. The Jotun Empire had 200 points for killing 100 zombies and 100 of their mounts, but the distribution for the individuals was what attracted the most attention. While most of the names on the list so far had one or two kills to their name, a single name stood out: Cara Deathsworn - V2001.

Cara Deathsworn was her name and V2001 was her registration number. The V let people know that she was from Vegus Minima. The reason why her name attracted so much attention was because of the number of points she had accumulated: 29. While each of the soldiers had one or two kills, she had 29. A lot of the guests found themselves turning their screens to her and watching replays of her fight.

Maybe a lot of them were expecting to see some beautiful warrior, cutting through the zombies like a valiant hero. Unfortunately, they could not see her face under her helmet, and armor was not designed with visual appeal as a priority, so it did not look too flattering. What they were able to catch was a moment when her armor was damaged around her arm. Before the armor stretched itself to cover the damaged area, the guests were able to catch a glimpse of rock-hard, extremely lean muscles. It woke many of the viewers up to the truth that Deathsworn was not a fairy warrior out of an anime. She was a soldier, and she was built like a killer. For some reason, that only increased her number of fans.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 149: Pride of the weeb community

A few minutes into the chase, the crowd started diverting their attention to the other participants. At first, it seemed that the others were just doing their own form of recon, until someone noticed that Alexander and his army were moving too quickly in a straight line for it to be reconnaissance. Unlike the actual participants, the guests had access to a map which showed the location for each of the participants. When someone finally realized that Alexander was moving directly to intercept Pramod, excitement filled them and they spread the word.

Alexander was coming from Pramod's left, and based on the distance would intercept them only 1 and a half miles away from the main zombie horde. The fact that the previously mentioned horde was also slowly moving outwards made the point where the two would clash uncomfortably close, but only for the participants. For the guests, the possibility of a larger clash only made it more thrilling.

One would think that Alexander's family would be worried for him at this point, as the other Nascants slightly were - though their reasons were different. No, the Morrisons could be seen sitting together, casually chatting amongst themselves. Brandon would sometimes whisper something in his wife's ear that would make her chuckle, while Ragnar and Hillary - Alexander's mother - seemed to be discussing the details of the other armies.

A few moments of peace filled the time, but instead of boring the guests, it only served to build the anticipation. Alexander's clash would be extremely dangerous, especially considering that he was outnumbered almost two to one.

He was aware of this fact, as his satellites gave him the most detailed information amongst the participants. He knew he only needed to hold them long enough for the Jotun soldiers to catch up. He was not doing this because of some agreement with the Empire, or because his family told him. This was simply the best course of action for him. Numerically, this was the smallest target and also one with the greatest return in terms of weakening his enemy.

The wait was not long - in only a few minutes, the two armies came within sight of one another. If he did not move into position to block them, Alexander would have employed a long range attack, but that would only slow down their speed. So at this moment, he urged his troops to move even faster while the enemy had not noticed them.

This was a drawback of having zombies as subordinates. They could not warn Pramod of the approaching army, even if they spotted it due to their lacking intelligence. But they were fighting in a plain - the view was largely uninterrupted. Pramod finally noticed the army when they were almost directly in their path, and without hesitation, passed out a command. The army of zombies split in two, one continuing to move in a straight line and another turning right and moving that way.

Alexander had no way of knowing which of the groups Pramod was in, as his satellite was not capable of providing such detailed information, not that he could have done much even if he knew. In a few moments, Alexander got into position to block the incoming horde.

"Lay down suppressive fire!" Alexander commanded into a mic, prompting a barrage of artillery fire. But even as bullets tore through the air, they were unable to deter the oncoming horde. The zombies launched their own counterattack as they neared, ready to directly tear into Alexander's army.

Yet the spirit tech used by the Morrison family, while unable to match the quality of the Empire, was extremely imaginative. Some of the soldiers were wearing an unusual backpack out of which hundreds of mini-drones kept flying out. Flying in front of Alexander, they seemed to form some kind of formation. They remained unreactive as friendly fire passed them by, but whenever an enemy attack neared, an electric field was formed between the drones that zapped the attack.

Unfortunately, while the field served to destroy some of the attacks, some of them were only weakened. As the soldiers suffered the attacks, the stark difference between their armor and gear compared to the Jotuns once again became evident. Although there were no casualties so far, many soldiers were already injured in the first volley.

But since the two forces were different in many ways, there was no need for them to use the same tactics. Alexander was not planning on taking on a direct collision of a charging force. He was planning on tearing them apart!

"Penetration tactic 1," Alexander calmly commanded, as if he was not under attack. Behind him, his 6 blades became airborne.

The defining difference in combat between Foundation realm cultivators and those below that realm were the spiritual techniques that one could use. They became more versatile, and a wider array of options were available to you. While most techniques served a single purpose and were driven by the energy a single person could provide, such techniques were less common in war.

One hundred of the soldiers behind Alexander wielded unusually heavy weapons that had the shape of a rocket launcher. The fact that, despite their cultivation, the soldiers were struggling to hold it demonstrated their weight.

But while there were only 100 soldiers with such weapons, a thin blue line was formed in the air, connecting the weapons to the rest of the surrounding soldiers. They were all using an energy buildup technique. Such a spiritual technique was usually the buildup for a larger attack, but this took things one step further. In the presence of another person using the same technique, a blue line made of spiritual energy connected them, multiplying the speed at which they gathered energy. In the presence of 1000 people using the same technique, a web was formed and the energy buildup was so quick and massive it threatened to blow up the very people using the technique.

Then, via the blue lines, the energy was transferred to the weapons, which had already been aimed. It barely took a few seconds for all of this to happen, and just as the zombie horde was about to crash into the soldiers, the weapons fired!

100 blue balls of flames launched with the ferocity of a bolt of lightning and roared like a continuous clap of thunder. Completely eviscerating the zombies in their path, the blue flames traveled fifty feet before destabilizing and exploding. The force of the attack launched the zombies in the air, the heat of the flames burning those in its path to a crisp, the shockwave of the attack causing them to fall over.

Yet this was not meant to be Alexander's main attack. This only broke the momentum of the charging army. Sword in hand, blade hovering behind his back, Alexander was the first to charge into the zombie horde, followed closely by his soldiers.

Originally, Alexander would have liked a long range battle where he could use his spirit tech to destroy the zombies before they even got close. But since they were already too close to the horde by the time they blocked their path, he would not shy from doing things up close and personal.

Considering his recent entry into the Foundation realm, Alexander should have been at a disadvantage. But someone forgot to tell that to his blades that were ripping through enemies like paper. He could not act with the flexibility and precision he liked, and so often only cut off limbs instead of beheading zombies, allowing them to survive. But his soldiers would take care of the weakened zombies, he only needed to guide them and lead them on the path to victory.

His blades carried a red hue, a visual effect of the spiritual technique he was using: Unending Solder. Its effect was simple yet powerful, it gave his blades a massive increase in cutting power. A zombie that had somehow turned invisible suddenly latched itself onto Alexander with octopus like tentacles and bit at his throat. Yet before the zombie could succeed, a blast of spiritual energy emerged from Alexander's body and ripped the tentacles away and threw the zombie far away. This was the effect of a defensive body technique Marlo had gifted him when he entered the Foundation realm: Magnetic pulse.

Unfortunately, Alexander's grandfather got his hands on the technique and changed it just a bit before Alexander learned it. As a result, Alexander's hair was not standing up straight as his body was surrounded by a visible, golden aura - looking very much like a certain anime character.

The 100 students from Troy academy who were watching their senior fight were losing their minds as they screamed and shouted. This was the pride of their academy. This was the pride of Earth. And this was the pride of the weeb community.

Alexander himself did not notice his peculiarity and continued to ruthlessly cut down his enemies, which only kindled the passion in his fans' hearts. Even some of the Jotun soldiers who were watching the fight were attracted to the literal golden child of Earth.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 150: Anthony's surprise

The crowd was heated up. The hooting and the chanting were the least of it. Whether it was the demons, the Earthlings of the Empire, they were all analyzing each and every moment, recording all the data they could for their own reasons. Earth's technology was subpar, as expected, but their application of it was interesting. The most interesting, though, was the way the soldiers fought.

Charging behind Alexander, they cut through the zombie ranks like grass. Once surrounded, they broke off into pairs, each wielding a sword and a shield. Each pair attacked and defended when needed, making up for their partner's weaknesses. It went beyond simple partnership - that was not something unseen in the universe.

The pairs used spiritual techniques one at a time, alternating between them, but it was almost as if each technique strengthened the subsequent one. It was as if the new technique was feeding off the remaining spiritual residue of the previous one, somehow increasing its own strength. But the accumulation had a flexibility to it that seemed almost impossible. The duo did not need to attack consecutively to gather energy - even if they used a defensive technique, it fit perfectly into the cycle of gathering momentum. It almost seemed as if the soldiers had an entire repertoire of techniques that fed off each other.

Finally, when the accumulated strength reached the limit of what the soldiers could maintain, they slashed their swords in the air together, releasing a blade of spiritual energy that traveled through the zombie horde, cutting them in half. As if that wasn't impressive enough already, the spiritual blades somehow didn't injure the other Earthlings at all.

At this point, even Anthony admitted that he had severely underestimated these specific humans. Their technology was backwards and so was their cultivation. Many of them were getting injured as they fought - a much shakier performance than the soldiers of the empire. Instead of fighting like one large, cohesive army, they were fighting in smaller, weaker units. Yet, despite all that, they were killing the zombies faster than the empire had. They employed a way of fighting Anthony had never seen before.

Recording them as they fought, Anthony was sure that when the experts of the Empire saw this footage, they'd be able to identify the underlying logic and create even better techniques. For now though, Earth had the lead in this new way of fighting.

While the soldiers fought in pairs, the golden boy of Earth - a title that he had officially earned now - Alexander fought on his own. Two of his blades were spinning like the blades of a blender at imperceptible speeds, mincing any zombies that tried to attack him from the back. The other four blades attacked the zombies at his sides, as if they had eyes of their own. In front of him, Alexander used his own sword to cut a path - though occasionally he would be overcome by barbaric tendencies and smash the zombies in his path with his free hand.

To the viewers, it seemed like an unending symphony. To them, he was dancing flawlessly, finding the perfect way to move in a situation where the slightest mistake would cost him his life. It was the epitome of elegance.

To Alexander, it was chaos. It was heat. It was loud. And it. Was. Bloody.

This was not the first time he had led soldiers on a mission, but it was the first time he was in a war. His mind was working in overdrive, not only to anticipate how the zombies would attack him and what he needed to do to retaliate, but also keeping track of his soldiers. He needed to give orders if their performance deviated, or if they were doing better or worse than expected. Yet, after a certain point, he could no longer keep track of the soldiers. As much as he didn't want to, he ended up making the decision that the best thing he could do in this situation was kill as many zombies as possible instead of keeping track of the army.

So, he went from doing his best to going beyond his limits. He was already using spiritual and body techniques at the same time, a feat that marked him on a level beyond genius. Now it was time to do even more.

His speed and strength suddenly increased, and the golden aura around him intensified. He went from reacting to the zombies' attacks to cutting them down before they could even make a move. With his blades in the air and his sword in his hand, Alexander attacked in each direction, becoming a cyclone of death and devastation.

Five minutes into the battle, the chasing soldiers finally caught up. As surprised as he was to see the situation, Crawford-41 did not waste any time in giving his orders. Like a charging cavalry, the soldiers crashed into the zombies that had their backs turned. Over a hundred zombies died immediately, and the remaining ones were only just beginning to realize that they were being attacked on both sides.

Alexander immediately felt the change, and dove even deeper into the horde, moving away from the relative safety of his soldiers. His efficiency increased, and now that he no longer felt overwhelmed, Alexander finally began to feel exhilaration. This is what he was searching for - to prove himself through fire and steel and war.

Amongst the bloody and ugly horde, Alexander suddenly caught sight of a single soldier in a familiar armor. It was the armor of the Jotun empire. Quickly, he realized that the empire had joined and passed new orders into his mic.

"Retreat and initiate tear down tactic 2."

With reinforcements grabbing the zombies' attention, he could take more effective and less dangerous methods of attack.

The battle was evolving quickly and before even realizing it, Alexander found himself fighting closely with that soldier. It was then that he realized, despite not having as many weapons as him, this soldier's killing efficiency was close to his.

As the soldier's two-handed sword cleaved down to split a zombie in half, one of Alexander's blades collided with it just a little, causing the blade to deviate. Instead of slicing the zombie in half, it only cut off the zombies' various tentacles, giving Alexander's blade just enough time to cut its head off.

The soldier looked at Alexander for a split second with a frown under her helmet, but didn't waste any time on him. She continued her attack, but quickly noticed that every time she was about to go for a kill, one of the flying blades just 'happened' to deviate her sword just a bit.

"What the hell are you doing?" she finally roared at the teenager, unable to keep her anger suppressed.

"Winning," was his one-word reply. He did not slow down his assault, nor did he turn to look at her. In fact, his killing prowess increased.

Cara ground her teeth as she stared at him like she wanted to slice him in half. She finally understood what was happening: he was preventing her from getting kills and stealing her points. Truth be told, she did not care for the points at all. But the more Alexander stopped her from getting them, the more she wanted them.

Tightening her grip on her sword, the lone soldier went on an absolute rampage. At this point, it seemed more like a competition between the two than an actual battle.

But the competition ended quickly. With the zombies diverting their attention to the new soldiers, the Morrison troops were able to retreat and got enough time to assemble and ready one of the heavy weapons they had brought.

"Tear down tactic 2 ready," Alexander heard a voice say in his ear.

"Take cover," was all Alexander said to the soldier, before leaping into the air to escape. Caught unprepared by the sudden action, Cara did not know whether to listen to the golden bastards' instructions.

That's when she heard the roaring, and leaped for cover.

Back at the Inn all the guests were once again filled with excitement as they saw all the Morrison troops once again connected to one another with blue spirit lines. But this time, instead of feeding the energy to 100 soldiers, it was fed to just one. The soldier, whose legs were bolted to the ground using tethers and plates dug into the dirt, pulled the trigger.

As the barrels started spinning it seemed for a moment like any other ordinary gun. That illusion was quickly dispersed the moment it started firing. Red spirit bullets started shooting out of the gun so fast, instead of a stream of bullets it seemed like the soldier was shooting a laser. At a speed of a little over 150 bullets a second, this gun, at the cost of a massive amount of spirit energy, completely eviscerated everything in its path.

The soldier was able to fire for almost two minutes before the strain of so much spirit energy coursing through his body made him collapse, but that was enough. Only a few zombies were left anyway.

Some of the soldiers that followed Alexander had died, many of them were injured and almost all of them were exhausted. Compared to the near peak state of the Jotun forces, their performance seemed pathetic. But that was only if you could not see the points board hanging in the air in the coliseum, which showed just how many zombies the army had killed in a little under 20 minutes.