

Innkeeper 151

The Innkeeper

Chapter 151: Developments

Alexander and his troops regrouped while the Jotuns finished the zombies off. Other than Alexander, who was simply tired, all his troops looked beaten and battered. This was not to say that they were weak or inexperienced. Their equipment just didn't match up to the standard of the Jotuns, and their techniques, while ingenious, did not have the same spirit energy efficiency.

But despite all that, Alexander was quite satisfied. This had been a quick skirmish after a long chase, which gave them little to no time to prepare. When they attacked the main zombie horde, they would have better preparations. The only regret that Alexander had, other than his few dead soldiers, was that they were not able to attack Pramod. He clearly had escaped with the other group of zombies. By now, he had already joined the main horde.

Once the last of the zombies were finally killed, Alexander ordered his soldiers to retrieve the bodies for their soldiers. They needed to understand how they died, in case it was something preventable. In the meantime, Alexander walked towards Crawford-41.

Over the past day, everyone had already gained some idea of who the commanders of each army was, which is why Alexander knew exactly who he needed to talk with.

On the other side, Crawford-41 looked at Alexander with a mix of amusement and respect. Though there were areas in which they were lacking, this was probably one of the best performances he had seen from someone belonging to a Sky level civilization (a civilization unable to leave their star system). Not to mention, their killing efficiency was very high and their losses, considering their limited resources, were very few. That was where his respect came from. His amusement originated when he heard a report saying that Alexander actually tried to compete with Cara. Alexander could not be blamed for not knowing about the Deathsworn family, he did not have the relevant exposure. Still, considering the crazy and suicidal antics of the Deathsworn, it was rare to see someone even be in a situation dangerous enough to compete with them, let alone have the frame of mind necessary to compete rather than survive.

"Crawford," Alexander acknowledged the young man, approaching him. They were actually similar in age, with Crawford-41 being in his late 20s. One would think that with the background of the universe, cultivators would have already surpassed the Foundation realm by their late 20s, but that was not so. Unlike on Earth, where it was an amazing feat for Alexander to break into Foundation in 2 years, it was

not considered impossible for the rest of the universe. They just simply didn't, despite being able to, because there was no real advantage to rushing their cultivation. It was a difference in perspective brought about by a difference in environment.

"If you're going to shorten my name, I prefer you call me 41," the man replied. "Did you encounter the armored demon?"

"I tried to intercept him, but they broke off. He's met up with the main horde by now."

Crawford-41 frowned. They had already failed one objective, which was not a good start. Then he looked towards the teenager. His previous golden aura had disappeared, and he could see a bit of fatigue in his eyes. They were technically competitors for the prize, but the main objective was still to destroy the nodes and this teenager had already proved useful.

With all of that in mind, Crawford-41 said, "You should check up on your soldiers. These zombies have all been laced with a special poison that makes even the slightest of scratches lethal."

Alexander grimaced and immediately passed on the news. All his soldiers who had been wounded were mostly suffering from blunt force trauma. The ones who had suffered scratches or bite were the ones that were dead.

He would have to change some of his plans, but that was for later. Currently, he came to Crawford-41 for only one reason.

"I don't know if you know this already or not, but the main zombie horde is massive. We are gravely outnumbered. I'm not sure of the exact numbers, but they range anywhere from thirty to forty thousand zombies. This is not a fight we can engage in alone, especially now that there is a demon capable of planning in charge of them."

Crawford-41 was not aware of this, but he only slightly frowned before his expression returned to normal.

"This is crucial information. We need to communicate with the other humans and beasts and plan an attack, but we can't waste too much time either."

"I have the means to communicate with the other Earthlings," Alexander said. "We just need to contact the beasts and hope they listen."

The two immediately started planning. Even though they were competitors, without each other's help, neither of them would succeed. Like this, another hour passed by before they were ready to lay siege to the main force. Alexander's army used this time to rest and recover their spent spirit energy. All was progressing smoothly, or smooth enough.

But as the two-hour mark approached and all the armies readied positioned themselves for the attack, something similar was happening on Earth.

Zeus Leventis, a descendant of the Leventis family from New Las Vegas on the moon, stood nervously in the space carrier. Hovering silently over a mining facility on the dark side of the moon, the space carrier was one of many, each holding dozens of soldiers. The greatest irony of it all was that this particular mission was being overseen by one of Zeus' great uncles. They were attacking this facility not for the benefits it would provide, but to arrest control from the forces that occupied it. This was a strategic resource, the absence of which would cripple the economy on the moon. This was...

Zeus was woken from his daydreaming when the speakers released a very determined voice saying, "all forces, attack!"

As if a switch had been flipped, the night went from calm and peaceful to immediately being extremely chaotic! All the carriers open fired, not only penetrating the oxygen dome formation surrounding the facility, but the various outposts as well. The doors opened, and the soldiers jumped out, a jetpack accelerating their descent that was slowed by the weak gravity. The craziest thing was that despite all the chaos, it was eerily silent due to the lack of atmosphere. Except for the tremors that could be felt on the surface of the moon and the occasional flashing light of a grenade, there was no evidence of the chaos taking place.

Zeus also jumped and followed his team as they descended. He needed to get to a computer still connected to the interplanetary network as soon as possible. Deep inside his heart, he already knew that the network was likely already shut down by whoever orchestrated this attack, but still, he hoped.

He needed to communicate with Alexander. That was the only way either of them would have any hope of surviving. Little did he know, Alexander was nowhere near Earth to begin with.

On Earth itself, the situation was both extremely chaotic and extremely peaceful. Various soldiers positioned in strategic locations began an attack at the same exact time worldwide. For some unusual reason, there was little to no resistance to the attacks. Dams, solar power fields, nuclear reactors and basically any kind of power supply stations worldwide were taken over and shut down. Government buildings were invaded with an efficiency that should have been impossible.

The few islands of resistance that could be found worldwide were mostly independent groups, caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. Quickly, though, they too surrendered.

Most, if not all, nuclear weapons facilities were overrun. All nuclear submarines lost contact with the surface.

Before any of the soldiers left behind by the five family heads could use their keys and report the situation, they were killed. The precision with which each person loyal to the family heads, in possession of a golden key, was killed, spoke volumes.

In London, in a quaint little house, there was a young girl playing games on her phone when suddenly she disconnected from the internet. She groaned and got up to reset her internet router, but suddenly her house lost power. Confused by the sudden development, the girl's mind had only just begun to think of possible reasons for why this could be happening, such as a broken wire to the main transformer or something, when one of her elder sisters barged into her room.

"Something is happening. I was on a call when I heard gunshots on the other side, and the phone disconnected. Then the electricity went out."

"We need to contact mom and dad," the younger girl was only beginning to say, when her second, and oldest sister walked into the room.

"No, in case of an unexpected development, we need to establish communication with the relay station and ask for instructions." her voice was cold and commanding, just like her eyes.

"Belle, what about big brother?" the young girl reluctantly asked, slightly afraid of the answer.

"According to our surveillance, Lex's location is unknown. He is most likely safe..." Belle frowned slightly. "He is most likely safe, but I'll request the relay station to send down some security. Dad won't like the interference, but if the situation is dangerous enough, he'll allow it."

"What about us?" the middle sister, Liz, asked.

"What about us?" Belle replied blandly. "First of all, we don't even know if something serious is even happening in the first place. And even if something serious is happening, these bodies are just spirit clones - even if they die, nothing will happen to us. Not to mention, their purpose has already been fulfilled. We only need to contact the relay station and act according to their orders."

Just as the younger girls were hoping everything was alright, the sudden sound of gunfire woke them to the truth. Then someone kicked down their house door and soldiers started pouring in.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 152: The pride of Uncle Sam

It seemed that all of a sudden, Earth was in chaos. In the most well executed and efficient manner in the history of the planet, regimes fell and new rulers took their place. One would think that the ICPAs would resist the change, but ironically, it was the ICPAs that led most of the rebelling armies. With an in-depth understanding of the regions they policed, they knew exactly what to do to seize actual control rather than simply protect them.

At the rate that things were progressing, even though all the family heads' spies were killed, it would only be a matter of time till someone else with a golden key escaped to the Inn. Yet that was a matter for the future.

Right now, all eyes were on the massive screen as the first joint assault on the zombie horde was about to begin. Earth was in the lead with the highest number of points, and as for the person with the most kills... It was neither Alexander nor Cara Deathsworn. It was the soldier wielding the gatling gun - NPC1.

But no one focused on him, or why he had such an unusual name. Their focus was on the fact that Cara had a total of 51 kills now, while Alexander had 53. Alexander had quickly taken the lead from her, and by denying her kills kept her total behind his. The audience had inadvertently dubbed the two rivals and could not wait to see how things continued.

The assault was not as coordinated as Crawford-41 would have liked, but the fact that everyone agreed to attack at the same time was already good enough for him. A total of twelve thousand five hundred going up against anywhere between thirty to forty thousand, not to mention less than ten hours left, gave them abysmal odds. He could not believe the Innkeeper thought such a difficult ordeal was a game.

To be fair, Lex himself was caught unaware by the number of zombies. When he was designing the games, he ensured that all zombies above the required level would be ejected from the game zone. Yet, while he tried to estimate how many zombies would be defending each point, he grossly underestimated the numbers. He expected that the devils may beef up defenses after they found out about the games, but this seemed a little too much. Fortunately, the game had an upper limit to the number of zombies based on the number of participants. Otherwise, if an army of a million zombies showed up in one of the future games... Lex shuddered internally just thinking about it.

As Alexander and his troops neared the zombies, he realized that the mass of zombies could no longer be called a horde. From a random mix, the zombies had turned into an organized fighting force. Zombies with long range were mobilized in the back, protected by several groups of zombies, with a clear advantage in close combat. In the air, massive undead birds circled as they kept a close eye on the approaching prey.

For better or worse - most definitely worse though - this was the enemy they had to face now. Still, everyone remained undeterred. As dangerous as zombies were, on the ladder of demons, they were at the very bottom - as Alexander had learnt in a crash course the Jotuns had provided him. Their individual fighting force was usually weaker than the average cultivator. So long as they approached this systematically, they could still win.

A green flare went up in the sky, indicating that the Jotuns had begun their assault. Unlike Alexander and the other Earthlings who planned on using long range combat to weaken the enemies, they directly charged in. Based on what Crawford-41 told Alexander, considering their equipment and training, the Jotuns were expecting to go through the whole games without a single casualty. The limited time was truly the only difficulty they faced in this war.

As advanced as they were, looking through a scope that aimed his newly assembled mortar, Alexander could not help but think the Jotuns were a bit pretentious. Why not use the advantage of technology?

He fired the first shot, using actual physical ammunition this time, which prompted several other teams to fire as well. The Earthlings watched from a safe distance as the first of their artillery hit the zombies and, with the energy of a bunch of teenagers playing video games at midnight, started taking more shots.

Even the 4000 other Earthlings were taking a similar approach. Under the supervision of a few soldiers who were also trained as spirit-tech engineers, the soldiers created a minimal version of a catapult. As primitive as the device seemed, its ammunition was the latest technology and pride of Uncle Sam.

They loaded what looked like a moored mine into the catapult and fired freely. Relatively speaking, the massive metal ball flying through the air was slow and easy to target, which is exactly what the zombies did.

Amongst the many other kinds of attacks, a bone-spike was the first to hit the metal ball, and instead of a fiery explosion, the ball burst into hundreds of smaller balls that quickly fell into the crowd. The zombies made no effort to avoid the falling balls as they lacked the momentum to be dangerous, and just watched them when they finally landed on the ground. For a split second, it seemed as if nothing would happen.

Then one of the balls released an annoyingly loud, sharp screech. As if activated by the sound, each of the balls suddenly absorbed a massive amount of spirit energy and launched towards the screeching ball, as if pulled by a magnetic force, and ripped through the zombies in their path. When all the balls finally reunited, they trembled, and then caused a massive spirit explosion!

The force of the blast absolutely eviscerated all the zombies within a hundred feet, and the traveling spirit shock-wave killed many more zombies by crushing their zombie cores with an overload of spirit energy.

Many things on Earth could be disputed, but no one could deny that the Americas had the greatest talent in making things explode.

On the beasts' side, similar to the Jotun army, they decided on an upfront charge. The elephants took the lead, breaking through the zombie ranks, allowing the rest of the beasts to attack freely. At a glance, there seemed to be little to no tactic being employed by the beasts. Yet the truth was, with their incredible strength and defense, this was their best play to begin with.

The wolves were close behind the elephants, and attacked with extreme prejudice! Despite lacking in technology, in the simplicity of their savagery, they were keeping up with the Earthlings in number of kills. In less than a minute, over a thousand zombies were already dead by the combined armies.

At the Inn, the mood was extremely positive, as humans and beasts alike rooted for those they supported. Despite their initial intimidation, it seemed like the zombies were bound to lose.

But as hopeful as Lex was that things would continue to play out this way, he doubted the devils would give up so easily. Perhaps if Pramod had not joined, Lex could believe that the trend for the battle was set, but he could not believe the devils had him join just to let the zombies be slaughtered so easily.

Without even realizing it, they hit the four-hour mark. At exactly this time, there was an announcement across the battlefield.

"Two treasure chests have been placed at opposite ends of the battlefield. Each chest contains 100 tokens that will be absorbed by the first 100 contestants to reach them. One of the chests contains tokens that will fill the owning participant's endless spirit energy and physical stamina for the duration of this match, while the others will give the owner a secret advantage during the next game."

The announcement ended as abruptly as it came, but the words had an abrupt reaction. The most immediate effect was on the soldiers, who were momentarily stunned by what they heard. But pausing in battle was extremely lethal, as the zombies did not bother to stop attacking, pushing them into a precarious situation. The second reaction was by the various commanders.

The repercussions of the announcement had varying levels of effect, not only on this game, but on the next one as well. Most importantly, endless stamina and spirit energy would allow them to gain a massive number of points, while a secret advantage in the next game would also put them at an advantage.

Almost as if it was rehearsed, all the armies immediately retreated. The announcement said that the chests were in opposite directions, but their specific location was unknown. Everyone sent out their scouts and drones. Even the flying zombies were sent out by Pramod to search for the chest. Only Alexander, who had satellites in the sky and got a live feed of the entire map, immediately knew where the chests were.

By the next game, everyone would know about his satellites and he would lose the advantage, but for this game, they played a critical role. Immediately he set out towards the nearest one, while pretending to send out scouting units.

Just as the mood on the battlefield had immediately changed, so too did the mood in the coliseum when a man covered in blood came running in, wearing a look of panic. He looked around till he identified Fateh, one of the five Nascants, and ran towards him.

The man tried to whisper but those nearby, as well as Lex who had the power of the Host Attire, heard him when he said, "war has broken out on Earth!"

The Innkeeper

Chapter 153: Refugees

Sitting cross-legged on the floor in the very center of the zombie horde, Pramod looked at the vile organ in his hand. It looked like a beating heart, but instead of muscle and tissue, it seemed to be made of rotting leaves and bark. His one and only mission was to kill as many humans and beasts, all if at all possible.

Originally, his plan was to use this Cursed Quibly Heart on his enemies after they had been worn out after fighting the zombies endlessly, but the two treasure chests presented another opportunity. If he could manage to get to the endless spirit energy, during this round he could kill as many as possible with his own two hands, and save the heart for the next game. Or maybe, if he got an advantage for the next game, he could use it to set up traps.

Either way, there was not too much pressure on him. The devil that had commanded him had given him the mission, but also told him to treat these games as a training opportunity since the nodes would be lost regardless of the situation. With no pressure for success or failure, he could do as he pleased.

So for now, he waited. As soon as his birds informed him of the location of the chests, he would make a drastic move. The loss of a little over 10,000 zombies in the past hour did not phase him in the slightest, and he continued to sit on the ground as if he were meditating in a park. A few dozen feet below him, the node was hidden in an underground base. A part of him also wondered, if he destroyed the node himself and gained all the points, would it be worth it? Would the prize still go to the planet Vegus Minima, or would it go to the devils?

Lex was slightly confused when he heard the panicked man's whisper. What did he mean war had broken down on Earth? War, even in this modern day and age, was not necessarily rare on Earth. Without taking any sides on the matter, there were many conflicts not only between what was described as the West and the East, many countries had high tensions with their neighbors.

An embarrassingly long list of countries' names flashed through Lex's mind when he thought of countries it would be troublesome to be neighbors with. This was also only considering the affairs of the so-called 'mortals'. Large-scale war between cultivators had also been curtailed by the ICPAs.

Yet before the man could explain more to Fateh, or Lex could come up with a plausible explanation, the familiar ring of a new quest rang in Lex's mind.

New Quest: You have encountered a special event called 'World War'. All guests coming from the planet experiencing the World War will have a period of 70% discount on all expenses. All guests below the age of 15 will have a 99% discount on all expenses. As the most prestigious establishment in the universe, the Midnight Inn must be a safe haven during troubled times. Host as many refugees as possible!

Quest time limit: Duration of World War

Quest Reward: Subject to number of refugees hosted

Remarks: Some things are worth more than MP, such as a good reputation! Scam everyone till you get it!

Lex froze when he read the quest, and his shock was so huge that even the Host Attire wasn't able to stop his body from tensing up. Though no one dared to scan the Innkeeper with their spiritual sense, many had their focus on him at all times.

Let alone Remy and Akihiko, who were sitting beside him, the mystery devil along with a number of other prominent guests noticed the anomaly in the Innkeepers' behavior immediately.

"LEX SNAP OUT OF IT" Mary roared in his mind, quickly snapping him back to his natural state. Yet the damage was already done. Many people started wondering what had happened to elicit a reaction from the Innkeeper. They started replaying scenes from the games, wondering if something had happened there. A few people wondered if his reaction had to do with something that happened at the Inn.

The mysterious devil, whose senses were by far the strongest here, naturally overheard the words the bloody man had whispered. For a moment he considered if that was the reason, but then dismissed it. There was a delay of several seconds between the words and his reaction. At their level, even a single second could be stretched to fit a billion thoughts, let alone a few of them, so it was unlikely.

What he did not know was that the delay in reaction was because Lex was listening to his new quest. Such a simple misunderstanding had saved Lex from revealing a huge secret, yet no one realized it.

But even as Lex had recovered his composure slightly, his mind was in chaos. What did the system mean by a world war? What was happening? There was no indication of this whatsoever beforehand. He was not worried about anyone else at this moment except his family.

He had been waiting to bring them to the Inn because he wanted to become stronger first, but how could he have anticipated such a situation? A million thoughts ran through his head before he calmed down. At this moment, he could not give a rat's ass about maintaining his facade.

His focus was entirely on the bloody man's words as he explained the situation and thought of what he could do.

"At first, they cut the connection to the internet, then the power. Communications were severely compromised, so we had to wait for the backup generators and private communication channels to understand what was happening.

"All governments are already under their control! Many countries' militaries tried to put up a fight, but they were either quickly defeated or their leaders were captured. Dozens of sects are taking part in this, and from what it seems like, so are the ICPAs. Anyone who could put up a strong resistance has either been detained or killed. Nuclear facilities have fallen and many holy lands have lost control of their formations.

"And this is just the bits and pieces of information we were able to gather before we lost communication. All key points worldwide have been taken over. Civilians haven't been hurt so far, or at least, the ones who didn't try to fight back haven't..."

"Lex, you need to be clear headed," Mary said loudly in his mind, attracting his attention. "Your greatest asset is the system and the Inn. You need to maintain their power and prestige. On Earth, you have no contacts, no power and no say. If you're worried about your family... well, to be completely honest, unless you use the Inn, there's nothing you can do for them. So don't break character and don't let anyone know the Innkeeper is interested in Earth. It will only spell trouble for you."

Lex grimaced, but eventually acknowledged what Mary said.

"Thank you," is all he said to her. He needed to clear his head and understand the situation clearly, only then could he react appropriately.

While chaos was beginning to spread across Earth, and among their representatives at the Inn, Alexander had already reached the first chest. After leaving sight of the other armies, he had headed in a straight line at maximum speed, not caring to preserve his spirit energy or stamina, and he was rewarded accordingly. Without any suspense, and with none the wiser, Alexander opened the first chest and felt a token latch onto his arm.

Spirit energy coursed through his body, completely refreshing him. He felt a special artificial film coat his meridians, preventing them from suffering any wear or tear due to the excessive amount of spiritual energy.

The feeling was more intoxicating than any drug - and yes, Alexander had tried various drugs, under supervision of course - that he had ever experienced. For a while, he even forgot what he was supposed to be doing.

But the feeling passed, and the boy recovered. He opened his map to check the location of the second chest, and to see if any of the armies were near it. Preferably, he wanted the second one as well. To his horror, he saw that nearly 80% of the zombie horde was moving towards the second chest, and had nearly reached it.

There was no way Alexander would be able to get the other chest. Suddenly, his eyes narrowed as he had an idea.

"All units assume bulldozer formation and await my return. The node is vulnerable, we have to destroy it before the others return."

As the 99 soldiers who were with him also recovered from the euphoria of the endless spirit energy, he gave the order for them to return. Activating his body technique to the absolute maximum, Alexander rocketed towards his destination - his gold aura shining brighter than ever before!

The Innkeeper

Chapter 154: Nuclear deterrent

As nonchalant as Brandon usually was, even he was not smiling right now. He'd had a strong feeling that something would happen during the games, but despite all their investigations, they yielded no results. Now it seemed the answer was in front of them. It was impossible for such a massive conspiracy to be hidden from all five families, unless the members of each family were also involved in them. It seemed they had suppressed everyone's ambitions for too long.

He was sitting in a room with the other family's heads. The bloody man was present as well, and had been thoroughly interrogated. To ensure the truth of what he was saying, the family heads had sent back several of their assistants and followers back to Earth, but none of them had returned yet. That in itself was information enough.

"The fact that we return to Earth from the exact place we left is a big flaw," Richard finally said. "It lets the enemy prepare a trap for us in advance."

"There is no point in delaying this. Even if there are traps, what can they do to us? We just need to return and take care of anyone who gets in our way."

"Matters are already beyond that. Do you even know who you can trust? Who will you 'take care of' once you return? How many people will you kill as a demonstration? You know, the whole point of leaving us in-charge was to avoid chaos. If we go back and start killing everyone who resists us, what will we do when 'they' become dissatisfied?"

Silence filled the room once again. From the moment they had started the meeting, none of them had been able to come to a conclusion on what to do. The truth was, everyone was just evading the problem as long as they could, because once they did, it was likely they would have to kill their own kin. Other than Brandon, who was only 104 years old, the rest were a fair bit older - though they did their best to hide their ages. They lacked the youthful vigor required to tackle difficult situations.

Just as they were about to begin arguing again, Richard's personal hologram appeared before him.

"Excuse me for disturbing you, but your granddaughter Selene is trying to reach you. Would you like to allow her into the room?"

"Yes, let her in," he said quickly. Selene had been on Earth and had not joined him for the games, so her presence here was a great relief. But it also left a hint of dread in his heart - what if she was the one who betrayed him?

The girl that entered no longer had her prior grace and elegance, instead her face was painted with anxiety. The moment she saw her grandfather, she handed him a letter, unsure of her voice to communicate effectively at this moment.

Richard read the letter, his body trembling in anger as read the words, until he reached the end, when his shoulders slumped in defeat.

"The letter is from my nephew," Richard said, passing it to the others. "That ten nuclear devices have been planted in cities across the world. They have all of our locations of departure from Earth under surveillance. If any of the family heads return to Earth, they will set off 2 nuclear devices for each family head. Someone will come to the Inn to negotiate with us in a few hours, until then we've been instructed to stay here."

His words chilled everyone's hearts. It not only confirmed their worst fears about being betrayed by their families, it put them in a position where they could take no chances. Unless someone could prove to them that there were no nuclear devices ready, with the people of Earth as hostages, the family heads were unable to do anything. Furthermore, from the Inn they could not even communicate with the mysterious lady they talked to previously and let her know of the situation. All they could do now was wait.

Lex, who had been spying in on the meeting, grimaced. Originally, his knowledge about the politics of Earth had been very limited, but occasionally, whenever he found free time, he would spy on these high leveled Earthlings to learn more about his planet. He had a basic understanding of the five families, and now concluded that the so-called 'World War' was a result of their family members revolting against the leaders.

He didn't care much for their internal strife, but if any of his family members got hurt as a result of this, he would make them pay dearly. In this moment, Lex learnt something about himself. He never realized it, but he had a very serious anger issue, and when thinking of all the things he would do to them should his family get implicated, he was a strong believer in revenge.

Somewhere on Earth, in what looked like a very modern version of the Taj Mahal, Kristine and Vera Joel stood close together, whispering amongst themselves. Around them were various security guards and only a few other people who were dressed casually. Among those dressed casually was Ayesha Shehzad, looking forlorn.

"Are you sure about this?" Kristine asked her daughter nervously.

"Yes, yes, trust me. Well, I'm not so sure about you, but I've already determined that I'll be absolutely safe here," Vera answered with too much honesty. "We just need to wait out the month, then we can leave this desolate planet."

"I hope you're right," Kristine answered bitterly.

Suddenly, Vera turned her head towards a wall, a smirk suddenly appearing on her face. It appeared as though she was looking at nothing, but a few rooms away in that direction, one of the guards started making a report about the sudden war to a hologram of a woman. It was the same woman the five family heads reported to.

Alexander had no knowledge of what was happening on Earth and had his entire attention focused on the task before him. If all went according to plan, not only would this game end earlier than the 12 hour mark, he would take a huge lead on the number of points.

He and his 99 soldiers were running at maximum speed, radiating spirit energy far and wide for anyone to sense. But even if they were noticed, it would make no difference now as they had already taken the tokens.

Despite running at his utmost speed and using as much energy as he could, Alexander had never felt better. Imagine doing the most arduous physical task your body could endure without dying. Now imagine being able to repeatedly do that task without fatigue or danger of hurting yourself. That was how Alexander was feeling, all he was really doing right now was running.

Well, he was doing more than running. He was the beacon that led his troops to battle, the tip of the spear that would pierce the enemy, the front of the vanguard that would clear the path for those who followed.

His idea was simple. He and his 99 troops would charge through the zombies and continuously bombard the node with the strongest, most deadly and destructive weapons they had. With unlimited spirit energy, they were literally experiencing video game cheats in real life.

The first of the zombies entered his line of sight, and he entered theirs. By the time the zombies realized it was not a ball of golden flame approaching them but a person, he was already upon them.

Cutting through the horde like a bullet through a loaf of bread, Alexander has his destination marked. As he laughed in mirth at the wonderful feeling of endless power, his troops began a coordinated assault on the horde.

But in this scenario where their brains were slightly overstimulated by the endless euphoria, coordination simply meant screaming 'watch how many I kill in this direction' before throwing their strongest attack that would usually leave them completely drained.

As ridiculously as the situation had become, those who were still watching the match realized that these troops may have slightly... lost their sanity. But who cared? It made for an entertaining show.

Alexander reached the center of what remained of the horde to realize he could not see the node. Was it hidden somewhere? While he analyzed the situation, his six blades spun around him like a saw with a ferocity never before seen, slicing anything that tried to come close.

'Underground maybe,' Alexander thought to himself and looked down. It was at that exact moment the ground burst open and an armored hand reached for his leg.

Alexander leaped out of the way, but the hand was faster and longer than he expected. The seven foot tall demon revealed himself, the scaly armor adorning his body free from any dirt despite coming out of the ground, and caught hold of the teenager.

Before Alexander could do anything to protect himself, Pramod used Alexander's body like a hammer and smashed him into the ground. It was impossible to tell under the helmet, but the viewers got the sensation that Pramod was grinning.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 155: Expected more

There were numerous battles taking place in the games, mainly around the second chest. It was a frantic free for all, yet despite their best efforts, the chest remained in the control of the zombie horde that seemed to be slowly taking it back towards the center. The elephants met their match in zombies ten feet tall, the wolves were stalled by the zombies with tentacles; the humans slowed down by a special breed of zombies that could dig into the ground. It truly was a spectacle.

Near the center of the map, 99 fearless soldiers were launching repeated attacks out of what looked like rocket launchers, as if they would never run out of ammo. The truth was, these weapons were powered by spirit energy, so under their current circumstances, they really wouldn't run out of ammo. That, accompanied by their overly excited emotions due to the excess energy running through their brains, resulted in a situation where they were fighting the hordes like kids in a video game instead of backing up Alexander who was deeper in.

Yet despite all that, at this particular moment, most people who were still watching the games had their attention turned towards Alexander. The first time he was smashed into the ground, he became completely disoriented, the golden aura around him vanishing and the air knocked completely out of him. But that was only the beginning.

Pramod did not slow his movements, and started smashing Alexander around like a rag-doll. With a grip tight enough to crumple steel clamping onto the teenager's leg, he swung him over his own head and smashed him into the ground. Once. Twice. Thrice.

As he was about to smash Alexander into the ground the fourth time without any resistance, people had begun to suspect him already dead, but that is when the six blades that had fallen onto the ground flew into the air, aiming to pierce through Pramod's hand.

Originally, the giant demon meant to ignore the blades, as he had every confidence in his scaly armor, but when the first blade cut into his forearm, the demon had no choice but to release Alexander and retreat.

The demon stared at his bleeding arm with a mix of pain and fascination, giving the beaten teenager some time to pick himself up. Even as Alexander wobbled to his feet, his head was spinning and he could not think straight. For the first time in a long, long time, Alexander had been taken completely by surprise and was disoriented. Before his infinite physical stamina helped him completely recover, Pramod decided to attack him once again.

But things did not go according to plan. Even without the ability of coherent thought, this was not Alexander's first time in battle. His instincts were honed through hours of endless combat and expert training.

His six blades, still as sharp and lethal as ever, immediately attacked Pramod the moment he moved towards Alexander. The few seconds they delayed him were enough for Alexander to barely recover.

He no longer looked like a handsome youth, straight out from the cover of a magazine. Messy hair and a layer of dirt on his face were the least of his worries. He was suffering from a broken nose, several hairline fractures in his ribs and probably a severely messed up leg. Whether the bone was crushed or not could still be debated, but his muscles and tendons were surely ruptured.

But even as he raised his hands towards his face to pop his nose back into place, Alexander wore a messy grin. What had he cultivated his body for if not to be able to handle such injuries, if not worse ones? This was not even taking into consideration how quickly he would be able to heal with his endless spirit energy.

"Dat wash goodsh," he said, before frowning. After wiggling his tongue around in his mouth for a second and discovering the problem, he spit out a few broken teeth.

"That was a good surprise you gave me there," he said once again, his accent only slightly changed due to his missing teeth. "I don't even remember the last time I suffered a concussion."

"It was not aimed towards you specifically," Pramod said, his voice surprisingly mild and sweet, as if he was a kid. "But I'm glad I came across you. With your annoying stoic face and attitude that says the whole world revolves around you, you were really beginning to annoy me. I'll thoroughly enjoy taking you down."

Alexander grinning, and looked at the massive demon in front of him. The teenager himself had not yet reached six feet in height, so he had to turn his head upwards, but his demeanor screamed as if he was still looking down at Pramod.

For a moment, he considered exchanging a few more lines with his opponent, then decided to directly get on with it.

The golden aura around Alexander returned, and he charged towards the demon. The six blades flew into the air, distancing themselves from the two, but kept their aim directed towards Pramod. Even without doing anything, the threat of being attacked from six different directions was very real, even for Pramod, but the most pressing threat was the sword in Alexander's hand.

But the demon did not shy away. A purple aura wrapped itself around the demon's hands as it directly slapped the sword away, directly pushing Alexander aside. Pramod's massive brute strength was already dangerous enough, but the purple aura had a corrosive effect on the sword as well. Alexander had to quickly use his own spirit energy to wash away the lingering purple aura, only to find his sword had dulled slightly from the middle.

Alexander ducked, still looking at his sword, just in time to dodge a massive palm, and stepped closer towards the demon's body. Using both his arms, he swung his sword upward, slashing at the demon's neck. The demon dodged nimbly, its speed not at all affected by its hulking body.

The two exchanged moves, each more lethal than the next, doing their best to kill one another. Yet despite their speed and impressive skill, so far all their techniques had been limited to simple augmentation types. Alexander augmented his sword's lethality, while the demon did so for his hands.

The human teenager was the first to break the pattern, a golden bolt of energy escaping from the tip of his sword just as it passed Pramod's face after a dodge. Alexander was already readying his next move for when the demon dodged but, unexpectedly, the bolt hit it directly in the face.

Pramod yelled as he fell backwards. Immediately, Alexander took advantage of the moment and directly attacked. Unable to deflect the attack skillfully, as he had been doing before, Pramod released a massive burst of purple energy from his palm, blasting the sword out of Alexander's hand. For a moment, it seemed the demon had managed to protect himself.

Then, one of Alexander's blades that had long been forgotten pierced through the demon's neck from the back. Through the helmet that the massive demon wore, Alexander could only see its eyes showing surprise mixed with horror. Then another one of his blades cut through the demon's neck, and another, until the head was cut clean off from the body.

Back at the Inn, everyone sat frozen at the sudden conclusion of the fight. It had only just begun. Where was the desperate battle? Where were the hidden techniques? How could it end so quickly? Was that all there really was to the demon commander? Either his end was extremely anticlimactic, or this Alexander was much stronger than he seemed.

The kids from Troy academy burst into cheers, waking up the rest from their reverie. In her room, Loretta continued to watch the screen with a placid look. It did not appear as if she cared about Pramod's demise.

"To be honest, I was expecting more," Alexander said, as he looked down at the demon's detached head. There were still things he held in reserve. He was just getting warmed up. But this was a good reminder to him. Life wasn't always like a movie. You wouldn't always get a long, drawn out battle. A moment's carelessness could prematurely decide even an expert's fate.

Using all his physical and spiritual strength, Alexander suddenly moved to the side as dread suddenly filled his heart, but it was barely enough.

A sword - his discarded sword - pierced through Alexander's back and through his chest, puncturing his left lung.

The crowds at the Inn, humans and beast alike, froze as they saw the scene. Behind Alexander stood a headless body.

"To be honest, I expected more," Alexander heard a sweet voice. His eyes bent downwards at the head to see its eyes staring back at the body. His expression did not need to be seen, just from the look in his eyes, one could tell he was grinning.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 156: Let me give it a try

"NO!" a scream echoed through the Inn, accompanied by a horror-stricken Helen. She did not know when she stood up, nor did she realize that she had screamed. All she felt currently was panic so deep it and firmly grasped her heart.

Even Lex, who had been marinating in his own endless anger, was woken up from his thoughts by her yell. He was startled again to see Alexander on his screen, standing with a sword running through his chest.

"Absolutely pathetic," the head said, as its body left the sword in Alexander's body and approached it. "For all your arrogance and bravado, I expected a better fight. But you fell so easily for the first trick I used. Although I must give you props from moving out of the way just enough to protect your heart."

The demon picked up the head and reattached it to its body, now looking down upon Alexander, who was still standing in the same posture he had been stabbed in.

"But then again, it was my own fault for expecting so much from such a pathetic species as humans. How can you even begin to imagine my power? You probably thought I was dead after you cut my head off. But I'm not a low level demon like the zombies. I'm a nightmare demon, understand? I'm immortal!"

With that the demon burst into a fit of laughter. It seemed like he was enjoying talking down to Alexander, but the truth was the demon was only casually chatting while its head properly reattached to its body.

A being such as that really was outside the understanding of humans. Even the guests at the Inn or the Jotun soldiers had a dark expression on their faces. Alexander was someone who had attracted a lot of attention, and his current condition left a bitter taste in the mouth.

But compared to a demon that could live even after getting its head chopped off, let alone Alexander, all humans looked weak and insignificant. What inherent power did humans have? What was their strong suit? If they did not cultivate, humans were so weak that a fall down a small flight of stairs could end their lives.

All humans were really good at was adapting. They could understand the rules of the world around them, and since they could not bend the rules, they could use them to their own advantage. They could fashion weapons out of wood, make utensils out of stone. They could grow crops in the dirt and predict the weather from the wind. Even if they advanced enough to build a civilization advanced enough to fly in the sky and travel through the stars, all their accomplishments were external. They could harness the energy of the universe to make the most complex of tools to aid them, but in the absence of those tools, they were still weak. They could not reattach their own severed heads the way the demon had.

Of course, if humans ever gained the ability to directly interact with and control energy themselves, instead of just taking advantage of their understanding of how energy normally behaved, what they could possibly accomplish was... unimaginable.

"Relax girl," a calm voice washed over Helen, attracting her attention from the nightmare on screen. Behind her stood Audrey, Alexander's grandmother. "My grandson is not so easy to kill."

Helen was taken aback by the old woman's seemingly calm attitude. If Brandon were not in a meeting and saw the current situation, his reaction would not be much different from Audrey's.

They had unwavering faith, not only in their grandson, but in the life-threatening training he had undergone his whole life. They had confidence even more so because what was spirit energy if not a supreme form of energy, and what was cultivation if not... controlling and manipulating that energy?

Pramod continued to give a condescending speech, not at all noticing that the golden aura around Alexander had not diminished at all, unlike the last time he had taken Alexander by surprise. If anything, the color seemed to be getting richer.

If one could see into Alexander's body on a microscopic level, they would notice millions upon millions of nanobots repairing the wounds in Alexander's body. The nanobots gathered in clumps around where the blade pierced his lungs, preventing blood from entering them as well as getting ready to seal the wound as soon as the sword was removed.

But that was not all. Normally, when a human healed, his cells would undergo a division to replace the lost or damaged cells. But there was a limit to how many times a cell would divide during a person's lifetime. However, there was a technique used by cultivators who practiced both their body and spiritual cultivation at the same time which would use up all the spiritual energy in a person's body not only to force the cells to split, but undergo a rejuvenation which would actually increase the number of times the cells could split.

That was only one aspect of the technique called Buddha's Grace, and the technique was a lot more complicated than that. It was meant to be used when one was critically injured, and would allow the person to heal just enough to survive a little longer. That was because, normally, the amount of spirit energy a person wielded was limited. But what if there was unlimited spiritual energy? And what if the body would not be exhausted no matter how much it healed itself?

By now, even some of the guests noticed that the teenager who had a sword hanging out from both sides of his body was still standing, while he should have fallen down a long time ago.

"Immortality," a single word from Alexander's lips interrupted Pramod's speech, who suddenly woke up to the fact that the human still had not keeled over and died.

"It sounds interesting. Let me give it a try."

He grabbed onto the blade protruding from his chest and slowly pushed it back out, all the while maintaining eye contact. When the sword was pushed all the way out and fell to the ground, only a small amount of blood squirted out of the wound before a metallic sheen covered the wound. If people didn't know better, they would assume that instead of a human, a robot stood before them.

"While I'm at it, let me put your immortality to the test!" he said with gritted teeth, a twinge of anger coming through. He was putting on a brave face, but only he knew how close he actually came to death. If his heart had been punctured instead of his lung, while he could have continued to live, he would not have been able to move. The demon could have easily finished him off.

Right now, his body was still healing and using a tremendous amount of spiritual energy while at it. The more energy that he burned, the darker the surrounding aura became.

Without any words, the two suddenly launched towards each other and clashed, fist against fist. They had prepared to smash each other to bits, but a small spark from their first clash completely ignited the aura around Alexander.

Instead of gold, he now appeared to be covered in flame, but he did not slow down even for a moment. An ungodly amount of strength flowed through his arms as he punched the demon's face, determined to see if he could still live after he squished it to a pulp.

While Alexander himself still remained unaware of the fire surrounding him, the guests, and especially Pramod, were extremely aware of its awesome power. The strength of Alexander's augmented fists could be dulled by his armor, but the heat of the flame seemed to reach directly into his being.

Pramod roared as his ominous purple aura exploded around him, but before he could use it to his advantage, six flaming blades attacked him from different angles. Pramod barely defended himself, but his aura was eviscerated.

Alexander did not give him any time to rest, though. He raised his right hand in the air, and the six blades oriented themselves right beside it. Small yellow balls of light floated out of his fingers and started collecting at the tip of each blade, influenced by the blazing glory of the flame around the teenager, the balls slowly became alight.

Normally this would be a slow process, but the rate at which Alexander was burning spirit energy sped up the process so that in a couple of seconds, six flaming balls hung in the air. This was the technique he had learnt from John, called Final Glory - meant to be used as a last resort that would normally drain him of all his spirit energy. Alexander did not care much for the name, but its effect was truly amazing.

Alexander pointed his hand at Pramod and shot the blades towards the demon as if out of a bazooka. Each blade passed through the flaming ball, absorbing its energy as it passed.

Pramod immediately sensed the threat and let out a ferocious roar before slamming the ground. A wall of dust rose into the air, hiding the demon from view, but that did not prevent the now flaming blades from reaching him.

Six earth-shattering explosions rocked the entire small pocket dimension, immediately attracting the attention of each participant. They looked towards the center, wondering what had happened.

But while everyone was feeling a mix of shock and awe and reverie, Alexander cracked his neck a couple of times before he slowly started walking towards the dust cloud.

"Who knew immortals could make such great punching bags?"

An angry and crazed roar responded to his casual remark, but he did not care. Six blades were floating around his right arm again, gathering six balls of flame, as he prepared his next round of attacks. Today, he would beat the crap out of an immortal.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 157: First game ends

The crowd at the Inn was going wild. They enjoyed the twists and turns in each fight, swooned as they saw the various weapons on display. Alexander's fight was just one of many, quite a few had managed to make a name for themselves. A few outstanding beasts attracted a lot of attention, and naturally many of the humans. The Jotun soldiers did not dazzle with ostentatious displays, but their extremely consistent and steady performance was an award winner. Even up until now, they had not suffered a single casualty.

The participants themselves, though, had a very different mindset. Most of them were extremely tired. Large-scale battles were very different from small scale fights, and they had to balance their physical and spiritual stamina, something that not many were trained for. The mental fatigue had also started to wear them down. But despite all of that, they had around 5 hours left, and somewhere between fifteen to twenty thousand zombies still standing. They didn't even want to kill the zombies, they just wanted to get their hands on the treasure chest the horde was quickly escorting back, but just that seemed a momentous task. And if they weren't able to do this much, destroying the node would be even harder.

But little did they know, the node was almost destroyed simply by accident. Pramod, battered and beaten, kept trying to lure Alexander away from the center. For a while now, he had just been using devastatingly powerful attacks that threatened to destroy the node just by attacking the vicinity near it.

He himself was bleeding from all over, and his armor seemed destroyed in many places. But he truly did not care about the damage he was taking - in a sense, he had not lied when he said he was immortal. Such attacks, no matter how many times he received, would never kill him. Of course, he would not explain that to Alexander.

The only thing on his mind now was to hold Alexander off long enough till his zombies brought the treasure chest to him. After that, he would let Alexander destroy the node because the truth was he had realized it was impossible for him to actually kill Alexander right now.

While all of this was happening, Lex had calmed down now and was watching the game with a critical eye. He did not know enough about cultivation to understand the complexities of the techniques and abilities being used, but the one thing he could understand very clearly was his own inferiority.

As of late, he had been getting slightly arrogant with all the influence he held at the Inn. People older and stronger than him hung on his every word, and he made decisions arbitrarily. In brainwashing himself to seem more confident for his performance, he had at some point really started believing himself something great.

But all it took was a single crisis on Earth to bring him back to reality. As much influence as he had at the Inn, outside of it he was nothing. His personal strength was weak, and Lex Williams' connections were all for naught. He was so caught up in avoiding trouble on Earth that when trouble came, he had no one he could ask for help. Even his connection with Marlo he had terminated.

But this realization did not mean he was indulging in self pity. Far from it, in fact. He was waking up to the cold hard truth, so that he could remedy it. If he stayed within his delusions, a simple accident was all it would take to cause him irreparable damage.

With his self-actualization achieved, he needed to decide what to do next. He already put up a commission for items to heal the soul or information about it, so now in that regard all he could do is wait.

Much more importantly, Lex was worried about his family. Without moving a muscle, he used his ability to put up another commission in the Guild room for detailed information about the situation in London, which is where his family was currently staying.

He also put up another commission for general information about the details behind what was happening on Earth.

Once he had enough information, he would then decide what to do. His greatest power and asset was the Inn and its influence, and he intended to use it fully. Currently, his attention was split between the family heads and the games. They seemed to be waiting for someone, which was good enough. The moment they learnt anything, so would he. And in case his family was in trouble... he would hold events, put up commissions, offer jobs, give out trials, whatever it took to make sure they'd be safe.

"Lex, you're getting angry again," Mary said softly, waking him from his thoughts. She was sitting on his shoulder, looking at him with a little bit of pity. Lately she had spent less and less time with him, because she realized she could not help herself but give him recommendations. That in itself was not a bad thing, but he needed to learn how to make decisions based on whatever information he had himself. After all, if her way of doing things was so great, she wouldn't be...

"Thanks," Lex muttered, and turned his attention back to the game. He needed to keep himself occupied.

Back in the game, the horde had neared Pramod enough that he completely ignored Alexander and sprinted towards the horde. He couldn't let the human realize that the horde had the chest or he would use his overwhelming firepower to steal it.

From Alexander's point of view, it merely seemed like Pramod was running away. Initially, he thought to chase after him, but by now even he had realized that despite doing a lot of damage, he was unable to kill the demon. And with various other forces chasing close behind the horde, Alexander decided it was a better idea to look for and destroy the node before they arrived.

He didn't know which of them was able to get the prize, but it hardly mattered to him anymore.

"Squads 1 and 2..." before Alexander could continue to give orders, he realized that his earpiece had fallen out or had been destroyed at some point. He could not communicate with his soldiers, so he would have to figure this out on his own.

Right now, he had no equipment or weapons other than his blades, so it would be a little hard to determine the location of the node. His emotions, in the heightened state that they were in, made it difficult for him to make a detailed plan, so he went with the most basic and brutal one.

He started bombarding the ground with an endless barrage of Final Glory. The ground shattered and quaked as his attacks landed. Each attack brought about its own cloud of dust and dirt to the point where Alexander felt like a smoke machine, but he did not stop. And, just like that, in the stupidest way possible, one of his attacks finally reached deep enough and hit the node, destroying it.

A siren rang throughout the battlefield before the Innkeeper's voice was heard, full of energy and mirth.

"Congratulations to Alexander Morrison for single-handedly destroying the first node, and kicking off the games in such a splendid way! The rest of you performed remarkably as well. Why don't we get you some well-deserved rest?"

With that, all the participants were covered by a protective bubble, and teleported back to the Inn. Since many of them were in combat, when they returned, they were spaced far apart so as to not accidentally harm one another.

The sudden change caught many of them with surprise, and most of them felt frustrated rather than relieved that the game was over. After all their hard work, the points for the node had been single-handedly snatched by Alexander! Of course, the other Earthlings were ecstatic. Though they separated from Alexander, his points would ultimately count towards Earth's total as well.

Followed by the feeling of frustration, they were hit by exhaustion. The next game was supposed to be in around 17 hours, which was definitely not enough time to completely rest up. This was not even considering those of them that had been wounded. But of course, since they could think this far, so could Lex, and he had already taken care of it.

"To all the contestants, I recommend you return to your allocated bases and get some rest. The housing in each base has been fitted with the healing capabilities of the Recovery room, so that all remaining participants will be in tiptop shape for the next match."

The participants, too tired to think about anything else, started marching back towards their bases to get some rest. The sounds of hooting and cheering from the coliseum made a nice backdrop to their return, but while most Earthling participants were reveling in their victory, Alexander was staring at his grandmother.

His grandfather was missing, and so were the other family heads. Something must have happened. Something bad.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 158: What the hell

The hours after the game ended passed in a much needed lull, at least for the guests. After watching for several hours straight, despite the excellent excitement, they were getting tired. Many chose to stay in their rooms to sleep, some decided to return to their respective planets. Those that returned to Earth soon received a big surprise. Everyone had plans to return to watch the next match, but how many would actually return was yet to be determined?

Will Bentham was one of the guests who had decided to stay at the Inn. Truth be told, he was seriously considering living at the Inn perpetually, as the air on Earth was too putrid for him to tolerate after spending time in this heaven. This plan of his was slowly starting to seem more likely because he had placed a nominal sum as a bet to show support for Alexander. Keeping in mind the lad's excellent performance, he had received a whopping 11,000 MP as credit! This solidified his plan to continue betting, small amounts of course, and could use that money to supplement his plans - not that he was really short of money, but he had never disliked a sudden windfall.

While Will had become an unexpected winner, most people had lost their bets - including Anthony, who had placed a personal bet that the Jotuns would be the ones to destroy the node. Since this was the first match, people had bet only small amounts, as they did not know what to expect from the participants. The next match would likely be when the real betting began. Despite that, Lex had made a spectacular 330,765 MP profit from the bets alone.

Something worth noting was that other than Will, Igishima won nearly 8000 MP in bets. Oddly enough, his prizes didn't come from a single win, but from various random bets. It seemed as if the tree did not

understand the concept of gambling very well and randomly placed bets on whoever it thought looked good.

Other than that, his income from food and other services was only 440,765 MP since about 15,000 of the mouths he was feeding were participating in the games. Even though he was not really in the mood to pay attention to these things, he could not help but remember just a month back when he was struggling to raise a measly 10,000 MP. In comparison, his current total was 981,530 MP.

But he did not touch the MP this time. He planned no upgrades and didn't think of fixing any issues. This MP would stay in reserve for now in case he needed to use it for any particular reason.

He spent his time meditating back in his room and told Mary to inform him when the people who were going to negotiate with the family heads came. While Lex was meditating, a lot of people were waiting in anxiously.

Brandon, of course, had already cooled down and was spending time with his grandson, laughing at his reaction when Alexander finally learnt about the golden aura. As it turned out, Brandon had specially modified the technique so the user would not be able to see the aura. It was the only way to have people actually practice the technique all the way. Helen sat quietly in the corner. Since she learnt about the war, she had not spoken a word.

Anthony was having all the data analyzed and discussing the strategy for the next match with Crawford-41. It was confirmed now that Pramod had been able to get his hands on the second chest, which would likely make the next match incredibly hard. He had also sent someone to invite the leaders from Earth to discuss the strategy, but apparently they were preoccupied at the moment. By now, as dismissive as he was of Earth, he at least recognized they were not completely worthless. He had even sent a clip of Alexander's battle to Ragnar back on Vegus Minima.

Speaking of which, the bubble surrounding the first battlefield had disappeared once all the contestants retreated. Ragnar immediately secured the location and had his troops try to locate any remnants of the node. If they could understand it better, they would be able to search for it themselves on the other planets.

The beasts were undergoing their own form of strategy meetings. They had racked up a decent number of points, but not enough. The sloth was having a few discussions with the various leaders from the planet about how they can improve performance. The consensus, generally, was that during the first

five games, they only needed to get a decent number of points. It was the last five games during which they would steal the show.

Like this, the time passed and just as the first light of the new day shone down on the Inn, three new guests appeared at the Inn. In the lead was a woman, and behind her two men. This was the first time they had come to the Inn and took a look around. When their personal holograms showed up and introduced them to the rules and asked if they needed help with anything, they were particularly impressed.

"This is a good place. If I can cultivate here, I feel like I'll be able to break through in just a few months," said the man with short, blonde hair.

"We need to find out more about this Inn. If we can cultivate our forces here..."

"Focus on the task at hand," the woman said in a tired voice. She was exhausted from babysitting these two. Why couldn't hidden co-conspirators be more serious, like in the movies?

Little did she know, her two partners were thinking the same thing about her. She had an unusual form of OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder) wherein she could only focus on one task. Anything at all that was not completely relevant to that task would irritate her to no end, and she would, in turn, irritate them to no end.

"Fine, fine, let's just get on with it."

The three asked their holographic-assistants to escort them to the family heads. As soon as they met someone from the entourage from one of the families, they were escorted to a room for a meeting.

Mary naturally woke Lex up so he could pay attention.

In the room, four of the family heads and a few other relevant dignitaries were staring at the three newcomers with murder in their eyes. The three of them were quite nonchalant about it though - they already knew about the security provided by the Inn.

"Don't look at me like that, grandpappy Sam. What will you do if I get scared and run away?" asked the blonde man sarcastically.

"You have some gall to speak to me like that, Kevin!"

The blonde man only chuckled and ignored the senile fool.

"So you really have betrayed us," said Richard, looking at the other man.

"Is it really a betrayal, old man? The way I see it, we just took our inheritance a little before you died. It's not a big deal."

"You disappoint me, Lee."

"The feeling is mutual," he said, as he comfortably took a seat. To be honest, Lee felt like annoying these geezers a little more, but he could tell the preamble conversation was already irritating Miranda, and he'd had a long day taking over the world. He didn't want to hear her bickering.

"Were all families involved?" the Queen asked Miranda.

"Does it matter? That's not what we're here to discuss. Someone hurry up and call Brandon so we can begin."

"Ho ho, I didn't know you were missing me so much," rang Brandon's voice as he appeared close behind Miranda. She didn't know if she was imagining it, but she could feel his warmth behind her. Despite herself, Miranda blushed. Then Audrey appeared in the room and pulled the century old playboy to his seat - pulled him by the ear, of course.

The other family heads felt stifled. They didn't know if they were angrier at their descendants who had appeared before them or this stupid old man who had somehow completely stopped caring that the Earth was being taken over.

"Let's begin," Miranda said, sitting down, her gaze still lingering on Brandon. He had gotten a few new tattoos since the last time she saw him...

Miranda gulped as she suppressed her wandering thoughts and regained composure. To help her retain her focus, she made direct eye contact with the Queen - the unofficial leader of the five family heads.

"It is only out of filial... pity... that we are even meeting. A lot of the members from the council wanted to directly wait for you with Gravedigger formations back on Earth and finish you off once and for all."

The family heads suddenly grimaced when they heard those words. Gravedigger formations were the nuclear deterrents of the cultivation world. It was a hassle to set one up, simply because of the resources required to actually make one, but they had no theoretical upper power limit. If used properly, and if they were caught unaware, those formations could be a real threat to them.

"Hey, don't forget about Sam jr. who wanted to use hydrogen bombs," pitched in Kevin.

Miranda gave Kevin a dirty look, but continued, "Yes, many ways of... disposing of you were discussed. You should be thankful that in the end the council only decided to imprison you at the Inn."

"Hey, I can think of a few ways to thank you," said Brandon with a wink.

Without missing a beat, Audrey stabbed Brandon in the leg with a small dagger, completely unconcerned that the Innkeeper would consider it an attack.

As if to emphasize to her husband to behave, she looked towards the two men sitting beside Miranda and said, "I'm considering taking concubines. Would you be interested?"

Back in his room, Lex felt like flipping a table. This was supposed to be a serious meeting. **WHAT THE HELL WAS GOING ON?**

The Innkeeper

Chapter 159: Oppressed cultivators

As annoyed as Lex was by the two senior Morrisons, he noticed that neither the family heads nor the other three responded to them. It was as if years of experience had taught them the best way to handle them was to ignore them. The strong blush running down Miranda's neck was completely not a giveaway about how she felt about Brandon's flirting, not at all.

"Do you really expect this to work?" Richard asked. "You cannot trap us here. We can leave, and even if you do bomb two cities, or even more, as long as we return to Earth, all of you will die."

"Do not try to bluff, old man," Lee said, yawning. He was not at all intimidated by these few who had controlled Earth for so long.

"You bend over backwards to stop any cultivator conflict, and step in even if a mortal conflict is getting too big. You think you are being secretive, but the truth is old timer, other than your cultivation, you are not superior in anything else. The same goes for the rest of you as well."

Lee gave a derisive look to all in the room.

"You are not good leaders. You are not good businessmen. You are not good politicians. You make yourselves feel good by saying you're protecting people's lives, but all you're doing is suppressing your own people. Your shoddy rules and improper management are literally destroying Earth, but the mortals are protected from the truth, so who cares?"

At the end of his little triad, Lee got a little heated, no doubt from holding in years of resentment, but decided to stop so Miranda would not pester him. But just as she was about to speak again, he discovered that he really could not stop himself.

"You're uneducated and stuck in bygone traditions! You trained your descendants to be the best, but then forced them to hide and suppress themselves. You taught them to have ambition and then buried it with your own hands. It is not betrayal when you betrayed us first! You..."

"Lee, stop," interrupted Kevin. "Go take a breather. We'll handle this."

Lee realized that he had, indeed, lost his temper. It really was better to go cool off - they still had many things to take care of after this. He gave Richard a dirty look and said one last thing before leaving.

"As much as you all look down on him, at least Brandon gave his descendants a place to thrive. Of all the families, his has the least members on the Council of the New Order."

At this, Brandon and Audrey both raised an eyebrow. Council of the New Order is probably what they called themselves, but what truly attracted him was the part about the least members. Least did not mean none. So even the Morrison family had traitors.

With Lee leaving the room, Miranda took a deep breath and turned back to the Queen.

"We have much to do, so I'm not going to waste any more time. We did not come here to negotiate, we only came here to tell what's going to happen from now on. You can choose how to react to this information, but the consequences will be your own. You can believe us about the nuclear bombs or you can test it out, it'll be up to you.

"The mortals have ruled and the cultivators have hid long enough. It's time to restore proper order - for both their sakes and ours. Soon, the borders of many countries will change. Sects will once again openly recruit and cultivators will take over positions of power. All efforts will be put towards the growth and expansion of the cultivation civilization.

"As for you... you will remain at the Inn until a time that the council decides you may return. Don't worry, treat it like retirement. Play bingo, watch some tv, whatever it is retired people do. Because, even if you do come back, you'll find that your influence is gone. No one will listen to you. Any authority you thought you had... was only because none of the council members wanted to fight you up front. Anyone who was still loyal to you... well, let's not get into the specifics."

"Is it so easy for you to massacre so many people?" the Queen asked in an even voice. If she was feeling anger or frustration, it was not evident.

Miranda looked at the Queen placidly, as if she had asked the stupidest question in the world.

"About as easy as it was for you to let my father die."

"I think I've heard about enough," Brandon said, standing up, a dagger still sticking out of his leg. "Little girl, I wish you the best in your endeavors. I never cared much for ruling Earth anyway, too much responsibility - I would rather chill at the beach with my wife. I will only give you one piece of advice: don't kill too many people during your little revolution. If you piss off the boss lady, you might really learn just about how much power you really have. Oh and uh, I'll stay at the Inn, but someone uses that as an excuse to harm my kids or grandkids..."

He didn't finish his sentence as he left the room, but his message was clear. Miranda let out a little sigh, even as she swooned a little internally. Their biggest concern really was the Morrison family. Although mostly focused on Mars, their army was sizable. Naturally, against all the cultivators of Earth it was still inferior in strength, but the damage the council would take fighting them would be considerable.

"Are you sure about this?" Audrey asked as the old, but somehow very young looking, couple walked away.

"You know I never cared much for the responsibility. If Rorick or the others want to do something about it, they can, but I say good riddance. Keeping that woman happy was too annoying. Now we can just focus on what we want to do. Hey berry, want to have another kid?"

Audrey smacked the man on the back of his head, effectively communicating her feelings about that notion, as they continued to stroll around. They had many hours before the next match. Alexander was sleeping, recovering from the mental exhaustion, and Rorick was cultivating in his room, completely unaware of what was happening in the outside world.

While the Morrisons strode off, Lex was still focused on the meeting. The family heads learnt of how deeply the betrayal ran, and they all had mixed feelings. Basically, anyone not from their immediate family was very dissatisfied with them, to put it mildly. They were born at the peak of the world, raised to be the best, then suppressed and forced to hide their brilliance so that the mortal world would not be destabilized.

Lex honestly didn't care about any of that, and currently he had no thoughts on what the family heads could have done better. He was slowly getting agitated by not being able to learn any specific details about Earth.

A part of him wanted to simply return to New York and see if he could call his family. But of course, he knew that all communication had been shut down so he would learn nothing.

Eventually, he decided to wait one more day to see if someone would answer his commission, or else he would start to take more... drastic... measures.

Somewhere in the universe, far away, Serene Williams was looking at her husband as he practiced. On her face she wore expressions of both disappointment and annoyance, but the man did not notice as he was focused on his sword. He was practicing shirtless, his taut muscles rippling with each move, his rolling sweat giving his body a nice sheen.

His each swing was slow and deliberate, but despite that each time he finished a swing the very room would tremble. The man frowned, he still could not prevent energy from leaking. When he was able to perform each move without any sound or wind, without any energy leaking at all, he would finally reach a satisfactory level of mastery.

Finally, unable to wait for him to notice her, Serene said, "There's news from Earth."

"Oh, did the kid finally do something interesting?"

Serene gave her husband an exasperated look.

"He's only just started cultivating, what can he even do? No, this is more serious. Cultivators have revolted against the proctors we assigned to keep the peace, war has erupted."

This attracted the man's attention, and he finally stopped practicing and turned towards his wife, wearing a look of 'I told you so'.

"Even that isn't the serious part. When I heard about the war, I had the local sentries call back all the 'guests' we've sent on Earth for their own protection. They're all there, except..."

Serene paused, and despite her usual composure, wore a look of exasperation.

"No one can get in touch with Bastet. She has left the planet."

The man was startled, but the look of horror quickly changed to that of great amusement. He burst out laughing, his energy causing an earthquake on the continent where they were.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 160: Panic

"Stop laughing," Serene said, but the chiseled man only roared out harder. The room was shaking and paintings had started falling off the walls, but he could not care less.

"Stop laughing," she said again, feeling slightly embarrassed, but to no avail.

Finally, her expression turned serious, and she said in a bitingly cold voice, "stop laughing!"

As if he had been faking it all this time, the man went from almost falling over to a modest smirk.

Seeing that he had listened, her expression softened and continued, "What are we going to do about this?"

"How did she escape? Do you have any clues?"

"I strongly suspect the newly discovered entity known as 'Midnight Inn' may have played a role. Although Earth is in a deadzone, lacking higher forms of spiritual energy and making it the perfect place for high leveled political prisoners, if they can travel to the Midnight Inn and recuperate their energy, escaping becomes an option."

"Oh please, how many of those prisoners can travel directly in space or teleport? We don't need to do anything. Earth can continue to serve as a prison, just no longer for anyone approaching the Daolord realm. Send a report back to the family, there's no need to hide the matter. If they want to pick an issue, they can go find the Midnight Inn, I don't care."

With that, the matter was resolved, and the man returned to his practice. Serene sighed as she opened a tablet to write up her report. She completely ignored a small notification in the corner with the title 'your daughter has run away from school again'. She could only handle one disaster at a time.

Slowly the hours passed and many things happened at the Inn. The meeting between the family heads and the representatives of the council did not go over well and, as Lex predicted, his guards had to get involved. Still, none of the family heads returned to Earth. They only sent back their assistants and followers and tried to control the situation through them. Unfortunately, it seemed that they truly had lost all authority.

The few who were still willing to follow the command of the family heads were locked in battle with the council's forces. Most countries worldwide were already under their control. Strangely enough, only South Korea and Japan were able to resist the influence of the council. As for why that was, the family heads were receiving only bits and pieces of information, so it could not yet be determined.

In the meantime, the armies were preparing for their next match. The recovery afforded to them in their bases was remarkable and almost all were fully healed. Only a few who had extremely serious injuries had to preemptively forfeit.

About 900 of Alexander's soldiers were still capable of fighting. While most of them were resting, a few of them were submitting a report for new supplies and gear to be brought from Mars. While this was happening, they received a dossier from the Jotun army. Considering Earth's stellar performance, Anthony decided to give them more support so long as they continued to deliver at the same level. In the dossier was information about the terrain for the remaining 9 nodes. Since the nodes' location had been identified back on the planet, they quickly drew up maps based on previous satellite images and marked down the terrain and notable landmarks.

They could not predict where the next game would be, but at least they would not be surprised no matter what they faced. This was extremely important because two of the nodes were underwater! Without proper gear, the soldiers would literally drown and die within the first hour!

In the dossier was also a report on Pramod! The empire could not confirm it just from watching him fight Alexander, but they had strong suspicions about his species. They suspected he was a Nightmare demon. This was a very rare, very dangerous breed of demons that was named not because of how they originated, but because they were a nightmare for anyone to face!

The document gave a lot of details on how to properly fight a nightmare demon, but to spare everyone the issue of figuring out how to apply this information, they also provided a spiritual technique that could actually damage them. It was not very strong, but at least it did more harm than Alexander's attacks did, and at a fraction of the energy cost.

Like this, the calm was kept right up until a few hours before the next match. So far, most of the guests at the Inn from Earth didn't actually know what was happening. But as if planned, several panicked guests entered the Inn at the same time. They tripped and tumbled as they ran towards those they knew. Unable to be discreet in their mental condition, they shouted 'war' when they finally saw their compatriots.

In but a few minutes, news spread. The guests that arrived didn't know the global situation, but when enough of them got together and told similar stories, it became apparent that the issue was widespread. Fortunately, it seemed that so far cities were being occupied and put under martial law, and there were no reports of widespread massacres. But the lack of information and abundance of over-imagination caused panic.

At this point, despite his own agitated state, Lex had to intervene. Honestly, he was feeling a little annoyed at the family heads for not addressing the people from Earth who were at the Inn, but it didn't matter. They were caught up in their own world.

"Please, be calm," a warm yet firm voice washed over the citizens of Earth. Somehow, Lex had figured out how to give targeted announcements, so only Earthlings were hearing his voice right now.

From Ragnar, who was cultivating, to those who were asleep, to Sophia, who had not left her son's side, they all heard the voice.

"It appears that your planet has come under conflict. Such a time of difficulty is dreaded by all, but as citizens of your planet, it is also your responsibility to shape the destiny of your planet. But at the same time, how can you fearlessly face the future if you are concerned for your loved ones? For the people of Earth, the Midnight Inn will offer great discounts to provide you and your loved one's safety and security, so long as the conflict remains. Please, if you think you or yours are in danger, do not hesitate to bring them to the Inn."

The announcement was short and direct, and delivered the message well enough. Immediately, most of them realized the security and safety the Inn could provide and started returning to Earth to fetch their families. The 100 students from Troy academy felt scared, but surprisingly handled the information better than most adults. It made sense, their regular lives weren't exactly normal either. Actually, it suddenly occurred to Lex that some of them might be kids of the people leading this worldwide revolution, which is exactly why they were sent here - for the security, or to be spies.

As much as Lex hated the feeling that he was simply doing this to fulfill the refugee quest, the truth was that he genuinely wasn't. Previously, he was so concerned about his own family that he forgot about the quest. But the fact that he remembered now was good enough.

One thing he might need to address later was housing for the refugees if the conflict lasted longer than the Midnight Games. For now, there was temporary housing due to the event panel, but once the event ended, that would go away. It seemed like he needed to save more MP, just in case.

It was at this time he also thought of his friends in New York. The fact that he couldn't reach his family was one matter, but those in New York were still within reach.

Lex was not indecisive at all this time around. Deep down, he felt like maybe he was just looking for an excuse to not be logical and just return to Earth. But if an excuse was what he needed, his friend's safety gave him just that. He had to at least check on them. After all, as odd as it may be, despite their short time knowing each other, Lex thought of Larry as a good friend.

He returned to his room and donned the damaged armor he'd bought before going to Nibiru last time, and wore a hoodie on top of it. He ensured the safety was on before hiding the Heavy harley in the back of his pants like in the movies. As uncomfortable as it was, he dealt with it. Making sure he had all the items he needed one last time, he was ready. The next game would start in a few hours, he should be back by then, but if he weren't he told Mary to start without him.

With that, he disappeared from his room and returned to Earth.