

## **Innkeeper 161**

### The Innkeeper

#### Chapter 161: Not suspicious enough

Lex did not know exactly what to expect when he returned. A part of him expected to land in the middle of a war-torn battleground, with buildings half destroyed and bullets flying in the air. Maybe he expected the city to be under lockdown. Maybe he was thinking he would see soldiers pushing innocent civilians around, and a band of resistance fighters made up from civilians fighting back.

The fanciful stories he had filled his head with were many, but the one thing he was not expecting at all was for everything to be normal. Though it was early in the day, people could be seen walking around the streets casually. Some were walking their dogs, others were sitting on benches and reading books. The wind raised a few skirts, a few men slammed cabs and yelled 'I'm walking here' and a few other, completely standard and not at all stereotypical everyday things happened.

At first, Lex was amazed. Then he frowned. War was definitely happening - the system had confirmed it and so many guests had confirmed it, so how was everything so normal? Completely underwhelmed, Lex walked into a cafe and tried to eavesdrop on nearby conversations. If anything significant had happened, the people would be talking about it.

Significant news there was, just not what Lex was expecting. The people were talking about the unusual internet outage that was apparently affecting everyone. News channels were not reporting on it and no official statement was being released. Just a single hour of blocked internet access could send various companies into massive loss in this city, yet somehow everyone was okay with it.

Lex took out his phone and turned it on to see if he was getting any signals. He didn't know how else he would contact Larry, or anyone else, for that matter. Contrary to what Lex expected, his phone was working just fine. He was about to try an international call to his family when he started receiving messages.

The first was from Bluebird:

Until further notice, the Bluebird portal will not be available. Please contact your nearby Bluebird office if you need any help.

The second, again, was from Bluebird:

A curfew is now in effect. All cultivators must remain home unless provided a pass. Any cultivator discovered breaking curfew, or without their Bluebird token, will be detained pending a treason trial.

The third was from Larry:

Your phone is powered off, but you should get this if you turn your phone back on. Things are not as they seem. Be safe. Contact me if you need help.

Subtly, Lex nodded. The suspicious behavior was more inline with what he expected. Based on what he had heard so far, the ICPAs were locking down their regions of control and were a part of the war. Since all of New York was so thoroughly under Bluebirds control, they probably didn't need to use soldiers to snatch control. They just needed to maintain as much normalcy as they could manage until the global situation stabilizes.

Lex tried calling his family, but the call would not connect. He tried calling Larry, and the phone was off. He tried calling Larry again, but this time on a second number he had given Lex to use in case of emergencies.

The call went through, but after it was picked up, there was complete silence. No one on the other side said anything.

"Is anyone there?" Lex asked hesitantly.

"Lex? Is that you?" Larry asked, his voice easily identifiable. But before Lex could answer, he said, "Don't say anything. I'm sending you a location. Come alone. Don't bring your token."

After receiving the text, Lex followed the directions only to find himself standing before a dollar store in uptown. He explored the store and could not find Larry, so he tried calling again, but the phone was powered off.

At this point, Lex frowned. It was dangerous to randomly roam around the city, especially since he did not have his token. He could still recall how his previous boss had immediately identified him as a

cultivator. They had to get extremely close for her to notice, but then again, she wasn't actively searching for anyone, either.

Just as he was wondering what to do, a man in a hoodie with the hood down approached him.

"Hey Lex, follow me," Larry said in a hushed voice, and quickly led him to an apartment building nearby. Silently climbing up seven flights of stairs, they reached the room where Larry was hiding. As soon as they entered, Larry activated some formation he had in the room and let out an audible sigh of relief.

"Damn, this thing is so hot," he said as he took off his hoodie.

"What's with all the drama?" Lex asked casually. As per usual, Larry's face was covered in bruises - probably from working in that club where he fought people.

"Yeah, I have some bad news for you, buddy. By the way, turn your phone off while we talk. I'm carrying a signal jammer on me, so no one could have followed us through tracking your phone, but better safe than sorry."

"Is your bad news about the war?"

Larry paused, clearly surprised to hear Lex.

"You already know?"

"A little. What do you know?"

"Not much, but... a lot of people I know got 'picked up' by Bluebird. I haven't heard from them since. Then a contact of mine, an old... associate of my family, told me about the war. I don't even know who is fighting who, but it must be pretty bad. All markets, like the one that I took you to last time, have been shut down. Considering the shutdown in communication and the curfew... I've never seen it this bad. I've tried a hundred things, but I haven't been able to connect to the net."

As Lex followed Larry into the apartment, he realized it was nothing like the beat-up and worn down building it was hiding in. There were computers EVERYWHERE! Wires crisscrossed the apartment, though bolted to the floor or walls so as to not get in the way. There were at least a dozen different monitors, all showing different things.

Lex was not a tech illiterate person, but this... was even beyond him.

"Listen, do you have any way of contacting anyone abroad?"

"Currently, no. The moment I'm able to connect to the net, I'll be able to. But god knows when that'll be."

Lex took a look at things and finally felt a sense of relief. At least his friend was okay. He spent a couple hours chatting with Larry, finding out as much as he could about Bluebirds actions. They had been very discreet, but certain forces had been targeted by them as far as Larry knew. If any fights broke out, they were handled swiftly and efficiently, so that no news had spread so far. They were keeping the peace for the general public right now, but who knew how long this would go on.

"Well, I'm glad you're safe Larry, I just came to check up on you. You're doing a good job staying low-key, but if you get in trouble, use this."

Lex handed him a golden key, preparing to explain to him how to use it, but Larry froze when he laid eyes on it.

"That... that's... that's the golden key!" he exclaimed. "It's the key that's been all over the net! There have been so many conspiracy theories in such a short time... don't tell me they're real?"

"Conspiracy theories?" Lex asked, confused.

"Yes, if the net were working, I'd show you. They say that such keys have been passing around top government officials and high leveled cultivators recently. No one knows for sure what they do, but those conspiracy theorists claim the keys can take you to a secret society that only the rich and powerful are a part of. They claim that our world is ruled by families, hidden in the dark, who have been using these keys to signify members of their secret society. Don't... don't tell me this is real!"

Lex chuckled, and despite all that was happening, suddenly felt amused. He did not realize that one day he would become a source of conspiracy theories. The funny thing was, those theorists were remarkably close to the truth about many things.

"I don't know about all of that, but if you get into trouble with Bluebird or anyone else, break the key.

Despite Larry asking multiple times, Lex didn't say what the key did. At this point, it wasn't for safety or secrecy purposes, he just wanted to see the surprised look on Larry's face when he used the key for the first time. Of course, he would still not tell anyone he was the Innkeeper. But now that the keys were circulating on Earth, it was much safer for him to hand them out to people.

As he walked out of Larry's building, chuckling as he thought about how Larry would react, he did not notice two men staring at him.

"The variable has left. The target is alone in the building. What are your orders?" one of them said into an earpiece. After getting the reply, the man nodded to his partner and the two of them entered Larry's building, each carrying a gun.

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Chapter 162: Take a shower

Other than Larry, there were a few other people Lex wanted to check up on, but meeting everyone in person would take too much time. He gave everyone a call and left a few voice messages, all the while making his way to a park. Finding a remote area, he hid between some bushes and teleported back to the Inn.

His mood was somewhat better now and only improved when he learnt that someone had completed his commission for information about London. He wasted no time and retrieved the report, expecting a situation similar to New York.

But the situation in the UK was actually quite different. Even though the council had vast influence, basically feeding off of the original connections, they could not influence everyone. As the Queen's place of residence, her palace was full of her closest followers. In many places around the world, armed forces were directly neutralized by turning their own defensive formations against them by spies, yet the Queen's guard was exceptionally well trained.

Even under such strenuous circumstances, they put up a fierce fight and escaped. The palace was destroyed and a few other fights broke out all across the nation as the elite guards made their escape.

The good news, for Lex anyway, was that while many soldiers and cultivators suffered casualties, there were minimal civilian casualties, and those too were only near the palace. The bad news was that the entire nation was in a strict lockdown. The official news being spread to the public was that there was an assassination attempt on the royal family orchestrated by terrorists and rival nations.

A decent number of those experts had escaped and there was no information of where they might be, so it could not be determined when the situation would change. But since his family had nothing to do with any such matters, he felt that they were probably safe.

With that stone off his shoulders, he suddenly realized how effective the Inn could be at collecting information.

"Hey Mary, can I ask you for a favor?"

"What is it?"

"Can you keep an eye on my guests? I'm thinking of building a news collection service, and need someone who would be good at something like that. But I need someone with a real knack for something like this, as I'll want him to collect sensitive information in every world we connect to."

Before Mary could answer, the familiar ting of a quest rang in Lex's mind.

New Quest: Find an employee who can run a news service

Quest time limit: none

Quest Reward: Midnight News building

Remarks: For the first time, the host has taken a decent initiative. Now take the initiative to take a bath!

After a long, long time, Lex lost his self-control, and his lip once again twitched! The twitch! It had returned! Lex could not help it, it was a reflex to the lethal remarks of the system. What embarrassed him the most was... he had been so busy lately that... he forgot, and it had indeed been a few days since he showered.

Taking in a deep breath, he pushed down his agitation and looked back at Mary.

"I'll keep an eye out. For something like there, there are a few races that are better suited than others. It'll be your luck if you run across one, and you'll be luckier to find one suited to work for you. All I can do is pay attention."

"That'll be enough," he remarked.

The new quest reminded Lex that he had quite a few quests racked up, and he had not even checked the reward for the quest to expose the devil's planting trackers on his guests.

He went through the quests list, just as a reminder.

Quests:

1. Prepare an event for your guests to participate in

Status: Ongoing

2. Build a connection to Dunya!

3. Develop a permanent guest district

4. One of your guests wants to use the Inn to host a secret society. Aid your guest.

5. Host refugees

6. Find an employee who can run a news service

Many of these quests could not be completed in the short term. The permanent district was too difficult for him at the moment, and the world Dunya he had encountered while using a Golden Ticket was too dangerous for the current him. The secret society meeting he had decided to complete after the Midnight Games ended, for the refugees, he had already spread the word and as far as finding an employee was concerned, it was up to luck.

Shaking his head, he decided to look at his quest reward. Surprisingly, it was pretty good!

Security room:

As a prominent establishment, the Midnight Inn must ensure the safety of its guests. But as an Inn for the entire universe, even a trillion guests at a time are too few. The security room can be used by the Inns security guards to monitor malicious intent among the guests, to protect them as well as prevent them from making trouble!

This was an incredible, incredible reward, probably one of the best and most practical he'd received yet. It improved his mood tremendously.

Lex made a plan on how to install it and what to do about security now that he had a decent amount of MP, but all that could wait till after the games.

Speaking of which, a quick scan of the Inn let him know that the second game had already begun. Not for all parties though, only for Pramod and 99 of his zombies. They'd entered the map 2 hours early. The secret advantage they had received was invincibility!

For one minute, they would be able to activate the ability to be completely invincible to any and all external influence. This was a tremendous ability that could aid them in attacking as well as defending, but other than themselves, no one knew what the ability was. That made them even more dangerous.

Pramod used the extra time he had gained to alter the terrain. The map this time was the side of a mountain covered by a forest, with a castle carved into the mountain at a certain point. The node was, naturally, inside the castle. Pramod immediately controlled the zombies to start cutting down trees and building various walls and digging various ditches. He could not do anything too insidious, as all the guests outside could see everything on the screens, but still, he manipulated the environment to give himself an advantage.

At first, Lex thought of watching the match outside again, but then disregarded it. The system could take care of everything and at least this did not need his supervision. With that, he had some free time on his hands. Now it was time to do something he had been putting off for a while.

Lex lay down on his bed and summoned the bottle of Purified Wraiths blood. This little reward would help him strengthen his soul, but also put him to sleep for a few hours. Now, more than ever, he was anxious to raise his cultivation. Watching a 17 year old Foundation cultivator was only a part of the motivation. As cliché as it sounded, he realized how little power he really had. Sure, normally on Earth, he could survive and thrive with his skills by earning a decent living. But that was only if he operated inside a working system that governed society. During exceptional times, such as war, when that system could not influence anything, he was powerless. Strong personal connections and strong personal strength were the things he decided would help him.

Without waiting anymore, he gulped down the Wraiths blood and lay down in bed. Sleep did not suddenly come to him, but slowly and steadily his mind slowed, until he fell asleep without even realizing when.

Just as Lex fell asleep, at the front of Midnight Manor, a light flashed and a bleeding Larry appeared. His body was covered completely by a thin layer of metal that rippled as he fell to the ground. It was as if his skin was made of mercury.

But despite the metal skin, several gunshot wounds littered his body. His legs, especially, had nearly a dozen bleeding holes in them, though somehow he was not bleeding as much as he should have been.

He looked around for a moment, confused and muddle headed, but could not understand where he was.

A moment later a few panicked A.I.s approached him, followed by Velma.

"Dear guest, you are gravely wounded. Do you give me permission to take you to the recovery room?"

Larry looked at her, and nodded, only hearing the word 'recovery', but then collapsed right after.

"Quickly, call Gerard! We cannot let a guest die on our watch!"

The A.I.s scrambled to do as they were told, and Larry quickly found himself in a recovery pod. Just by happenstance, as he was being taken in, Marlo was exiting another room, and happened to see his bleeding student. His eyes went red with fury.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 163: Smoking hot

On Earth, two pale looking agents stood in Larry's room, leaning against furniture for support. Bullet casings littered the ground, along with bits and pieces of broken furniture. Clearly, there had been an intense fight here, and the two armed men did not hold an overwhelming advantage.

"We have a problem," one of the men said, after calling someone. "The target used an unknown item and escaped. But he suffered multiple gunshot wounds so he should not have gotten far."

"Search the area and see if you can find a trail. Have someone waiting at nearby hospitals as well. If you can't... Do you have any pictures or the person the target was just with?"

"Yes."

"Send the picture to Bluebird and put out an arrest warrant. If we can't find him, his friends will have to do."

"Got it," the man answered and closed the phone. But instead of searching for Larry like he had been instructed, the man threw himself on a nearby sofa to recuperate.

"Aren't we supposed to look for him?" the man's partner asked.

"Are you crazy? What if we actually end up finding him? I don't want to fight that crazy maniac again. Pretty soon, this assignment will be someone else's problem. Make sure to forward the pictures to Bluebird. And check the kids' fridge for some drinks. I could use one about now."

The partner breathed a sigh of relief, then walked towards the fridge.

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As the hours passed by, the other guests noticed that the behavior of the guests from Earth changed dramatically. They had long stopped betting, and none of them were as jovial as before. Soon the empire got word that a civil war had erupted on Earth. This was bad for them as it would probably affect the number of participants Earth would send to the games.

Just as Anthony was about to send someone to the family heads to discuss if their cooperation would be affected, someone by the name of Lee showed up. He introduced himself as a member of the new council that was overlooking Earth. He discussed new terms that were entirely different and less stringent. Anthony didn't care one way or another, but said the agreement would depend on performance. And thus, the soldiers who were participating in the games had switched allegiance, but other than some of their superiors, they had no idea.

Eventually, the second match started completely, and was much more intense than the first round. Many of the guests from Earth had stopped watching, as watching such dangerous combat only made them fear what was happening at home. But that did not reduce the number of guests, however, as by now the empire had distributed the golden keys amongst their staff on all three planets in the Vegus System, as well as the natives with a considerable amount of contributions. A large batch of keys was also being sent to the Command Carrier.

So, for the first time in centuries, residents from all three planets of the Vegus system had an opportunity to meet. Yet despite their common origin, their societies had developed differently and they did not have much to talk about. The only common thing they shared was that they all thoroughly enjoyed watching zombies die on the big screens!

As a result, the Earthlings filled the distant corners of the Inn to get away from the noise as they hid and waited for news from home, and the rest filled the coliseum seats. All of this, accompanying the various army camps, made the Inn as crowded as an amusement park.

But Lex knew none of this as he slept. But it was not a deep, restful sleep. His body heated up despite the ambient temperature being quite cool, and soon he was covered in sweat. His face was entirely red, and soon, white smoke started coming out of his nose and ears. The smell of something burning filled the air, but no one was around to notice.

Along with Lex's sweat, dark-colored filth came out but did not have a chance to accumulate as it was quickly burnt away.

Mary watched Lex nervously, unaware if this was a typical reaction to the medicine or if the devils really had done something to it. But whatever the case may be, she could only watch.

Things continued like that for nearly six hours before Lex finally woke up. He was expecting to feel amazing, which is how he usually felt after getting stronger, but the reality was the exact opposite.

Not only did he not feel stronger, Lex felt incredibly weak. He felt wet from all the sweat, but thirsty at the same time. His body felt drained, as if he had starved for days.

"Water," he murmured to Mary in a hoarse voice, as his mind was currently not clear enough to mentally summon it himself.

When he finally started drinking, it was like he was sipping from the well of life! Strength immediately started returning to him, and his mind started clearing up. That's when he noticed that his room looked a little foggy, as if a smoke machine had been running for hours. But he could not mind that as the stench from his own body nearly incapacitated him. He stumbled his way to the restroom where he lay in a tub and turned on the water.

It took him nearly an hour more before he finally cleaned up and all his exhaustion left him.

"Do you feel better?" Mary asked, now that he was finally recovered. "Can you tell if the medicine worked?"

"Not really," Lex said, frowning. "I feel about the same as before I drank it. Let me check my status."

Name: Lex Williams

Age: 23

Sex: Male

Cultivation Level: Regal Embrace Body Tempering Stage 3

Health: Suboptimal (enlarged brain tumor), mild dehydration, mild starvation

Midnight Points: 1,331,530

Remarks: Occasionally, decent people also brush their teeth after cleaning up with a shower. Just saying.

He was happy to see he had earned some more MP while he slept, but there was no information on the status of his soul. Well, at least there was nothing seriously wrong with him except bad breath, apparently.

He summoned food directly into his apartment and donned the Host Attire so he could check up on what had happened at the Inn while he was asleep. Immediately, he noticed the massive crowd. Not only were the refugees - which were not too many actually compared to the rest - but new guests piling in from God knows where.

Originally, Lex had planned to expand the Inn after the games were over. But now it seemed like it was something he could not push off for too long. He did not like the massive crowd. It was also affecting the wildlife that he had at the Inn, as all of them had gone to the forest to hide. That's when he noticed the littering! Were people actually littering at his Inn?

Immediately he passed an order to his guards to clean up, and informed all his staff as well as holograms of a new rule. If someone littered, the first time they would get a warning from the hologram, but the second time onwards they would get a fine!

It seemed like it was high time he upgraded the Inn and its capabilities. He could not keep waiting for the system to upgrade the Inn for him with rewards. He opened the Midnight Market to check how much it would cost to increase the size of the Inn. Considering that the system would literally be creating land out of nothing, the price was a reasonable 100 acres of land for 1,000,000 MP.

Lex didn't immediately go for the upgrade, though. He scrolled through all the available options. Buying buildings and A.I.s was just one aspect of the Midnight market. It also provided various other options.

One very interesting option that caught Lex's eye was a one time upgrade to the Mystery trial. The upgrade would not benefit the guests, however, as Lex was the intended beneficiary for this upgrade. Since the Mystery trials purpose was to refine the users strongest skill, the upgrade would allow Lex to add certain search parameters. Whenever a guest would use the Mystery trial and their skill fell into one of those parameters, Lex would be notified. This was an excellent way of scouting talents.

The upgrade only cost 50,000 MP! Lex bought it without any hesitation and started entering the parameters. The first one he entered was for a chef. The second one was for a musician. If Z were here to watch as Lex kept entering his parameters, he would be reminded of a certain anime about pirates. Why else was he looking for a sharpshoo- eh, no, why else was he searching for a marksman? And a swordsman. And a historian. Even Mary was confused as she watched him enter meteorologist. The climate at the Inn was under his control, why did he need a weatherman?

The Innkeeper

Chapter 164: Fruit knife

In one of the Recovery pod rooms, a man and a woman stood across from each other. The woman was glaring at the man, who did not seem to care.

"No, do it yourself," Sophia finally said.

"Sophia, don't piss me off. Go bring my mother to the Inn," he said sternly.

"Why do you even care about them? They've used you enough. And even if you care, why should I care? Let them die in the war for all I care."

"If my mother dies, I'll go down to Earth and kill your father."

"YOU!" Sophia roared, before attacking Marlo head on. But her attack came to nothing. There was no loud explosion, no devastating spread of spirit energy, nothing. Her hand was simply stuck in the air right before Marlo.

In his room, Lex was alerted to the outbreak of the fight, but when he checked who it was, he decided to ignore it. He would send Marlo a bill if anything broke.

"I've already crossed that realm. You'll have to up your game if you want to continue fighting with me," Marlo said with a teasing smirk.

"What?" Sophia was stunned, and for a moment, a flash of joy filled her eyes before anger and bitterness clouded them. Finally, instead of saying anything, Sophia disappeared. She had gone back to Earth to 'invite' her mother-in-law.

Marlo took a look at his son, then left the room. He had asked nurse Jubilation about the details regarding Larry, but due to privacy rules, she told him nothing. Finally, she agreed to have someone inform him once Larry woke up. Satisfied with the result, he finally left the building and located two extremely popular people at the Inn.

They were not members of the Inn staff, no; they were Chen and Lily. After conducting a trade with the Morrison family, they gained enough capital to start their own business back at Vegus Minima. Of course, their interest did not lay in mundane and paltry things such as money, they wanted power and revenge. It just so happened that earning money would make that path easier, so they started a little private business at the Inn. They started selling zombie cores. Of course, all trades were conducted through the guild room.

Marlo arrived to see the siblings sitting together watching the match. They were watching the impenetrable Jotun soldiers as they lay siege to the castle. They still had not suffered a single death, it was remarkable.

"I need zombie cores," Marlo said, walking up to them. "Tier 5 Zombie cores, as many as you have."

The siblings were startled by the sudden order, then broke out into a grin. They had a big client.

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"I must say, your choices are a little confusing," Mary said as she saw Lex enter a parameter for a detective into the Mystery trial.

"It's to build a reserve of candidates for when we need them. I have an idea for what I want the Midnight Inn to be like. It has to be a lot bigger, and with a lot more services. To be honest, there are hotels even on Earth that can host more guests than us. They have water parks and shopping malls, spas and gyms, and so many more things I can't even imagine. So we have to be open-minded. In fact, I was thinking that after the war on Earth is over, I'd go interview a few hotel managers in Lax Vegas and Dubai. Get a little professional with things."

"Yes, I get that, that is indeed a good idea. What I don't get is... why do you need 'cosplay enthusiasts'?"

"It's complicated, don't worry about it."

"Alright," said Mary hesitantly. She was really starting to get concerned about how much the tumor was affecting Lex.

When Lex finally ran out of ideas for skills to look for, he once again started searching the Midnight Market for other upgrades. That's when he came across the upgrade for his beloved Butter Knife. Currently, it was limited to a one-hit-kill to anyone at Foundation realm and below, but that was too weak for Lex now.

The upgrade that was available for 100,000 MP was an ingredient that Lex was supposed to dip the knife in. It would then be upgraded to Self defense fruit knife, and would be capable of one hitting a Golden Core cultivator. Unfortunately, that was still far from sufficient, but it would do.

Once again, Lex did not hesitate and purchased the ingredient, which appeared in front of him, in a neatly wrapped silver cover. On the cover, a few words were printed: 'I can't believe it's not butter'.

Lex chuckled and stabbed the block with the self-defense butter knife. The knife started glowing and completely submerged itself in the block. The process would be complete in a few hours.

Just as he was about to spend more time looking at more options, Mary appeared and said, "There are a couple of things that require your attention at the Inn."

"Oh, what happened?"

"First, there is a guest in a Recovery pod with a unique constitution. The pod is not able to heal him, and if nothing is done, soon, the guest will die. Second, there is a guest by the name of Miranda who wants to meet you."

Both those news' took Lex by surprise. It was rare that the RP was unable to heal someone, and would usually be the result of a wound such as that of Rafael. He also had an idea of who Miranda might be. She was one of the representatives that spoke with the family heads. Lex himself had already thought of speaking with her, but he felt that he would not be able to stop himself from asking questions about London. That would not be inline with the persona of the Innkeeper.

"I'll check on the RP first," he said, before teleporting directly to the recovery pod in question. He was startled to see an unconscious Larry covered in bullet wounds. He quickly checked Larry's status.

Name: Larry Dershaw

Condition:

Multiple gunshot wounds

Ruptured kidney

Multiple fractures

Crushed knee

Severe blood loss

Blocked blood vessels

Non-organic living tissue damaged

Report:

Guest has a unique constitution mixing his organic tissue with spiritual metals. The Recovery pod is able to aid the body in healing organic matter, but spiritual metal is required to completely heal. Please provide any kind of spiritual metal to facilitate the body's healing.

Lex was greatly confused at seeing such a strange requirement, but also relieved that the conditions could be easily met. In fact, he did not even need to go look for spiritual metal elsewhere. He summoned his Heavy harleys magazine and started popping the physical rounds into the recovery pod. By the sixth bullet, the pod no longer needed any more metal and started incorporating the metal into Larry's body. Of course, the useless materials in the bullets were pushed out of the pod.

He had only just started relaxing, thinking that the situation on Earth wasn't so bad, and then this happened. His concern for his family came back.

Seeing that Larry's condition was stable, Lex left to go see Miranda. It was time to see what this person wanted with him.

When he teleported to the garden behind the manor where Miranda was currently sitting, conversing with her partners, he expected to see evil incarnate. He was ready to see the face of someone he would hate. Instead, he saw a pale-looking woman with dark circles under her eyes and a frail voice. Yet despite her seemingly tired state, her clothes were neat and clean, without a single extra crease. He checked her status.

Name: Miranda Charles

Age: 31

Sex: Female

Cultivation Details: Foundation Peak

Midnight Inn Prestige Level: 1

Condition: Severely damaged meridians, unable to cultivate further without treatment

Remarks: A revolutionary with a splash of pumpkin spice

Ignoring the remark that made no sense to him, her damaged meridians may have explained why she was so exhausted despite her deep cultivation. Maybe she was also working a lot.

Miranda and her partners were startled by the Innkeepers' arrival, but then again, they had been informed that he would join them shortly.

"Greetings guests, I am the Innkeeper. I was informed you were looking for me. I hope you have not found any of our facilities lacking."

"Not at all sir, not at all," Miranda said, standing up to greet the Innkeeper. "I hope I am not being rude. I have heard many things about you, and wanted an opportunity to introduce myself, and hoped that we may be able to work together in a few endeavors."

Miranda was slightly nervous. She had heard many things about the Innkeeper, both from the council's spies and from the many guests she had met here. The scope of the Inn completely overwhelmed her and opened her to a whole new world. It made her realize just how insignificant Earth really was. It also made her realize how much time and potential the five families had wasted by stagnating. She would not make the same mistake. She would bring Earth to a new dawn.

She did not know that while she was belittling the family heads, they were meeting with Adrian, who was previously the observer assigned to them, and had come with a message from the lady they answered to.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 165: Sponsored by...

Lex, as the Innkeeper, maintained a warm smile as he gestured to Miranda to take a seat. Her associates also greeted Lex, but made it clear with their body language that they would leave all the talking to her.

"So, Miranda, how can I help you?" the Innkeeper said, taking a seat on a chair he summoned out of thin air.

"Let me introduce myself first," she said as she fixed her posture, trying to appear as proper as possible despite her apparent exhaustion. "My name is Miranda, as you already know, and I am a leading member of the Council of New Order, as well as their foreign relations director. Due to the gross negligence, stagnation of progress and greed of the previous rulers of Earth, we have taken it upon ourselves to lead our planet towards a brighter future."

"Yes, I am aware," Lex said softly, "of the changes happening on Earth. I'm hosting quite a few refugees at my Inn at the moment, all escaping from your planet."

"I heard about that," she said, letting out a defeated and exasperated sigh. "I want to thank you for looking out for our citizens. After decades of planning and build up, we've made the transition of power as peaceful as we possibly could. We have to thank your Inn for that as well. Had the family heads not left Earth long enough for us to make preparations, the battle to lure them into a trap would have been extremely bloody. But still, as much as we want things to happen peacefully, not everything goes according to plan. Some disturbances are unavoidable. Still, things should calm down within the week."

"I, naturally, have no opinion on how you do things on your planet. I am simply running an Inn." Lex smiled at her, his warm and calm demeanor relaxing her tense nerves. Then he continued to say, "of course, some of my staff members are from Earth. I'm sure they may have some concerns."

"Who are they? I'll make sure to take special care of them," Miranda replied suddenly, then realized her question might not be completely appropriate. But she, as well as the other guests, could not

differentiate between the A.I.s and actual employees. Other than Leo, who obviously ran a gaming den with games from Earth, other employees' origins were a mystery to most.

"Their identity is their privacy, but I will let them know to contact you if they have concerns."

Miranda nodded, as if to assure the Innkeeper that she would take the utmost care if any of his employees approached her.

"While we are still finishing dealing with... unstable factors, it is still true that we have assumed control of most of Earth. As such, I was hoping to cooperate with the Inn on certain matters."

"Please elaborate. I will do what I can."

"The first matter I would like to discuss is if it is possible to ban certain people from entering the Inn. There are many criminals and terrorists who have taken advantage of the momentary chaos to wreak havoc, and may escape to the Inn. It would be extremely detrimental to everyone if they stay at large."

"Miss Miranda, that is impossible," Lex replied immediately and firmly. "The Midnight Inn is open to all so long as they can pay our nominal charges and adhere to the rules of the Inn itself. The Inn does not interfere in the civil or political matters of other planets, and will also not adjust its rules according to the wishes of other planets."

Just as he finished his small yet clear rejection, a loud crashing noise attracted the duo's attention. They turned to see some guests on the side, ardently watching the second match. The beasts had demolished one of the walls of the castle and were charging in. Blood, fire and chaos filled the screen as various races combated the zombies.

"Of course, that does not mean the Inn will stay unresponsive if antagonized," Lex quickly added. What was an all out war if not interfering in civil and political matters? He mentally wiped some sweat off his forehead.

Miranda was disappointed but not surprised. It took her quite a while to accept the facts when she learnt about the Inn and other civilizations, but she had adjusted her mentality now and knew that in front of those other giants, Earth was nothing.

"I understand. Then I would like to move onto my next request. I would like to host an expo at your Inn. The culture part of your event already gave a lot of people a preview of Earth, and these games are a good opportunity to show off our military. But I would like to host a more detailed event focusing on everything Earth has to offer in search of anyone who might want to invest in the development of Earth. I was hoping that you would help with spreading invitations to the expo as well."

Her request truly took Lex by surprise. He could not believe he had heard correctly, despite the awesome power of the Host Attire. She was looking for... sponsors... for Earth?

"Can you elaborate on what you are trying to achieve? So that I can understand the scope of the event."

"I've spent some time getting to know some of the guests and the powers behind them at the Inn. Giants such as the Empire naturally would not be interested, but I'm sure there are merchants or businesses who would be interested in sponsoring Earth. Of course, we would not be selling equity, but perhaps they may want resources or the labor force or have some manufacturing done on our planet. I'm sure we have something that someone wants. The premise would remain that all cooperation be done via the Inn. We would never invite danger to our planet for some profit. I've prepared a rough list of the kinds of things we would be willing to accept as sponsorships."

With that she handed Lex a document listing, in great detail and with much specificity, the kinds of things Miranda wanted. In the end, the document also stated that they would be open to receiving other offers. If nothing else, at least this woman was well organized.

"There would be no issue in holding such an event, but it would have to wait till the Midnight Games are over. I can start advertising for your event as soon as you submit a down payment. My suggestion, however, is that you wait till you have a complete grasp on your planet before you do any such thing. It would be embarrassing if interested parties arrive to attend, but you are not in a condition to host."

"Of course, of course, we would also need to take of many things on our end to host such an event if we want to display our best attributes. Now that I know such an option is available, I will begin work on it as soon as I return."

"Was that everything, or did you have more things you wanted to discuss?"

"Just a few more things, if you have the time. I wanted..."

The meeting with Miranda truly went on much longer than Lex expected. But as much as he disliked her for helping to start the war, he truly did benefit from meeting with her. She bought 50,000 bottles of Botlam Dew, 10,000 Bath towels (removes negative statuses such as poison, paralysis paste, petrification, tracking powder, bad makeup etc.) and 1000 Travel face wash kits. For a moment, Lex was afraid he might run out. Fortunately, he did not, as there seemed to be no limit on purchases for these items.

The profit from one bottle of Dew was 120 MP and 100 MP each for the other items. This one transaction netted Lex 7,100,000 MP! But the joy from the sale was mired by the knowledge that these items were going to the council.

After the meeting ended, Lex checked to see how the game was going. It was almost the end as a wolf, Alexander and Cara together besieged Pramod. Without the advantage of endless spiritual energy fighting the demon was a lot more difficult. It did not help that the technique given by the Empire did not do as much damage as they had promised.

'They'll manage,' Lex told himself as he returned to his room to continue his expansion plan for the Inn, completely missing the moment Pramod finally activated his invincibility. The demon allowed himself to be attacked by the wolf freely before grabbing its neck and breaking it in one swift motion. Wasting no time, the demon grabbed a lance that had fallen on the ground nearby and stabbed towards Alexander. The demon's movements were too swift and his total lack of care for defending against any attacks put the two humans at a disadvantage. Alexander tried to dodge but was unable, and the lance pierced through his stomach and pinned him to the ground.

The teenager yelled in pain, but did not stop for even a second and pushed his body forward to escape the lance going through his body from the other end. Pramod attacked again with endless savagery in his eyes, but suddenly Cara appeared before him and parried his attack. Since the demon was immune to attacks, she did not attack and only defended.

Fortunately she was able to buy Alexander the time he needed to free himself, but now he was wounded and bleeding, and Pramod was invincible. Things did not look good.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 166: Midnight Mountain

The demon grinned at Cara and the teenager, then turned around and sprinted away. Both of them were confused as to why the demon left when it had such an advantage, but given the situation, they were relieved. Alexander was exhausted from the long siege and almost drained of all his spirit energy, relying mostly on his impressive body cultivation. This was an opportunity for him to retreat. Cara, on the other hand, was now free from distractions and ran towards a corridor leading to the chamber with the node in it. It was defended by zombies, of course, but so long as they were not as difficult to deal with as Pramod, she would end this match in a few minutes.

But while they were celebrating, they did not realize that the reason Pramod left them was because he did not take them too seriously. His real goal was the main Jotun force which was nearby. With his invincibility running out, he found his way to the main force and rammed through all of their attacks to reach the center of their ranks.

Then, he withdrew the cursed Quibly heart and crushed it, releasing black toxic juices and fumes. Then, before his invincibility ran out, Pramod quickly escaped. He did not bother looking back at the effects of the artifact that he used, but he knew it would do sufficient damage.

The Midnight games automatically prevented him from bringing in any artifacts at a level greater than what a Foundation expert could use, so it was not enough to destroy the whole army, but it would do its job. For the first time since the games started, the Empire suffered its first casualty. Then it's second. As the numbers started to climb up, Pramod did not look back. A few minutes later, Cara managed to destroy the node with the help of a few beasts and the match was over. The Empire's doctors ran to diagnose their soldiers, but the damage was terrifying. Those that did not immediately die seemed crippled.

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On Earth, yet another council meeting was being held. But this time, instead of an underground bunker, they were holding their meeting in the UN office in Geneva. The holograms did not hide the members' identities, and no one was using voice modulators.

Despite its public location, the meeting was a private one with almost full attendance of the council members. Among the council members, there was a distinction in importance, with five members having greater authority than the rest, but even the lesser members had a voice here. They had to, otherwise how would they fulfill their ambitions.

Currently, they were hearing about the situation in Africa, which was the most stable continent in the world at the moment. The transition of power was as smooth as silk and any opposition had been... diplomatically convinced to change their stance, much to the disappointment of a few warlords.

After this would be Miranda's turn, and everyone was looking forward to the new opportunity she represented. Originally, a lot of members were against her joining the council as she had no real power to bring, but her ingenuity won them over. She could turn any situation to her advantage, and they were now ready to see what advantages she had brought this time.

But the situation suddenly changed when a floating woman appeared in midair. She gave off no aura, so they were not able to tell what level she was at, but getting past so many people and suddenly appearing in front of them was no small feat.

"So this is the Council of New Order," she said with a look of derision. "Such a stupid name, how do you bring yourselves to keep it?"

"Who are you?" one of the holograms suddenly roared. The guards in the room suddenly pointed their guns at her, but then froze. They had lost control of their bodies.

The woman looked at the hologram that screamed at her, then appeared in front of it. She grabbed the hologram by the throat, as if it were a real entity, and lifted it. But somehow, despite how bizarre her actions were, the hologram was lifted into the air, the man clawing at his throat as if to free her hand.

"My name is Fernanda, and I have a message for you all so you better listen silently." She turned to look at the members in the eyes and saw a lot of panic, but she also saw a lot of calm faces.

"My lady, in her everlasting benevolence, has decided not to interfere in your actions. Since you are the people of Earth, and you all want a change in the way things are done, she has allowed you this modicum of control over your fates."

Fernanda's voice was full of disgust and hate, not because her mistress felt that way, but because letting such major changes occur on Earth was a failure on her part. She had looked like a fool in front of her mistress, and wished she could tear the council apart. But of course, she knew better than to do that.

"But there are things you need to understand. The Earth, the moon, the planets that orbit the sun and even the star itself, all of these were a betrothal gift from the young master to the mistress. Since you want change, you can have it. Since you want to reveal cultivators to the public, you may. Since you have ambitions that reach the stars, then reach for them. In how you choose to lead the planet, she will not control you, as she did not control your predecessors.

"But know that everything you do is with the permission of the mistress, and if you cross her line, then a wave of a hand is all it will take to replace you." Fernanda waved her hand and suddenly every member of the council felt themselves choking. The feeling lasted barely a moment, but it was real enough to remember.

"You have one week, you better end your wars within this period. The mistress does not like it when innocents are involved, so don't involve any civilians in the rest of your actions. Settling personal vendettas is acceptable during this period, but there should be no genocide. Remember, the Earth is her gift, so you should not even dream of marring its beauty. Does anyone have any questions?"

Dead silence filled the room as everyone stared at the angry woman. It seemed no one had the courage to do anything else.

Just as she got ready to leave, though, one of the men sitting at the head table stood up.

"Miss Fernanda, it is a pleasure to meet you," the middle-aged man said, his voice as smooth and alluring as a radio show host. "My name is Bernard Brown. I do have some questions, I hope you do not mind answering."

Fernanda glared at him, clearly upset that he spoke up, but she could not continue to ignore her duties.

"I've seen you before, you're that Sam's kid. Sure, ask away."

"Grandchild, actually," he corrected her with a smile, as if he was not admitting to planning parricide. "Thank you for humoring me. Would it be alright if I asked more about this 'mistress'..."

The meeting took a very sharp turn from what everyone had expected.

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Back in his room, Lex finalized his expansion plans. With 8,281,530 MP available to him, there were many things he could do now. No longer delaying the matter, Lex spent 5,000,000 MP on increasing the size of the Inn by 500 acres. There were no massive earthquakes or mystical indications. At a moment's notice, the boundary wall of the Inn expanded out and new land filled in the space. If all that land had been added to one corner instead of the boundaries, it would have been more noticeable, but this would do.

Behind the hills upon which stood the meditation hall Lex raised a mountain that could rival Everest, its peak going high up into the clouds. The singular mountain was nothing but one massive, pointy rock so Lex added layers of extremely fertile, volcanic soil. Then came a layer of fresh, powdered snow.

With another wave of his hand, thousands of coniferous trees started sprouting and in the blink of an eye grew. Like Salt Bae, he sprinkled his hands over the projection of the mountain, and various animals fell from the sky and into the new forests, somehow completely unhurt.

He paused, looked at the projection, and suddenly came up with another idea. He cleared one corner of the mountain with a wave of his hand, as if he were photoshopping an image instead of an actual mountain, then dotted it with only a few obstacles. This would be a ski slope.

Turning back to the other parts of the mountain, he carved out some trails for guests to climb. Naturally, he made sure to add some extremely scenic spots for the climbers to rest or camp, and added a fair share of small ledges for lovers to sit on and whisper corny lines to one another. Alright, a part of him was still just thinking of those two teenagers who came to the Inn for a date.

But he was not done. With the trails carved out, he then planned for the adventurous types, who went where no path led. He filled the mountain with secret caves and tunnels. He hid simple and tiny gifts, such as Botlam Dew, a few MI suits and more, in various corners of the mountain in small chests. He would not tell anyone about these and the guests would have to stumble into them.

He spent a good while perfecting the mountain, or Midnight mountain as it would eventually be called, completely unaware that all the guests in the Inn stood and watched in awe as a mountain appeared out of thin air, and then kept changing, as if being played with by a god.

## The Innkeeper

### Chapter 167: Avallon

Let alone the Earthlings and the Beasts, even Anthony stood in awe. The moment the expansion started, he was startled and sent someone to summon Ragnar. This was thoroughly beyond his scope of understanding, despite his own background.

Loretta watched silently from the window of her room, the mysterious man saying nothing as he saw the changes. Unlike the rest, he was not concerned about the rising mountain and expanding land. His mind was still on that one lapse in behavior the Innkeeper had displayed. Right now, he was only waiting. He had sent some devils to go and investigate the farthest reaches of the known universe. Something had to have startled the Innkeeper, and he needed to know what it was.

In the greenhouse, the Galactic Sovereign turtle turned its head towards the mountain, and then once again shook its head. These were not the kind of trees perfect for such an environment. He'd better go take a look. Little Blue happily followed the turtle, treating it like its father. The gardener, who was still plowing the land, was completely oblivious to changes since his sight was focused on the ground.

Crowds started to gather as they stared up into the skies. Children stopped playing. The gamblers who were wincing at their losses or laughing at their winnings paused to admire the magnificent beauty. But because the mountain was so large and evident, they missed the other changes taking place around the Inn.

Once Lex was satisfied with the mountain, for now, he turned his attention to the next big change he was planning. He turned to the small lake in front of the Recovery room and plucked it from the ground, like a piece of lego. He brought it to the edge of the Inn behind the recovery room, and placed it against the wall. Then, as if he were zooming into a picture, he stretched the projection of the lake. But the projection did not zoom in, instead, the lake became bigger. He pushed the lake in to make it much, much deeper, and then dipped the boundary wall into the lake.

Now it seemed like the boundary wall was running through a much larger lake, splitting off a portion of it for the Inn to enjoy. In its deepest part, the lake could easily accommodate beasts even several times the size of a blue whale. At first he considered covering the lake side with sand - like a beach - but decided against it. Lex didn't like sand. It was coarse and rough and irritating -- and it got everywhere.

Instead, he left the grass. In a corner of a lake, he built a small pier with a dozen or so rowing boats, and nearby created a refreshment stand. He bought a couple more A.I.s to take care of the boats and refreshment, then turned his attention back to the lake.

The lake was made of freshwater, and looked so clear that one could barely tell there was water even there. In a certain corner of the lake he added some corals, then dropped in various small fish. He knew nothing about fish other than how to eat them, so he took the ones that were the smallest sizes and dropped a bunch of them in. They would develop their own ecosystem - probably. He didn't want to add plants underwater, because when he imagined himself swimming in a lake, he hated the plants that would get stuck on his feet.

Then he turned to the forest surrounding the greenhouse. He moved that all the way back to the edge once again, but built a buffer forest in front of it that guests would have to cross to reach the array. He built a few regular rooms near the front of the woods, but changed their appearance to small wooden cabins that looked like they were made of wood from the nearby trees. Of course, then he added a few courtyards and converted them into larger, more sophisticated wooden cabins.

It then occurred to him he could do the same on the mountain. He shaved out one small corner of the mountain and flattened the land, just enough to fit in two small cabins and one big one. Between the three houses, he built a bonfire pit, a dry wood shed, and another shed with supplies for homemade hot chocolate.

Then he did something similar by the lakeside. He did not add too many rooms because he did not like crowding, but just a few were not an issue.

These few changes just covered the edges of the Inn, there was a lot of land in the middle to fill as well. But he did not feel like randomly dropping houses or decorations. He needed to think about what he would do to use the area, without making a mess of it. There was, however, one thing he did have an idea for.

He increased the distance between Midnight Manor and Main street, then built a modest 40 story high rise on the street. With five rooms on each floor, other than the first floor and top floor, that made 190 rooms. He turned the entire top floor into a penthouse and the ground floor there was a marquee, a few restaurants and the lobby.

Such a large building obviously warranted a lot more staff, so he hired 50 more A.I. and after consulting with her, made Velma incharge of all staff.

Lex breathed out an exhausted sigh. He'd suddenly made so many changes in one day, and while he had more ideas, he decided to slow down first. He would see how guests responded to these changes, take care of and fix any issues that may rise up, and then continue his expansion.

He eyed the high rise, and it occurred to him that this would likely be hosting more guests than his manor, and that he would need to name it. Resisting the urge to slap the name Midnight tower onto it, Lex actually spent a little time thinking about it. It was his first high rise, and represented his first changes to the Inn that he did himself without the prompting of the system. It kind of went against what he had been wanting, which was to avoid the vibe of New York, but with literally thousands of people in his grounds, he needed a solution.

It meant a lot to him, and so the name should be special. At the same time, Lex felt that if he named it completely randomly, that would be hilarious. Unable to decide, he looked to Mary and said, "Give the building a name."

"Me?" she asked, surprised. "You want me to name the building?"

"Yeah, why not? You've helped me so much, you should get some credit. Or do you think I should just name it Mary tower?" he asked with a modest smirk.

Unexpectedly, the tiny, floating woman did not react to his joke. She was silent for a few minutes before she finally said, "Name the tower, Avallon. It sounds nice."

"Good name," Lex simply commented, before the name Avallon was spelled out on the front of the tower. The letters that spelled it out were magical, in that anyone who saw them would see them in their native tongue. This was not directed towards making them understand, the Inns translation system would handle that. It was focused on evoking feelings of nostalgia and closeness. Anyone who would see it would be reminded of home.

"It looks nice," she said, her gaze falling softly on the name.

Lex did not notice any peculiarity, his focus was on other things. This little show of power should be enough to build him some more prestige, it was time to meet Miranda again, but as Leo. Yet when he scanned the Inn with his mind to look for her, she wasn't there. He was completely unaware that she had left right after her meeting with him, and missed out on his magnificent performance.

Lex grunted, and instead decided to go meditate and regulate his mood. He also asked Mary to let him know the moment Miranda or any of her two followers returned as Lex wanted to meet with them, but did not notice that the floating woman did not respond.

Soon, he had lost himself trying to meditate, while Mary remained hovering in the air, looking at Avallon.

"It is a good name," she finally uttered, agreeing with Lex, then disappeared.

With both Lex and Mary preoccupied, they missed the scene when Z excitedly dragged Gerard into the Gamers' den and started up an anime called Initial B - an anime filled with mountain racing. Nobody saw the dangerous gleam in Z's eyes, and they missed the burning passion in Gerard's as well. Behind Gerard stood his fleet of golf cart drivers, no longer dressed in the formal attire of the Inn. No, these A.I.s were wearing leather jackets and jeans, with hair styles that defied physics. Z was the one who recommended the styles, and Harry was the one who brought the boy's vision to life.

"The trail is not built for vehicles, we'll never be able to do it," one of Gerard's followers said to the old man.

"Do not doubt my skills," the old man said, a silver light flashing in his eyes. It had been a long time since Lex checked up on his workers, but if he had paid even a little attention to them, he would have noticed that Gerard was already in the Qi training realm, and had awoken special powers.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 168: Missing

Full of determination, Gerard watched a few episodes of Initial B and then walked out. Waiting for him on the street was an old lady with a small child in her hand. She was one of the guests, and had taken a liking to being driven around by Gerard, despite the fact that her Qi training cultivation allowed her to be fit enough to get around on her own.

"Thank you for waiting, mademoiselle," Gerard said to the lady. She had insisted that was how Gerard should address her. Were Gerard familiar with the cultures of Earth, he would have picked up on the fact that such an address was typically for unmarried women, and then may have wondered why the

lady made a point to let him know. But since he was unfamiliar, he did not respond. The lady, however, was undeterred - she was not beyond being more forward if she needed to be.

"It was no trouble at all. Are we all set?"

"Indeed, mademoiselle, we are. Please, climb aboard my barouche-landau, and I shall take you to your destination."

Barouche-landau is what she called his golf cart, and eventually Gerard started copying her. He helped the lady climb into the golf cart and, once he settled them in, sat on the driver's seat. A silver light shone in his eyes when he grabbed onto the steering wheel, and a similar silver light coated the tyres. Releasing a handbrake that should not have existed on a golf cart, Gerard accelerated at speeds that rivaled a regular car.

With the wind flowing through his silver hair and the melodic laughter of a femme fatale accompanying him, Gerard was ready to drive fast and drive furiously.

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Lex ended his meditation after nearly an hour, but there was no update. He did some exercise, ate some food, took another shower, and did everything else he could think of to fill the time, but neither Miranda nor anyone else that followed her came back to the Inn. At this point, Lex was nearing his limits of self-control.

He decided to go to sleep, and if they did not appear by morning, then he would go find someone else to help him check up on his family. Reason told him he should not connect anyone to his Leo identity as it would be dangerous for him in the future, but he no longer cared.

In truth, the distraction from worrying about his own family was causing him to miss out on many things. He missed Ragnar coming back to the Inn, and hearing about the changes that had happened before his eyes. He also missed Ragnar telling Anthony that they had new orders and would be leaving the Vegus system right after this war and that someone else would take over.

He missed the increasing number of devils who were coming and going from the Inn. Many of them were reporting to the mysterious devil accompanying Loretta, but many of them came randomly from unknown places. Unaware or uncaring of the things that happened before, many of those devils caused multiple problems. Well, they tried to cause problems. When Lex's guards took care of matters, they would stop and detain the devils because Lex had ordered them not to kill.

In the one instance Lex's bodyguard had to step in, he destroyed the devil's soul and handed the body over to the Sovereign Galactic turtle. Unexpectedly, the bodyguard and the turtle had developed a good friendship.

That did not present a long-term solution to the number of devils entering the Inn, however. One may wonder why so many devils were coming in. The truth was, the devils had access to teleportation portals that could not be replicated by the Jotun Empire. Using those portals, they could travel far and wide, which is how they managed all their various demon farms. As a result of those portals, the golden keys had been spread far and wide across the universe already, though not all demons understood the perceived background of the Inn.

Lex also missed all the joy of his guests. He missed the beasts diving into the lake and relaxing. He missed the students from the academy climbing up Midnight mountain and having a snowball fight. He missed the coalition of mothers who often followed Z around, introducing the boy to their own kids, who had also finally entered the Inn.

He missed the moment when all the new rooms he'd built were promptly occupied. He'd missed the moment when John exited the Mystery trial for the third time, suffering from rapid mood swings, going from depressed to frustrated and back. Most importantly, he missed the moment when Larry finally woke up.

It was safe to say that there were numerous things that Lex was unaware of that he would have thoroughly enjoyed, but until this ordeal passed, he would not be able to focus.

The next morning, the first thing he did when he woke up was scan the Inn for Miranda. Unfortunately, she was not there. Then he made a list of anyone he could potentially ask a favor from.

As much as he would have liked to ask the Morrisons for help, it seemed like they were not on good terms with the council and he wanted to avoid any unnecessary trouble. Eventually, his sight landed on Will Bentham.

The old man had come to the Inn in a wheelchair, but was now well on his way to good health. He had started cultivating again, and despite all the time he spent relaxing at the Inn, he was also a dedicated businessman. In fact, currently, he was having a meeting with some members of the Rose Society. His bodyguard, who had stopped appearing for a while, was also back.

He listened in to their meeting for a moment, and when he discovered they were in a good mood, decided that things had not turned out badly for them during the worldwide revolution. Putting on his glasses that disguised him as Leo, Lex decided to teleport directly outside Will's courtyard and knocked.

Hugo, Will's bodyguard, opened the door and was surprised to see Leo. He, like many other people, had memorized the faces of some of the prominent Inn employees. This Leo, who rarely appeared, had been titled one of the more mysterious ones.

"Excuse me for bothering you, my name is Leo and I run the Gamer's den. Is it possible for me to meet with Mr. Will?"

"Yes, come in. I'll let him know you're here."

Hugo guided Lex to an empty room and then hurried away to let Will know about the unexpected guest. He could have directly taken Leo to the old man, but he had a feeling that the young man wanted a private meeting, which was indeed the case.

Barely a minute later, the old man walked in with a warm smile and seemingly genuine delight. After a brief exchange of pleasantries, Leo got directly to the point.

"Mr. Will, it's slightly embarrassing for me to find you like this, but I had an urgent situation and wondered if you might be able to help me."

"Please, speak freely," Will said. Though Leo surely tried to hide it, as someone who was great in social situations, Will could immediately identify the various indicators of extreme anxiety. From the constantly fidgeting fingers, shaking leg, to the hurried speech and eyes that kept scanning the room, Leo had them all. He couldn't believe his luck that an Inn employee actually came to him for help. If he was able to do this, even if he got nothing in return, at least his relationship with the Innkeeper should improve, right?

"I am aware that you come from Earth. I have a... let's say friend on Earth who is extremely concerned about his family. If you could somehow help him get in contact with them, or reach them, I would greatly appreciate it. I will remember this favor."

"Transporting your friend will not be an issue at all. Where is he, and where does he need to go?"

"From New York to London," he answered.

"Extremely simple, consider the matter done." He took a piece of paper and wrote down a phone number.

"Have your friend call this number and let the driver pick him up. I will arrange everything else."

"Thank you, Mr. Will. I will give this to him straight away."

"Please, just call me Will. Such a small matter is not even worth calling a favor. It is my pleasure to be able to help you out."

"Thank you," Leo said, this time a little more heartfelt. "I won't forget this."

Without extending his stay, Leo left the courtyard, and then teleported back to his room. He was so excited, he completely did not pick up on Will's excitement.

Lex wasted no time and returned to Earth, and dialed the number he was given.

"I was given this number by Will, he told me to have you pick me up," he said, finally relaxing a little now that things were finally in motion. Though, he still had his armor underneath his clothes and the Heavy Harley hidden.

Half an hour later, he was sitting in a black car with tinted windows on his way to the airport. He did not notice that along the way, his phone ran out of battery, but even if he did he would not have been surprised. He spent very little time on Earth lately and hadn't charged his phone in a long time.

Fifteen minutes after he had left, several Bluebird agents appeared near the area where he had called from.

"Target has disappeared and his phone can no longer be traced," one of the agents reported on a call.

"Can you trace the person he called?"

"It was a private number, we can't trace it."

"Keep searching. The target is reusing his regular phone number so that likely means he still does not know he is being tracked. As soon as he shows back up on the grid I want him detained!"

"Understood."

The Innkeeper

Chapter 169: Growing up

"I just got word, the plane has taken off and is on its way to London," one of Wills assistants said. "We followed all the instructions you gave, there weren't any issues. Bluebird agents here, and the Royal Guard agents in the UK will all look the other way to any people getting on or off."

"Good, that will be all," Will said, as he finally let himself lean back into his chair. It had not even been an hour since Leo came to him looking for the favor, but he had handled it well. Most importantly, no one other than him knew anything about the details of their conversation, and he had kept strict control on information about the passenger as well. Even he himself did not know anything about Leo's 'friend' that was traveling in his private plane.

The driver that drove that passenger to the airport had been administered with a spirit disruption pill. It was not something that was harmful, but would cause the driver to forget everything that had happened during the past few days. It had no long term harmful effects, unless it was used frequently,

and the driver was well compensated for it. The pilot for the private jet and anyone else who had been in contact with the 'friend' would undergo the same procedure. Will was documenting all of this and would submit a report about it to Leo before even he himself would take one of those pills.

One would think that by causing him to forget the details of what happened, Will would be losing out on the value of the favor. The truth was to the contrary. As a man of the world, Will knew exactly how to ingratiate himself to people in power, and by doing all of this he would show the Innkeeper, or at least Leo, that he was someone reliable, so that in the future if they ever needed help, they would come to him.

He did not fear them coming to him for help repeatedly, what he feared was them having no use for him at all. As long as he was reliable, he had great value. As long as he was valuable, he would be taken care of.

This was the fundamental difference between Will and all his partners in the Rose Society. Since the Council had taken over Earth, they had contacted Will and many of his partners to acquire resources from them. So while the whole world destabilized, not only did Will and his partners excel, the council was heavily investing in their operations to help them grow.

Of course, the Rose Society itself was still a hidden organization and no one knew that all of these influential people from across the world were actually partners. That was the primary reason they were able to attract so much business. The council's agenda was to break up the monopoly held by certain groups that had previously been supported by the family heads. What they did not know was that they were, inadvertently, setting up another monopoly.

All of that was a matter for the future. What mattered now was that while his partners were indulging in their own success and celebrating, Will did not let success blind him. He was already making plans for what to do if he fell out of grace with the council by developing relations with the Midnight Inn. Slowly, Will was returning to his former glorious self, before he was struck with a nearly crippled body - and as his cultivation progressed and he regained his vigor, he would one day surpass his old self.

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Lex felt his thoughts wander as he sat in the private jet. This was the first time he sat on a private plane, but even with all the privilege it afforded, he did not think his experience was the norm. He didn't even have any documents on him, no one asked for ID or a passport - he was directly escorted to the plane that was waiting for him on the empty runway.

Like most other people, he hated the extreme privilege of the rich and powerful. But he also had to admit, the sofas on this private jet felt incredible!

As he waited in the plane, and his thoughts wandered, it occurred to him that he could still be transported to the Inn from the plane. If he teleported to the Inn right now, when he teleported back, would he still be in the plane, or would he reappear in the space the plane was in when he left?

He asked Mary who responded immediately.

"Isn't it obvious? You'll reappear in the plane! If the Inn used absolute positioning for teleportation, then if you stayed in the Inn for a few days and reappeared, you'd be in space because your planet would have already moved away from that space that it occupied when you left."

"Right, right, of course," he said, thinking it made sense. Yet he still had a few more hours to burn and he didn't feel tired enough to nap so he continued to have the randomest of thoughts.

"Hey, what if I get a guest that's microscopic? How will I see it? What if someone has a baby at the Inn? Does the baby get special privileges? What do I do if someone I know comes as a guest? What if it's someone I hate, do I still need to be nice to them? Where do the items I buy from the system come from? Is there someone called Botlam whose dew we are stealing? Where do the A.I.s come from? Does the system just make them out of nothing? Or does the basement have a creepy basement somewhere full of bodies to fit A.I. into?"

Lex kept asking questions, but never really gave Mary any time to answer. Eventually, after the longest seven hours of Mary's short life, they landed in Heathrow airport. Before they landed, Lex looked out the window to see how the city looked. It was difficult to tell from so high up but he didn't see any explosions so that was nice. After landing in the unusually empty airport, Lex was once again escorted to a private car. When asked where he wanted to get dropped, Lex pulled out his phone where he had saved his family's address, to finally realize it was dead.

Fortunately, after a couple minutes of trying to remember, Lex was able to recall the general area where they lived and told the driver. He'd be able to walk to his parents house once he was close enough.

As they drove by, they passed through various security checks conducted by heavily armed guards. After a very long, long time, Lex once again pulled out an item that would help him identify anything he missed. He put on the Fancy Monocle.

Immediately he was informed that all of these guards were equipped with spirit weapons, not just regular guns, and many of them had various spirit tech on them. Lex's war was being checked for weapons and explosives using some devices the monocle was able to identify, which gave Lex a small heart attack. He had the Heavy Harley on him. But it seemed like they did not care much for a single sidearm and let the car pass.

The city, while unable to match the regular energy New York had somehow managed to retain, was still quite busy. People could be seen walking around in small groups, keeping mostly to themselves. At least the city wasn't deserted. This gave him no small amount of relief since this most likely meant his family was also alright.

Eventually, after getting dropped off, he walked the familiar path home. When he was growing up, his family never had a fixed home as they traveled a lot globally. His parents were fans of such a lifestyle, and the kids learnt to love it as well. It was only after Lex left for higher education, while throwing a tantrum that his parents weren't letting them live normal lives, that his parents got this home in London. They still traveled a lot, but at least his sisters could stay in one place for high school and university.

He had three sisters. His elder sister, Belle, was the complete opposite of her name. She was cold and aggressive, and liked to do things her own way. When they were kids growing up, she used to wrestle with Lex a lot. He was not embarrassed about the fact that he never won. Anyone who knew her knew that maniac could not be completed with. But despite all that, in her own way, Belle took good care of her younger siblings.

After Belle, Lex was born, and after him came his younger sister Liz followed by the baby of the family, Moon. Moon was not actually a baby anymore, she was 16, or 15, or something along those lines, but as the youngest, she was spoiled by everyone. Not just the parents, even all the siblings spoiled little Moon. Her nickname 'Moon' originated from Lex's father promising to gifting the moon to her. To this his mother replied that the man had given her the same promise. Before the embarrassed man could defend himself, little Moon fell in love with the promise and kept ranting about it to everyone.

Liz, who along with Lex formed the duo of middle children, was by far the most normal of all the siblings. She loved and hated her family, depending on the mood, loved making friends, loved traveling the world, and at one point declared she wanted to go to France and fall in love. Any time she mentioned

wanting to fall in love Belle would beat her up, Lex found it hilarious, but of course as the victim of many beatings himself, never intervened.

Lost in his thoughts, Lex found himself in front of a small house far out in the suburbs. There was enough room for one car in the driveway and the house itself, despite its ground and first floor, looked extremely cramped. Yet this was home. And the front door of his home was broken - kicked in, by the look of it.

Lex's face darkened as he pulled out the Heavy Harley.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 170: Assistant to the mayor

The third Midnight game started in a heavy mood. Not only was the location a desert, a sandstorm was raging. There was no visibility and no way for Alexander to deploy his satellite in this weather. That was not to mention that he wasn't fully recovered from his previous wound. To top it all off, in the surprise attack Pramod had pulled off on the Jotun soldiers with the curse, over 300 of them had died and 800 of them were critically injured. Crawford-41 was also amongst the soldiers that died.

The only slightly positive thing was that Pramod no longer joined the games and had left already.

"Find shelter," Alexander said to his few over 600 remaining soldiers. Too many of them had been critically injured and could no longer fight for now. "We're going to hunker down and wait this one out."

Alexander felt it was unfortunate that he had to avoid fighting today, he would lose his lead in points over Cara, but it was better than being reckless.

But while the Empire and the Earthlings had suffered greatly, the Beasts took this opportunity to gain some points. Their performance had not been the best, but the difficult environment for humans posed no problems to them. The tournament was far from over.

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On Earth, the council was having yet another meeting. All the participating members were in a grave mood. Just a short while ago, they were celebrating their grand victory and subsequent freedom, only to be brought to heel by some mysterious 'mistress' and her secretary Fernanda. It was fortunate that she didn't have many requirements - only that civilians remain uninvolved in the conflict and to avoid major damage to the Earth.

The good news was, upon being given the ultimatum, they had responded quickly and eliminated those that could be, or made deals with those that could not be.

"According to the latest report, last night South Korea launched a surprise attack on the North. Within a single night they took over the country. Their attack was extremely precise and calculated, as if they had been preparing for this for a long time. We just received a missive from them. Starting today, there will no longer be a South or North Korea, only a single Korea. They've agreed to join the council so long as they can rule without any external interference. We've gone over a preliminary list of rules they plan to implement and have no issues, so expect one of their members to join us soon.

"The issue about Japan, however, remains. We've lost all contact from all of our agents, and we're not the only ones who've suffered as such. The entire country seems to have stopped all external communications. We're preparing a diplomatic envoy to go and meet with their leaders, but just to be safe, I want a Foundation realm expert on the team.

"Is there anything else on the agenda we need to discuss?"

The room was silent, and no one answered Bernard, who had been speaking. Aware of everyone's mood, he smiled and said, "No need to be upset my friends. This is not a bad thing. Previously, we were going to look towards the Midnight Inn to fuel our progress, but now we know that we have some kind of backing in this vast universe. In a week's time, we will meet Fernanda again, and then we can discuss the future of Earth. We are no longer limited to a single star system, and grander horizons await us."

His words seemed to lift spirits, but only Bernard knew what he was thinking behind his warm, hazel eyes.

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Lex did not rush into the house, but walked with quiet and steady steps. When he reached the door he paused to check for any sounds coming from the house, but there were none. He looked at the broken door and saw the imprint of a shoe embedded dead center. The door had broken along with the hinges. Such a kick could not have been delivered by an ordinary person.

Tightening his grip on his gun, Lex slowly entered the house, careful not to step on anything that would make any sound. He ignored the stairs leading upstairs and walked past to check the ground level first. The kitchen was at the far end of the corridor, the living room to the right, and a bathroom under the stairs.

Just as he entered the living room to check it out, the cold, hard barrel of a gun pressed firmly against the side of his head.

Lex froze, suddenly caught by surprise by how quietly and calmly the attack had caught him. Before he could make any plans or try anything though, a familiar, cold voice started to harshly scold him.

"What are you doing, walking around with a gun? Watched too many movies, have you?"

Relief flooded through Lex's veins as he recognized Belle's voice and turned to look at his elder sister.

It was not a gun she was holding up to his forehead, but the front of an unusually shaped candle stand. His own imagination had done the job of mistaking it for a weapon.

"Belle I'm so glad you're alright," he said, taking a step back to get a good look at his sister. She did not look hurt or harmed at all, and was dressed extremely formally. Behind her, Lex could see an open laptop and several documents. It seemed like she had been working when he came in.

"Why would I not be alright? You think everyone is as incompetent as you?"

"I saw the broken door, I thought that..."

"Yes, yes, the broken door. That gave little Moon quite the scare," she said, her voice seemingly still as cold and even as before. Only someone who grew up with her could pick up the trace of concern in that voice.

"Since you're here with a gun, I'm guessing you already know about the situation."

"Yeah, there's a war."

"Yes, a war. But it's very different from normal wars. They're not targeting cities or civilians, only the top brass. Well, that has nothing to do with me. The only reason we're even slightly involved was because I recently started a job in the municipal government. I had been having meetings with a few people of interest to the council, and they were checking to see if I was harboring anyone."

"Wait, you know about the council?" Lex asked, surprised. The only reason he knew about the council was because of the Inn - how did his sister know?

"Yes. They're very reasonable people. After I pointed out the flaws in a number of their plans while they were interrogating me, they hired me. If things go according to plan, I should be assigned assistant to the new acting mayor of London by the end of the month."

"What? I... you... what? You're... working for the council?"

"Yes, they were very impressed with me," Belle said in a bland voice. "Instead of an assistant, I might have become the new acting mayor directly if I was a cultivator. According to their new policy, only cultivators can hold important government positions like that."

"Wait, you know about cultivators?" Lex asked, even more surprised this time.

Instead of answering him though, Belle only let out an exasperated sigh.

"Do you have a list of things I shouldn't know about? Can we go over it right now? I hate having to repeat myself."

"No, no, that's not what I meant... just that I only learnt about cultivators myself recently as well. But now that you know, it's great. I won't need to bother explaining it to you. Do you have cultivation techniques? If you don't, I can find some for you guys."

"Don't bother with that, tell me first, are you ill? You don't look so good."

Lex was startled by her sudden question. As far as he knew, his tumor had not affected his appearance at all, but before he could answer, Lex fell limp to the ground, unconscious. Belle did not bother to stop his fall, with his constitution, he would be alright. It was his soul she was concerned about.

Taking a silver pen out of her pocket, she twisted the cap, shooting a ray of energy at Lex that covered his entire body. Since Belle did not know what secrets Lex had, she did not want to take any risks and completely blocked out all of his senses. Even Mary, who was connected to Lex by the system, did not notice his condition as her focus was diverted towards managing the Inn.

"Moon, get down here. Check Lex's soul, it's extremely unstable."

The teenager who had been spying on her siblings was startled when she heard her elder sister and quickly came towards Lex.

"I can't use my abilities like this. I need to connect to the relay station and establish a connection with my main body."

"Then why are you still standing here?" Belle asked, her voice still cold and bland. But little Moon picked up the impatience in her voice and quickly ran before Belle got angry.