

Innkeeper 181

The Innkeeper

Chapter 181: Wedding blades

Mary looked at Lex with a mix of frustration and pride. It frustrated her at how critically he was questioning her, but at the same time she was proud of how careful he was being. The system really was an entity that was beyond Lex's understanding. It let him confuse beings so much more powerful than him that currently, Lex could not even properly comprehend how weak he was. Using the system, he was affecting events on a galactic scale, if not universal yet. So an adequate amount of prudence was a good thing. It just made things slightly awkward for her.

"I can answer that question, there is a bit of leeway there. But if I answer it, you'll be able to draw a lot of conclusions, Lex. And those conclusions won't be any good for you, and will in fact get in the way of your growth. So, if you trust me, then I would give you the advice to stop asking questions about the system until you are much stronger. I'd say the minimum acceptable level would be Ragnar's. But if you still want to know, I can answer."

Lex wondered for just a moment, then dropped the matter. For better or for worse, he was stuck with the system. Even if it wanted to harm him, there was nothing he could do about it. Waiting until he got stronger was the correct move.

Lex clapped his hands and jumped off the bed.

"Alright then, let's get to work."

With that, both Lex and Mary disappeared from the white room and returned to Lex's apartment.

"Anything important happen while I was asleep?"

"A group of pirates entered the Inn. I don't know where they got the golden keys from, but they left as soon as they were sober enough to understand that our guards were stronger than them. They didn't cause too much trouble though, so that's good. Other than that, the fourth Golden Core Midnight game is currently going on. Tomorrow will be the last match, so you woke up just in time. Other than that, not

much related to the Inn has happened. Blane was looking for you, but you weren't available, so he said he would wait. He said he wanted to meet you privately, without his companions finding out."

"Blane..." Lex muttered as he scanned the Inn, and found the man sitting in the guild room with Chen, Lily and Iris, and watching the match.

"Alright, have his personal hologram tell him I'm available. If he wants to see me privately, he should step outside the room and I'll summon him to me."

The message was passed along, and a few minutes later, Blane excused himself and stepped out of the Guild room. Lex teleported him, but not to Lex's bedroom where he was when he sent the message. Blane appeared in a secluded campsite on Midnight mountain, overlooking the rest of the Inn.

Lex was already sitting on a bench, staring out at his Inn.

"I hope you did not have to wait too long," Lex said, without turning back. At the moment, looking at the Inn, he was feeling extremely emotional and didn't feel like putting up a front.

"Not at all. You must have many matters to take care of. I apologize for disturbing you."

Lex did not correct him, nor did he dissuade him from the excessive flattery as he usually would. He simply said, "How can I help you, Blane?"

"That... er..." Blane felt slightly awkward bringing up his request, but eventually worked up the courage. "I was hoping to get married to Iris, at the Inn. But eh... I didn't know if you would allow that here... and eh, I don't exactly know how to get married either."

Lex was startled by the revelation, and looked at Blane in wonder. He supposed it made sense, considering how much the man loved the woman. Lex just somehow never considered that someone might want to get married at his Inn.

"Well, of course, you can have a wedding. What do you mean you don't know how to get married? Don't they have weddings back at Vegus Minima?"

"People remember marriages, but, the way life was, it's probably been over a 100 years since anyone got married. After all, your partner could die the next day. Not to mention, there was no shortage of other problems to worry about. That isn't to say that there weren't any couples. But, at least I don't remember seeing anyone get married. Even Chen and Lily, their parents, probably weren't married. Wait, they probably don't even share both parents."

Lex was both amazed and filled with pity at listening to Blane's story.

"Do you have anything in mind about how you want to do it? Or would you like some suggestions?"

"I don't know how it's supposed to be done, but I have an idea. I wanted to..." Blane discussed his marriage plan with Lex, and as simplistic as it was, for warriors such as them, Lex felt like it was perfect.

Blane let Lex know that he had taken a loan from Chen for the wedding, and would pay whatever the Inn charged. Although technically this was an event, and Lex planned on using the event panel to hold the wedding, he only charged Blane 1 MP for the wedding. He wouldn't be so sentimental if the wedding had been happening at any other time, but currently he was very emotional and did not feel like charging the man for his wedding. If Alexander could get up and go to war on a whim, why couldn't Lex sponsor a wedding on one?

"Go back, I'll prepare things. We'll start at night," Lex said, and then sent Blane back. If he was gone too long, his friends might start wondering where he was.

Lex teleported to the absolute peak of the Midnight mountain. The peak was barely a dozen feet across and had nothing except snow. Furthermore, it was forever surrounded by clouds, making it invisible for anyone to view. But the peak also contained a secret Lex had prepared for any curious adventurers who climbed so far, but the secret would only reveal itself if the guests climbed manually and did not fly over or somehow use their cultivation.

Actually, the surprise was likely not a big deal to high leveled cultivators, but Lex liked it nonetheless. Once someone climbed to the peak, if the secret activated, they would be able to climb the clouds as well, as if they were solid, until they climbed to the top of the cloud. The view was a sea of clouds, illuminated by hundreds of sky lanterns. There was no need to embellish, as to Lex, the sight was absolutely amazing.

Lex activated the event panel and started the second event, which was Blanes' wedding. He built a small stage on top of the clouds, with a simple bonfire in the middle. The warrior did not want roses or flowers; he wanted simple and straightforward. Though getting married on top of a literal cloud was anything but straightforward, Lex could not help himself from up-scaling the wedding a little.

Then, using the event panel, he made two silver-colored daggers, each engraved with a name. Making these daggers was the real reason Lex wanted to use the event panel, as these were mementos related to the event. Without it, Lex would not be able to make them. They were nothing too special and had no attacking power over a normal dagger. But they would last.

A few hours later, once the match was over and night had fallen, Blane asked his friends to follow him. Curious about why their friend was acting so mysterious, they followed him to the base of the mountain, where the Innkeeper was waiting.

"Are you ready?" the Innkeeper asked.

"Yes," Blane replied simply.

With that, the Innkeeper gave a simple nod and teleported Blane, Chen, Lily and Iris along with himself to the stage on top of the clouds.

For a few minutes, everyone was stunned by the sight, as they had never witnessed anything like it. A cold wind blew over the clouds, but the gentle warmth of the bonfire kept everyone comfortable.

"Blane, what is this?" Iris asked, finally turning to look at her boyfriend. That's when she noticed that while everyone else was looking at the lanterns floating in the sky, as if stars that were within reach, Blane was only looking at her.

"Iris, I cannot say that the thought has never crossed my mind, but the time was never right," Blane began. By now, Chen and Lily were also observing him as an idea of what might be happening crept in their minds.

"Whether it was war or famine, or zombies or hunters, the future was too uncertain, and I did not want to make a promise that I would eventually break. But things are different now, and our lives have changed. Yet even if they had not changed, I would have no doubt in my mind that the reason I live, the reason I fight, the reason I survive is for you."

He took the silver knife that had his name on it from Lex, and cut the palm of his hand, staining the blade with his blood.

"I do not have much to give you, Iris, only the blood in my body. But if you will have me, then everything that is mine will be yours. Iris, will you be my wife?"

Blane held out the dagger to her with his bleeding hand, the drops of his blood falling into the clouds.

For a moment, Iris was too dazed to respond, but when she came to, she quickly cut her hand on the other dagger and exchanged it with Blane.

Before the man could spew more nauseating romantic lines, Iris had hurled herself into Blane's arms and kissed him furiously.

Throughout the process, Lex never got the opportunity to speak at all, and it appeared that he did not need to ordain the event. Just like that, with a simple exchange of blood and daggers, the first Vegus Minima wedding in over a hundred years took place amongst the clouds.

Lex did not receive any notifications or quests from the system, but he did not care. While he did not understand the metric with which the system judged events as important, he knew that he would remember this simple wedding forever.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 182: Qi training

Once the small wedding was over, Lex returned to his room and went to his study. Although, according to Mary, not many big things happened at the Inn while he was asleep, there were many things for him to do.

First of all, the Midnight Games will come to a close tomorrow. Once they concluded, many of the benefits he had been retaining would come to a close. Lex needed to plan accordingly. His first priority was security, but Mary advised him to put that on hold till after the event. When he asked her why, she only stated that the system would prevent her from answering. Since her advice about the bodyguard had been so valuable, he decided to trust her once again on this.

The next item on Lex's list was the personal holographic assistant every guest received upon entering the Inn. Although those personal assistants could not do any actual work, they were great at answering questions and disseminating information. Unfortunately, while they were cheap to procure during an event, buying them permanently was extremely expensive. In the end, Lex decided to purchase holographic assistants with only very basic capabilities as a permanent addition to the Inn for 500,000 MP. These holograms would answer basic questions, but could not do all the additional tasks such as provide a place for a private conversation, like Lex had with Larry, or send messages to other guests.

The third concern Lex had was rooms. While he did not go and buy a few more skyscrapers, he started planning for them already. When the time came, he would be able to directly make the changes he'd planned and thus avoid doing things haphazardly.

To cater to his preliminary vision, the size of the Inn would also need to be expanded, but obviously that was expensive. He needed to divide his MP between expansion of the Inn and construction of properties, and would do so based on his requirements. So, he would build and expand in phases. This was especially important because while he was earning an average of 1 million MP a day, he expected to see that number fall once the games ended. This was because a majority of that income was from food and gambling.

Lex worked directly through the night as he compiled plans, not only for the Inn, but for himself. He made himself a priority list so that instead of doing things randomly, he could make a focused effort towards getting certain results.

The priority list was:

1. Security
2. Lex's own cultivation

3. More infrastructure to cater to guests

4. More managers so he could effectively divide tasks and not overburden his AI

5. Teachers, not for his guests but for his staff. Lex expected to be in a state of constant expansion for the foreseeable future, and the AI he hired only came with basic knowledge. He wanted teachers who could constantly raise the quality of his staff and services. The lack wasn't so evident now, but that was only because his services were limited.

6. Entertainment for his guests. Only after the basic and important requirements to host a guest were fulfilled could he start thinking of entertainment.

7. Expansion. Ideally, he would expand before a need for it arose, so that he was always one step ahead, but a lot of it would depend on his MP expenditure.

For now, this is all he had on the list. He might add more items to the list, or revise the order of things as he saw fit, but it would serve him well at the moment. It was important that he keep reminding himself of this because an unorganized way of doing things would be inefficient, and Lex did not want to slow down at all as he was now determined to raise his strength.

Another correction he decided to make was how he behaved while in the Innkeeper persona. Previously, he was obsessed with letting everyone think that he was incredibly powerful and mysterious. However, this was a knee-jerk reaction caused by his own insecurity at being so weak while being surrounded by those so strong. In his mind, when he envisioned an Innkeeper, the image he had in his head was someone very close to the ground level, and someone who had a good relationship with his guests and clients.

Though he could not suddenly change his persona, Lex planned to slowly become more approachable instead of enigmatic.

With all his planning for the Inn taken care of, there were still a few hours until the last match began. This gave Lex just enough time to do something he was very excited about: start cultivating!

From now on, his cultivation would no longer be in the hands of the system and would require him to make his own efforts. In a way, this was tougher. But Lex preferred not to be too dependent on the system for stuff like this.

He left his study and went to the place where he usually meditated and sat down, cross-legged. He closed his eyes and began meditating. This was not cultivation, but would help him hone his state of mind for when he did.

For this next part, he did not need any guidance from Mary, as the Regal Embrace had provided him with the relevant information on how to proceed.

The body tempering realm, for humans, was about tempering the body internally to make it capable of absorbing and storing spiritual energy. An increase in strength and stamina was only a side effect of such a process, and not the preliminary purpose. As a result of this, depending on how one cultivated, there were often mortal athletes who were stronger and more physically fit than Body tempering cultivators. This is why, on the first day Lex started his self-defense training, he felt like some of his peers lacked in the fitness department.

Lex, of course, was strengthened to the extreme due to the prowess of his cultivation technique.

It was important to note that this description was only fit for spiritual cultivation, as body cultivators obviously honed their bodies well. Furthermore, if one wanted to be a body cultivator, while the stages were the same, the effects were different. It was exactly for this reason why, if someone wanted to dual cultivate spirit and body, they had to start both together as the body would undergo various changes in each stage.

If, for example, someone reached the Golden Core in spiritual cultivation, then decided to start cultivating their body, not only would they be unable to do so, chances were high it would even negatively affect your spiritual cultivation.

There were, of course, exceptions to everything, and maybe there were ways in the universe that would allow a person to start body cultivating at a later stage. But, in general, that was the exception and not the rule. Encountering such a situation could only be based on luck.

Naturally, none of that mattered to someone like Lex who would, henceforth, cultivate his spirit, body and soul all at once.

The next stage of cultivation was called Qi training. It did not matter much, but Qi was just another name for spirit energy. To be more specific, a single strand of spiritual energy was called Qi. In the various worlds, spiritual energy took on various names, and thus the cultivation levels were often called differently as well. Fortunately for Lex, his universal translator would translate all the different terminology into the same few words.

The reason for the next stage being called Qi training was because, since the body had only just become capable of withstanding the presence of spiritual energy inside it, a cultivator would begin by only absorbing a single strand into their body at a time.

Even then, with having only absorbed a single strand, the cultivator had to be very careful. This was because the body maintained an internal pressure that prevented the spiritual energy flowing around it from entering inside. By absorbing a strand of spiritual energy, or Qi, the cultivator was actively pushing against this internal pressure. This was a delicate process, as cultivators would be required to constantly breakthrough the limits of their body by absorbing Qi, but at the same time if they were too rough, the increase in pressure could cause a meridian in the body to rupture, which would severely damage the body. In extreme cases, if too much Qi was absorbed, the body could even explode - the reason why Bluebird tested Lex's cultivation. Such a test did not eliminate the possibility of something like that happening, but at least a faulty cultivation technique would no longer be the cause for it.

Meridians were extremely important, as they were the vessels in the body that allowed Qi to flow through them, the way veins and arteries transported blood. Without meridians, or with damaged meridians, it was obvious that one would not be able to cultivate. In fact, the very reason Larry had been unable to cultivate was because he was born without meridians whatsoever - though people did not know that fact. They only knew he could not cultivate from birth.

What Lex needed to do to go from Body Tempering realm to the Qi training realm was simply to sense spiritual energy. That's right, he didn't even need to absorb it yet. As soon as he was able to sense the energy with his body, he would officially breakthrough the realm and finally begin his cultivation journey.

The process for sensing spiritual energy was described clearly by Regal Embrace, and once he had calmed his mind and entered the most suitable state of mind, he began. Four minutes later, Lex, for the first time in his life, sensed spiritual energy and broke through to the Qi training realm.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 183: Ballom

Typically, while the realm had changed, something as simple as just sensing spiritual energy should not provide an increase in strength or capability. Yet that was not the case because what was happening was more than the body simply sensing spiritual energy.

A simplified explanation of it would be that the body was awakening. This was because, while during the body tempering spiritual energy was used to temper the body, the cultivator could not actually feel the spiritual energy, just the effects of it. So when a cultivator entered the Qi gathering realm, the action they performed was only sensing the energy for the first time, but the result was quite a bit more.

The cultivator usually senses the energy for the first time on his or her skin and that initiates an automatic process whereby the body starts absorbing spiritual energy. This spiritual energy does not count towards cultivation, and is instead absorbed by the body itself as it is elevated to a higher stage of existence. This elevation, in turn, would allow the cultivator to sense the Qi that entered their body henceforth, and even use the internal pressure of their body to manipulate the movement of the Qi within their body. The movement of Qi in certain ways was necessary to use spiritual techniques.

So, ultimately, that elevation to a higher stage of existence is what strengthened cultivators when they transitioned through realms. For Lex, the spiritual energy absorbed did a lot more. His soul, spirit, and body had been melded together under an external force, but the spiritual energy being absorbed now was finalizing the process. Once the process was complete, Lex would forever be different from all cultivators in the rest of the universe. This is when the true power of the cultivation technique with the strongest defense would start to show.

While the transition in the realm happened almost instantly, Lex remained seated for another hour before his ascendance was completed. When Lex opened his eyes and finally regained control of his body, he shuddered. The process of his soul, spirit and body melding was extremely painful, yet somehow it was the kind of pain one liked. The more he felt it, the more he enjoyed it. He shuddered because he had a flashback of Marlo calling him a masochist. But he wasn't! Honest!

Lex stood up, and all the bones in his body let out satisfying cracks as he moved. He stretched his limbs and tried to sense the difference. But, once his body had finished adjusting to the changes, he only felt normal. In fact, he felt like he had better and more precise control of his body than ever before! This was just one of the many side effects of his existence going from being into three different forms to joining into a single one.

He wished he could have had more time to experiment, but the last match was about to begin and Lex wanted to watch it in the coliseum with the crowds. He had to suppress his longing to experiment with spiritual techniques, test out his strength and even play online games with his newly developed reflexes. He would definitely do all those things once he had the time. For now, he only had one thing left that he had to do first.

He opened the event management panel and looked at the prize for games. Originally, he was going to go for the second cheapest option, since the cheapest already had such a positive reaction. But he also understood that to get, you also had to give. The better the reward he gave out this time, the more participation he could expect next time.

He looked at his total MP which, by now, had accumulated to 9,430,675. After a moment's consideration, he spent 1,430,675 MP on upgrading the final reward! A small bonus to anyone suffering from OCD was that he was left with an even 8,000,000 MP.

Once that was done, Lex donned his suit, looked at himself in the mirror, admiring his own dashing good looks, and was off. When he arrived at the coliseum, the match had already begun. By now Harriot, the zombie leader, like Pramod, and long since stopped participating in the matches. While that made the battle easier, considering the severe lack of forces from Earth, each of the battles was extremely tough.

Still, while Golden Core zombies were more formidable, it was a fact that zombies were inherently weaker than most beings at their level. With the Jotun forces' steady attacks and the Beast's savagery, they had won all the previous matches, and it seemed like the trend would continue.

While somewhat watching the match, Lex also paid attention to the various guests in the coliseum. It was mostly empty, as people watched from the comfort of their rooms or wherever they happened to be. But a few groups still watched in the coliseum.

He noticed that the two people who sat beside him on the first day, Remy, the guy who wanted to have meetings for a secret society, and Akihiko, the influential man from Japan who chose not to cultivate for some reason, were seated side by side, chatting.

There was a large group from Earth that consisted of a few core members, and the rest were merely their entourages. Surprisingly, there was one group that Lex summarized from snooping on their conversations, that consisted of Beasts from Earth, Vegus Minima and Nibiru. Lex recalled that Golden

hair had once requested everyone that they summon beasts from their respective planets, and it had finally happened - though Lex did not understand his incentive for doing this.

The largest group consisted of a mix of people and beast alike who were discussing their bets. It seemed there were a few core favorites that most bet on who seemed to perform well consistently. Rorick was, of course, one of them, but his points were too low. He fought very slowly and casually, though he always won and avoided all injuries. He also never tried to attack the node, and so had no contributions to boost his points. The biggest bet regarding him wasn't if he would die, but rather how many zombies he would kill before the game ended.

Suddenly, while Lex was enjoying watching his guests mingle, he got a very loud and abrupt notification from the system:

Warning! Entity capable of detecting system's signature detected! Going into hibernation mode!

The very next moment, Lex realized that he had lost his connection to the system and all its features! It was fortunate that the Host Attire kept its functions, but Lex was scarcely able to do anything at the moment.

He noticed, then, with the power of the suit, that two men had exited their rooms in the coliseum and were approaching him.

Perhaps if this had been before his breakthrough, Lex would have panicked at the sudden turn of events, but right now he was in complete control of himself. He wouldn't even need the Host Attires' help to control his facial expressions. So, instantly, he decided to play it casually, as if he were in a good mood.

He turned to look at the two guests but did not recognize them, but gave them a warm smile anyway. If the system had not been suppressed, his scan would have shown him that one of the men was actually Loretta in disguise.

"I hope you've been enjoying yourselves," Lex said calmly, as he turned his attention back towards the screen.

"Yes, my small vacation has been very... informative. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance. My name is Ballom, I'm Loretta's father."

"You may call me the Innkeeper," Lex replied as he turned to look, not at Ballom, but at the other man. Lex assumed this man was Loretta in disguise, since Ballom had brought her up, but did not say anything.

"Innkeeper, I was looking forward to your finale, but an urgent task has required my attention and so I must leave. It appears, some trouble has been brewing in the uncharted territories of space."

"I wish you well then, on your journey. If you ever need to rest while on your journey, please come again."

Balloon had been staring closely at the Innkeeper, trying to pry some information from his reactions, but got nothing. It was true that there was some trouble brewing for the devils, but what he wanted to see is if this trouble had something to do with the way the Innkeeper reacted that one time. It seemed that either it was unrelated, or the Innkeeper kept his matters close to his chest.

"Farewell then, I look forward to seeing you again. I hope that next time, I may invite you over to try our hospitality."

Lex merely smiled, but gave no response. A few moments later, both Loretta and the man disappeared.

A familiar ting went off in his head as the system gave him a notification:

System is back online.

Before Lex could ask any questions though, Mary appeared in front of him, filled with excitement!

"I can't believe how lucky you are!" She exclaimed. "Your reward for this quest will be huge!"

The Innkeeper

Chapter 184: Hells Butcher makes his move

"I'm lucky? What do you mean? And what happened to the system?"

"Yes, you're extremely lucky! That man, don't think of his name or he might sense it, was an incredibly powerful cultivator! He was even stronger than Bastet, who, by the way, was the sole reason your quest was upgraded enough for you to receive the Regal Embrace! Now imagine what influence someone even stronger than Bastet would have on your quest reward for this quest! Even if he didn't do anything, just merely entering the Inn during the period of the event should be more than enough to upgrade your rewards. At the same time, however, his incredibly high cultivation level is also the reason why the system had to go into hibernation. The chances were very high that a cultivator of his level would be able to detect the system if he came close enough and the system were still active."

Mary's reply was more or less what Lex imagined it would be. It was disturbing to know that his system could be exposed just by being close to certain cultivators, but there really wasn't anything Lex could do about that at the moment, so he stopped worrying about it.

Ironically, his reaction was a lot more calm than his own bodyguard. The Celestial was practically sweating buckets worth, even when his system came back online. Unlike Lex, the Celestials' authority with his system was a lot higher, so he knew a lot more about it, and the risks involved in having the system be detected. At the same time, he was also stressed because this was the first time he had encountered a being on that level. Not that there weren't other Celestials who had reached that realm, there were, but Celestials were so rare that even he had not met another in his long life. His longevity also spoke about how rare it was to encounter a being at such a level.

Yet after the fear faded, the Celestial was filled with endless ambition! Reaching the same level as that being was his goal, and the system provided him with an opportunity to do that, which is exactly why he was so concerned about raising his system's level. One day, he too would reach that realm!

Although Lex had relaxed, he was not happy about the fact that such a being had been in his Inn, and Lex had never even realized it. It wasn't Lex's fault really, considering that even though the Attire made him aware of everything that was happening at the Inn, unless he focused on it specifically, he would not be conscious of it. It was like how a person was always aware of the condition of their whole body, yet they probably wouldn't pay attention to something like the third toe on their left foot unless an itch or pain attracted their attention to it specifically.

So, while he was still free, he started scanning the Inn more thoroughly. Each sweep he performed slower than before, and paid attention to guests more to get an idea of who they were or what they were doing.

In true anticlimactic fashion, he discovered no other hiding experts, nor did he discover any secret meetings or impending conspiracies. The closest thing to a 'secret meeting' was the family heads from Earth, convening yet again to make plans - except Brandon, of course. Lex found it very curious to learn that Earth was secretly being controlled by some people out in the universe, that they were the ones responsible for keeping the peace that ensured cultivators did not kill mortals. At the same time, though, Lex had learnt so many secrets about the universe that he was not too surprised.

He didn't pay it much mind and stopped paying attention to them. He had to admit, albeit reluctantly, that other than their cultivation, these family heads really didn't have much going for them. They had easily been threatened into not returning to Earth by the council, and put their hopes in the fact that many years of service to Fernanda would ensure their return to power. Who could have guessed they would be discarded so easily? On the bright side, they had been informed that the threat of the nuclear bombs had been removed, and should they want to retake power, so long as they do not cause heavy casualties amongst the mortals, they would not be stopped. Unfortunately, there would be very targeted arrays and formations waiting for them the moment they returned to Earth. They were currently planning on how to overcome this obstacle.

But, considering they still did not even know about Marlo's increase in cultivation, Lex did not expect much from them. He turned his mind away from them and focused on the rest of his guests.

The Jotun presence was completely ready to evacuate once the games ended. In fact, many of the soldiers had already left. The beasts from Nibiru weren't particularly interested in the Inn anyway, and were only coming due to the pressure from Golden Hair, and could not wait to return.

For better or worse, it seemed like after a busy few weeks, the Inn would return to relative calm after the games. That would give him an opportunity to focus more on each guest specifically.

While planning things, he continued to watch the match as well. As expected, the beasts were in the lead. Lex paid special attention to the beasts so that he could learn as much about them as possible. At the same time, something he had only done today when his thoughts were flowing more smoothly was to connect his Fancy Monocle to a monitor that surveyed the entire Inn. This way, his Monocle's database would increase at an exponential level, and be more useful to him in his ventures to new planets.

Just like that, with Lex scanning his Inn and occasionally watching the match, with the guests mingling amongst themselves or going about their day, the final match came to a close. With 2,500 Jotun soldiers, 1,879 beasts and 144 Earthlings remaining at the end of the final match, the node was destroyed.

The participants were teleported back, some tired, some wounded, some dying, and some completely unharmed. While the participants were being taken care of, all the leaders turned their attention towards the Innkeeper, who had once again appeared center stage, with all the screens focused on him.

"What an immaculate performance by all our valiant participants. Such ferocity and camaraderie were truly a splendid sight to see, not in the least when it gave birth to yet another story of the righteous triumphing over evil. I could praise their efforts endlessly, yet, I think, they are more interested in their prize than mere words."

Lex's performance this time was coming off much more friendly this time, despite their vast gap in status to all his guests. This was mostly due to a shift in his own mindset, but also because now he was not so desperately hoping to fall into the state of 'flow' he sometimes encountered. Now, Lex did not need external aid as he himself was enough for this small task.

"Without any further adieu, I announce the winner of the Midnight Games, the beasts of Nibiru!"

As the Innkeepers' voice echoed, thousands of beasts broke into a cacophony of roars! They were looked down upon in the beginning for their ignorance, but ignorant as they may be, whether on their planet or over here, they reigned the strongest! For these individual beasts, the prize did not mean nearly as much as the validation of this mysterious being. Yet the sloth gazed upon Lex with expectant eyes.

"Though the winner has been announced, the award ceremony will be held in 6 hours. This is so that all those whose valiant efforts gave us this result may be able to recover, and receive the proper award with honor and dignity."

With that, the Innkeeper once again disappeared, much to the sloth's distress. But it recovered quickly, as a few hours changed nothing. It was also true that this would give the participants enough time to recover and be present at the ceremony in a much better condition.

Lex did it this way because, though they would get no individual awards, he wanted to give them some recognition. So, while it was not technically an award, he prepared something for the exceptional performers.

So, while during these final moments everyone got ready for the ceremony, back on Vegus Minima, Ragnar had struck with relentless fury! As soon as the final node was destroyed, the ships orbiting the planet detected the unique signature of the spawning portal. With the formation threatening to destroy the planet if a high leveled cultivator struck being disabled, finally unleashed his complete strength.

When Hells Butcher made his move, why would anyone else's support be necessary? The troops stood by as he eradicated the largest zombie hordes on the entire planet with nothing but a cleaver. Five hours later, while there were still some zombies left on the planet, they weren't nearly the threat they had been previously.

With plenty of time to spare, Ragnar took a nice, long shower, adorned his military uniform, and went to the Midnight Inn to watch the award ceremony. A couple of moments after he appeared, the ceremony finally began.

Authors Note: Read the Creator's thoughts below for some important information

The Innkeeper

Chapter 185: Simple days

In the haunted forest, as some of the kids from Earth had started calling it, Helen sat alone. Well, she wasn't alone if you counted the various peacocks, pigeons and squirrels that followed her. Though they did not need to rely on her to be fed, as they did in the early days of the Inn, they continued to follow her whenever they encountered her. They had formed a friendship that none of the new or recent guests at the Inn could form.

Helen did not mind, and in fact sort of preferred the company of these simple animals these days. She wanted to change something in her life, and until she figured out what exactly that was, she would spend her time like this. Sometimes, she imagined herself to be like those cartoon princesses that all the forest creatures loved and responded to. But she was no princess, nor did she want to be one.

She was sitting on a picnic blanket, and Velma had brought her a lovely basket full of sandwiches, pastries, some drinks, as well as some things she could feed the animals. Sometimes Velma would accompany her and ask her so many questions! In those days, Helen would share some stories of her childhood and schooldays with her. Though technically Velma was still in a school going age, she hadn't been back in a while. Velma especially loved gossip of any kind, and the more scandalous, the better. Yet, somehow, Helen felt like they had very different understandings of what constituted scandalous. The most outrageous scandal, according to Velma, that Helen had shared so far was once when their school organized a trip, but due to poor planning, left all the kids alone in a hotel unsupervised. The scandalous part, for Velma, was the abysmal service the hotel had provided to those annoying, bratty teenage kids. Today, though, Velma was too busy to join her, so Helen was back to her regular activities. Or so she had thought.

Normally, she would be playing with the animals and eating her snacks, but today her focus was on something else entirely. One of her little squirrel friends had brought her here and shown her something wonderful. It had had squirrel babies!

Unbeknownst to all, these were the first beings to be born in the Inn, and could be called true natives of this wondrous land. Helen only smiled and watched the new squirrel parents as they fussed over their babies and proudly showed them off to her. The sleeping babies were nestled in the mother's embrace, who seemed to be gloating at all the other squirrels watching. If she didn't know better, Helen could almost believe the other squirrels looked at her with envious looks. But she did know better, so why did she still think they were jealous?

This kind of behavior may seem unlike a normal squirrel, and though these squirrels had not yet cultivated, they were to some degree influenced by that once colossal change the Inn had undergone that had scared Bastet away. If one day they began to cultivate, they would be true prodigies. For now, they were simply proud parents that had a complex understanding of social relations between species, and knew how to make other jealous.

"You're not chipmunks," Helen said as she looked down on the babies fondly, "but I'll name you Alvin, you can be Theodore and you can be Simon. When you grow up, you can sing and put on a performance for me, and I will bring you delicious food from the Inn." Of course, no one other than her would know these names, but who cared? Helen had given names not only to these babies, but to many of the animals as well.

"Today is a day that calls for celebration. Let's have a feast!" she summoned her personal hologram and ordered a rather extravagant order of pet food, before holding her own feast for her furry friends. She made plates out of leaves and made all the animals sit around the picnic basket before beginning. They

seemed to be unusually obedient, as well as intelligent! She did not need to repeat her orders even once!

In the distance, Little Blue watched all the fun as it hid between the trees. It was too shy to approach on its own, but enjoyed watching all the fun, nonetheless. It had often seen Helen in the forest, and though she seemed nice, it still had a phobia of most humans. Secretly, in its heart, the baby whale wished Helen would discover it, and force it to join in their activities. Yet it was too good at hiding, and Helen never expected anyone to be spying on her, so its secret fantasies were left unfulfilled.

All the hubbub of the 'tea party' eventually woke the baby squirrels, and Alvin looked at Helen with curious eyes. It's parents talked to it and its brothers, as if explaining that Helen was their godmother. Helen smiled at them, but did not try to touch or pick them up. As much as she trusted the animals, being protective of newborns was a very strong instinct ingrained in all living beings, and she did not want to agitate them. She just waved and took a bite from an eclair.

As unusual as it sounded, and as strange as it may seem to an outsider to view, Helen truly felt happy during these short moments. She forgot to worry about the future and forgot the troubles of her past. The expectations she had for herself slipped away, followed quickly by the weight of the expectations of others.

In a small corner of the vast universe, these simple beings enjoyed their simple happinesses. Their activities neither touched upon the destiny of worlds, nor influenced the grand scheme of things, yet in these simple moments of shared joy, they captured one of the most profound meanings of life, one that often escaped even the wisest of beings.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 186: Endings

The award ceremony kicked off with a display of fireworks over the coliseum. It was nothing too fancy visually, compared to some of the big displays Lex had seen on Earth, but he noticed for the first time that the fireworks he had been setting off gave a unique fluctuation in spiritual energy that was pleasant to experience! Who could have guessed? Other than the sound of the fireworks, and the dazzling lights, another sensation had been added to the ones at the Inn. This made them wonderful in their simplicity.

After admiring the fireworks for a moment, he looked at the massive crowd. He recalled the nervousness he had felt the first day. He recalled how he had stressed over every single exchange, every conversation. He remembered his panic when the zombies had entered the Inn, followed by the devils

revealing themselves. It was not so long ago, yet at the same time Lex felt like so much had changed since. His Inn had changed a lot during that time, and so had he.

The coliseum was packed with beasts and humans alike, all looking at him. In one particular corner, Pramod, Harriot, Creel and Ahjour sat and watched as well. Well, at least some of them were watching him - Harriot's attention was solely focused on Rorick, whom she was pining for.

He noticed a few of his other guests that had stood out to him as well during this period, but Lex only chuckled and moved on, otherwise he'd spend the whole chapter - eh, no, the whole day reminiscing.

"Dear guests, we are gathered here once again, finally, to end this small interlude in our lives that has been the Midnight games. I think by now you will know that I am not one for long ceremonies, so we'll get right to the matters we have all been waiting for.

"The first order of business is to recognize that while for many of us, this was but a small interlude, for many, it was the end of a journey. They may not have wished for it, but regardless, they have become heroes for the people of a land, and so I commemorate them with this statue, so that their names may be remembered till the end of time."

He waved his hand, a fifteen feet tall statue appeared beside him. Cut from the purest of white marbles, the statue depicted a man with a sword, fighting side by side against an unseen foe with a wolf. They stood upon a rectangular base, upon which the names of all the fallen participants were written, along with a story of how they fought for the freedom of the people of Vegus Minima. Once the event was over, Lex would relocate this statue somewhere else in the Inn.

After giving a moment for everyone to admire the statue, Lex continued.

"Now that we have paid respect to those gone, a small commemorative token to those who participated in the games. May you remember your time fondly."

Lex snapped his fingers, and all those who participated in the games, whether in the cultural portion or the fighting, received a small golden token with the words Midnight Games engraved into them. The humans received rings, and the beasts received other small ornaments that they could wear in various places on their body depending on their species. Of course, many of those who participated in the

games were not at the Inn and had returned to their respective planets, but since when had distance stopped the system?

"And now, finally, for the award that everyone has been anticipating for so long." Lex turned his hand and, like a street magician, revealed the prize in his hand from seemingly nowhere.

"For the planet Nibiru, and its inhabitants, the prize will be a single drop of Bailey's Vitalizing Dwarf Star Ferment."

Lex waited a moment to see if anyone recognized the name, but it did not appear to be the case. It appeared that this reward was extremely rare, and not many knew about its existence or use. But that only made sense, when Lex received the reward from the system and read its description, he was amazed.

The reward did not look too spectacular, only like a drop of water that had a crystal suspended in the middle. Lex closed his hand into a fist, and the reward disappeared, already being teleported into the core of Nibiru.

"Since you all do not seem too familiar with the reward, I shall explain, briefly, some of its uses. The Dwarf Star Ferment has already been mixed into the core of Nibiru and will initiate a great change. Not only will it raise the Star rating of the planet drastically, over the next few years, and potentially give birth to a planet spirit, but all the natives of Nibiru will gain a massive increase in strength! For Beasts, your bloodlines will be refined into the best versions of themselves, or will undergo enhancing mutations! The chances for some Beasts being born with some extremely rare bloodline being born will increase greatly, and their cultivation talents will be vastly superior to their peers. As the planet changes, natural treasures will be born with every changing season, and opportunities will fall from the skies like rain in a monsoon."

Some people may have felt like Lex was exaggerating a little, but true to his word, he had indeed been extremely brief in the benefits it provided. Only those that lived on the planet would truly understand how much things would change soon. His mind went out to that little girl he had met on Nibiru, Tiffany, who had been called the carrier of the will of Nibiru by the system. She would likely benefit a lot as well, based on his limited understanding of the 'will of the world' and 'world spirits'.

The system had provided him with some information on those topics, but not much. But recalling all that would have to wait, as Lex didn't want his thoughts wandering. The same thing had happened to him when read the description for this prize and almost shed tears when learnt that the prize could also be

used on a human rather than a planet. Considering how beneficial it was to an entire planet, he could only begin to imagine what it would do for a person.

Different guests had different reactions to hearing his description, but Lex only focused on a few. First of all, the devils quickly noted down the benefits and whispered to one another about turning it into a prospective farm. Ragnar's eyes widened when Lex mentioned 'world spirit', but recovered quickly. The sloth, Golden Hair, had the greatest reaction, and was grinning as widely as possible.

It did not care about any other thing, just the increase in star rating meant that the planet would be able to bear the strength that he was unable to control, and he would be able to spend more time awake from now on. The most curious reaction, however, was by Marlo. He seemed way too excited for someone who should have no interest in this, since he could never go to Nibiru. What Lex didn't know was that Marlo's intuition had become extremely strong after his change into a Prime human, and his intuition was now telling him that an opportunity for his son's recovery lay on Nibiru after the change.

"And with that, dear guests, the Midnight Games are concluded! I hope you all enjoyed thoroughly, and had no complaints about your stay at the Midnight Inn. I hope you will remember the Inn the next time you are planning a vacation."

Contrary to what many expected, the Innkeeper did not disappear after his grand announcement, and climbed down from the stage and mingled with the guests. It was mostly some of the guests who wanted to introduce themselves before leaving, but not everyone took this opportunity. Many guests decided they would come and meet the Innkeeper later, once the crowd remaining from the event had all gone.

And indeed, many guests were leaving quickly. The soldiers had all retreated as they had work to do in clearing out the rest of Vegus Minima. The beasts also quickly disappeared, as they were eager to go home

Igishima, the tree, had thoroughly enjoyed its time at the games, but it too had to return home. But it saw itself returning often to the Inn in the future, after all, it had about 20,000 MP worth of winnings from betting to blow away.

Nibiru, Igishima's personal garden

Tiffany stared out into the large empty patch of land where Igishima normally slept. From her hiding place inside a hollow portion in a tree, all she could really do was look. If Lex saw her now, he would not recognize her at all. This was not only because she had grown a lot in height and size due to the many fruits she ate that increased her power, but also because of the various scars she wore on her body.

She could currently only see out of her left eye, as her right eye was swollen shut. Many of her bones were covered in hairline fractures, and her muscles screamed in pain as if they were being torn apart. In fact, once she had retreated from the latest battlefield and hidden here, her body had completely stopped responding to her. She was paralyzed, at least while her body finished healing. For reasons she did not know, she would always heal very quickly from her wounds. That was the only reason she was still alive.

Had Igishima been here earlier, it could have participated in the defense of what was once the Red Nation. As much as she had prayed for the Lord Protector's return before, she wished just as much that the tree would not return.

Yet since when did life go according to one's wishes? With a flash of bright light, Igishima returned to its home after weeks, feeling good. The feeling lasted barely a moment, as an ambush lay waiting for it. Several Nascent level beasts attacked at once, not giving it any time to defend.

Tiffany could only watch with a teary eye as the Lord Protector, once a mighty being that had protected this nation and its people and beasts alike, died and its legacy ended.

Back at the Inn, Lex received an unusual notification.

One of your guests with MP credit at the Inn had died. Transferring the MP to the inheritor.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 187: Just the beginning

Lex, who had been conversing with his guests, was extremely confused by the notification, but noting that it was not something urgent, set the matter aside for later. Currently, he was preoccupied with his

guests. Seeing that the Innkeeper wasn't actually disappearing, and actually greeting his guests, many wanted to take an opportunity to get acquainted.

Lex knew for a fact that even with his enhanced mental capabilities, he would never be able to remember all the people he was meeting, but Mary's memory was reliable so that was his reliance on if he should ever meet them again.

It was nearly five hours later that Lex finally got some room to breathe. By now, most of the guests were gone. He had gone from several thousand guests to only a few hundred in the span of a few short hours. Even then, of the few hundred, nearly 50 people were those close supporters of the family heads who were too afraid to return home. The Morrison family was still also here, but a few moments of spying let Lex know that they were already forming a plan on how to go back to Mars.

Despite ending the event, the coliseum had not vanished nor had the guards because, contrary to what one might expect, the official end to an event did not actually signify the end of that event. Normally, the end of an event would be followed by the cleanup and packing up of everything. While those were not of any concern to Lex, he had received 24 hours after the end to see off guests and make any arrangements if he needed. This was naturally important, considering that many of his guests had been staying at the coliseum instead of his actual residences.

Once he was done, he considered going back to his room, but then, on second thought, went towards Midnight Manor instead. Rather than teleporting, Lex walked into the restaurant inside and took a seat. Only a few other people were here, as Main Street had started pulling most of the crowds as of late, but that suited Lex just fine.

"Would you like something to eat?" asked Velma, who approached the Innkeeper.

"Bring me whatever was the most popular dish during the Midnight games," he told her as he leaned back in his chair. Noting the relative silence in the Manor, he recalled that he had been considering hiring a musician, but never got around to it.

Not giving it too much thought, he purchased another AI named Frank and had him start playing the piano in the lobby. The few people who were sitting in the restaurant instantly noticed when a soft melody started playing, as if to accompany them for the evening. A lot of them guessed that the Innkeeper was in a good mood, but none of them tried to take advantage of it.

A few moments later, Lex was served a dish that made him chuckle. How could he have known that the dish that was most popular during the games, enjoyed by humans and beasts alike, was a burrito? Not that it left him with any complaints.

For once, Lex enjoyed his meal out in the open, for his guests to see, rather than in the privacy of his room. Currently, he did not look like some overbearing entity that was beyond their comprehension, but like a simple man enjoying a burrito after pulling off a successful event.

Once he was done, Lex looked around the room one more time, then disappeared. Of course, before leaving, he also decided to pay for the meals of all the guests who shared the room with him. What was the point of being rich if you couldn't do things like that?

Back in his room, Lex ordered 100 more burritos - his new appetite would not be sated with just one, but he didn't want to embarrass himself by eating so much in public - and began looking at his notifications.

Much to his surprise, Igishima was the guest that died! The MP he had in credit had been transferred to his inheritor, whoever that was. That was quite unfortunate. This was probably the first guest that Lex knew of that passed away. He decided that he'd take special care of whoever Igishima's inheritor was, if he ever met them.

Then he looked over the rest of his notifications. Despite his heavy expenditure on the last minute trinkets and awards, he still ended up making a profit of 780,000 MP during the last day, bringing his total MP to 8,780,000. Now that he had only a few hundred guests left at the moment, he had to be a lot more careful with how he spent it.

Next, he went over a deluge of miscellaneous issues and matters, anywhere from how many Midnight Suits were left, what areas required more AI staff to manage high guest densities, a request from Gerard regarding upgrades to his golf cart and more.

To be honest, Lex was filling his time with small, less important matters because he didn't want to do anything big until he received his quest reward. The final wait usually felt the longest, so he kept himself busy so that time would pass faster.

Unexpectedly, the day passed by very quickly, and at last the massive coliseum disappeared from the Inn skyline. The hundreds of guards disappeared, and from his hiding spot from which he viewed the entire Inn, Lex's personal bodyguard vanished as well.

There were literally dozens of things he wanted to do now that the event was over, but first things first, it was time to view his quest rewards!

Quest Complete! The Host's rewarded is being calculated:

- Reward upgraded for having over 1000 participants!
- Reward upgraded for having participants many cultivation levels above host
- Reward upgraded for attracting attention of several Dao level cultivators
- Reward upgraded for changing destiny of 3 planets (Earth, Nibiru, Vegus Minima)
- Reward upgraded for hosting Dao Lord level guest
- Reward upgraded for spreading prestige of Inn
- Reward demoted for letting guests die
- Reward demoted for discriminating against guests (devils + zombies)
- Reward Rank: SSS+ -> Destiny rank achieved

Reward:

- Authority +1

- 1 Free Inn Expansion (Size double)
- Inn Star Rating + 0.5
- 1,000,000 MP
- 1 SSS Rank Protector recruitment token
- 1 Destiny Protection upgrade for Inn
- Unlocked Special System feature: Special Quests
- 1 System upgrade (blocked)

Remarks: With your tumor gone, who will you blame for your bad decisions? Quickly deploy preparations for the amnesia trope!

Notification: System upgrade reward blocked due to unknown errors! Reward being replaced! Reward received: Bathroom robe!

Notification: Set items detected! When items 'Bathroom Slippers', 'Bathroom robe' and 'Bathroom towel' are equipped at the same time, they will unlock a special ability!

Just like the last time Lex received a reward that upgraded his Inn, a subtle change swept through his Inn. A wave of spirit energy swept across the Inn, washing all of his guests in such concentrated and pure spirit energy as they could never have imagined.

It was unfortunate that the stronger guests Lex had recently hosted had already left when this happened, or they would get to enjoy untold benefits. Well, all the strong guests except for Remy, the man who wanted the Inn to be the official meeting of his secret society.

All of Lex's guests, whether they were the arguing family heads, to Marlo who was butting heads with his wife, to Chen and Blane who had once experienced this sensation before, immediately stopped what they were doing and sat down to cultivate wherever they were.

Since Lex himself could finally sense Spirit energy, he too was suddenly overwhelmed by the sensation of having a breakthrough, and had to stop pursuing his notifications to sit and cultivate instead. Those of Lex's workers who could sense spiritual energy also stopped all their tasks to cultivate.

The Galactic Sovereign Turtle that had literally just returned from Nibiru was so surprised that even as it sat down and retreated into its shell, it did not know why it was instinctively behaving this way. Little Blue suddenly felt sleepy and decided to nap on top of its father's shell. The gardener, who was cultivating an unusual technique given to him by the turtle instead of the one given by the Innkeeper, went into a daze as spirit plants that surrounded him started growing rapidly. Even the few extremely rare seeds Lex had received that had yet to actually sprout, despite the turtle's personal care and attention, vibrated just a little. Then one of them immediately burst open and formed a Lotus.

Only Mary, a few mortal guests and a few of the AIs who had not yet entered Qi gathering remained undisturbed during this time, and only they got to see how the Inn quickly began to increase in size as well. To be more specific, the Inn had doubled in size. It was no longer possible to easily see from one end of the Inn to another, unless one climbed the Midnight Mountain.

A few hours later, as the first of the guests who had begun cultivating finally stabilized their realms, opened their eyes to a world that seemed more magical than ever. But how could they know that for the Midnight Inn, this was just the beginning.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 188: Exploring Rewards

When Lex finally opened his eyes, he was so shocked he barely understood what was happening. He had only just entered the Qi Training realm, and yet a couple of days later he had a spontaneous, repeated breakthrough and entered Qi training level 3! A part of him wanted to believe that Lex was just an unprecedented genius of epic proportions when it came to cultivation, but knew that that was probably not the truth.

"Mary, what just happened?" Lex asked as he quickly started to munch on his burritos. He did not expect that raising your cultivation was hungry work, but he was starving!

"Your Inn's Star ranking was upgraded. The Midnight Inn is now equivalent to a 2 Star ranked planet and is now the ideal destination for higher leveled cultivators. Every time there is an upgrade in the Star ranking, the Inn undergoes a qualitative change. The initial burst of spirit energy during that qualitative change is extremely useful to all cultivators, but is not something that can be easily sought out.

"It is almost impossible to find spiritual energy of that concentration and purity, which is simultaneously very docile in nature. This is why, whenever a cultivator encounters such a wave, their body will naturally absorb it and strengthen their cultivation based on how much they are able to absorb. In fact, if you recall, Bastet and Falak also left shortly after one of your upgrades. I've always strongly suspected that the surge in spiritual energy is what prompted them to leave, for whatever reason. If you look out to the rest of the Inn, you'll notice that there aren't just a few of your guests undergoing a breakthrough."

Lex scanned the Inn, and he was flabbergasted. Almost all of his guests were sitting on the ground, cross-legged, and were cultivating wherever they happened to be. As amazing as it was, it was also incredibly dangerous! Just the Qi training stage was so dangerous it could cause ruptures in the meridians if not done properly, so one can only imagine how much more difficult it was in a higher realm. Yet all of them seemed to be completely fine. In fact, some were more than fine.

Lex immediately noticed not only Rorick but also Audrey Morrison breaking through to the Nascent realm, along with various other Earthlings making great progress in the Golden Core realms.

Lex let out a sigh. As great as it was that these cultivators were growing, Earth was currently too unstable. Their breakthroughs, albeit great for them individually, might destabilize the situation once again.

But while the growth of the Earthlings might be problematic down the road, his various AIs that were undergoing a breakthrough were nothing but great assets! In fact, Lex was astonished that any of them had reached the Qi training stage at all, but a quick glance let him know that at least a dozen of them had done so. Gerard, Velma, the gardener and nurse Jubilation were only a few amongst the many who had surprised him like this. And here Lex was feeling great about his own quick breakthrough, but had already been surpassed by his workers. He needed to start paying more attention to them.

Lex quickly moved on from that thought, as he had many things to do. He also noticed, during his scan, that the area of the Inn had expanded greatly! Furthermore, unlike when he purposefully expanded the edges, this natural growth happened differently. The land literally doubled, which meant the distance

between any two points was twice what it used to be. For example, the distance from Midnight Manor to Main street had doubled.

This was not necessarily a bad thing, as he felt that these two areas had extremely different vibes, and needed some distance from each other. Yet now, more desperately than before, Lex needed to figure out a way to fill in all that empty space. Landscaping was an option, but even that could only do so much. What Lex needed was a YouTube tutorial on city planning and rural development. And a vineyard.

Lex looked at his notification and read through it properly this time. While his reward had been increased for several feats he had accomplished, ultimately raising the reward ranking from SSS+ to Destiny rank, whatever that meant, Lex noticed that his quest rank had also suffered some demerits. One was because he allowed guests to die during his event, and another because he purposefully targeted zombies, and subsequently devils, which the system did not approve of.

Still, his rewards were plentiful. His authority had been raised once again, which came with the usual upgrades he could perform on his various buildings and a few new ones. The size of the Inn was also increased. The Inns Star ranking had been raised as well, which would definitely serve to attract more guests in the future. He received 1 million MP, which was always nice - who didn't like free money? But after this was when the new and interesting rewards began.

He looked at his inventory and saw the SSS Rank Protector recruitment token. He summoned the token that was in the usual gold color associated with the Inn, but was in the shape of a shield. The token that filled his hand also filled him with a sense of security, and put his mind at ease.

"Is this why you didn't want me to get security yet? Because you knew I would be getting something like this." Lex asked Mary, who was sitting on his shoulder.

"Yes, but not exactly. Though it may seem random to you, there is a method to the quest given out by the system, as well as the rewards. Ultimately, the goal is to help you grow the Inn. The quests you receive will progressively get harder as you complete them, but still, you managed to perform well over the expected level on this quest.

"Normally, you would have only received something to help you beef up security, but would require your supervision or control. Ultimately, the security would still depend on how you handle the situation. But this token is much higher ranked and falls into a completely different category of rewards.

"Similar to the unique opportunity token you used to get the Regal Embrace, when you use this token, the system will scan the entire universe for a suitable protector for the Inn who will be completely loyal to the Inn. But you still have to be careful when you make your choice. Suitable can mean many things, and you may not end up with what you want if you aren't careful."

Lex nodded. It was basically pretty much what Lex himself expected. Even when he was receiving the Regal Embrace, some of the rewards seemed questionable to him.

Then he turned his attention to the next reward. Apparently, he had received a Destiny Protection upgrade for the Inn, but got no description of what that meant. He could speculate on his own, but his understanding of the universe was too shallow, so he asked Mary once again.

"What does this Destiny Protection upgrade do?"

Lex expected to receive either a straightforward answer, or to be told he did not have the authority to know. Mary's answer, however, completely took him by surprise.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 189: Bathroom Set

With a confused look on her face, Mary said, "I... genuinely have no idea. The only information I received from the Inn says, and I quote, 'While at the Inn, one is protected from the influence of destiny'. Destiny is a very... abstract concept. I guess we'll have to wait till you reach a higher realm, or develop your own understanding of destiny to fully understand what this means."

Lex frowned. He could guess what destiny meant, but his understanding of destiny was heavily influenced by Earthly media and culture. In the context of the universe at large, it may have a different meaning. Either way, since the Inn provided protection from the influence of destiny, then he did not need to worry about it. Unless his destiny was actually very positive, then he felt like he may be missing out. But, again, this was based on his understanding of destiny as perceived by those on Earth. The reality may be different.

Putting the matter aside, he looked at the newest unlocked feature for the system, Special quests. Currently, there were no quests available in that tab, but the description of this feature was very interesting.

Special quests were ones that would become available to him from time to time based on special circumstances or during special occasions, and he could choose whether he wanted to accept them or not. Furthermore, the rewards for special quests were not predetermined, and he could actually specify what he wanted. His request may or may not be accepted, but would definitely be considered and influence the final reward.

That was it. That was all the information he was given, without any knowledge of what would qualify as a special event or circumstance, and what kind of quests he could expect. So far, all his quests were related to the Inn in one way or another, but Lex felt like this might not be the case for special quests, after all, his normal quests could handle those matters. Only time would tell.

Then finally came one of the most curious matters which was his System upgrade, or rather the lack thereof. It had been blocked, for some reason, and his reward had been replaced. There was no information whatsoever about why his upgrade was blocked or what caused it.

"Hey Mary, any idea why the system upgrade didn't work?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, confused.

"The system upgrade I got as a reward. It was blocked, and I got a different reward instead. Any idea why that happened?"

Mary looked at him curiously, then seemed to go through some records in her mind.

"I'm sorry Lex, but my records don't show any system upgrade other than the destiny protection one. The only remaining reward I see is the Bathroom robe."

Lex frowned as he thought about it. First, the upgrade was blocked, and then, according to Mary, he never received an upgrade in the first place. There was something fishy going on, but like so many other things when it came to the system, Lex could only sit back and wait till he got more information.

He turned his attention to the set equipment. He had no idea that his various equipment were a part of sets, and this opened new doors for him. For example, his Fancy Monocle was already amazing. If it was a part of some set, then he could only imagine what its effects would become once worn together. Lex

visualized himself wearing his Fancy Monocle, a Fancy Top Hat alongside a Fancy pocket watch, strolling in some forest, decimating wolves wherever he went. Realistically, he knew the system would never give him something OP, but one could dream.

With a smile, he woke up from his daydream and viewed the Bath robe and read its effects.

Bath robe:

When worn, the host enters an extremely relaxed state, as if just coming back from a day at the spa, boosting the host's comprehension. The host can use it to comprehend new techniques, understand difficult concepts, make various plans, etc.

Lex smiled. As unusual as it was to be wearing a bathrobe while working, he could see this benefiting him greatly while he planned various aspects of the Inn. He just had to be sure not to let anyone see him working like that.

Then he checked the set ability of wearing the Bathroom slippers and Bathroom towel at the same time.

Bathroom slippers:

Entering different areas requires different kinds of preparation. Equip the bathroom slippers while leaving the Inn in foreign environments to protect yourself from hazardous environments. Note, the slipper only provides protection from the environment and does not act as a defensive item.

Bathroom towel:

Don't you hate it when you get something disgusting on yourself? Cleaning up is such a hassle. The Bath towel rids the user of any negative statuses that are affecting the user via the skin, i.e. poison, paralysis paste, petrification, tracking powder, bad makeup etc. Can affect Foundation realm and below.

Bathroom set:

When all bathroom accessories are worn together, the Host is cleansed completely from both internal and external factors. Internal factors include soul poisoning, artificially induced inner demons, constipation, indigestion, bad breath, etc. External factors include tracking techniques, poisons, curses, body odor, dandruff, wrinkly skin, etc.

Note: Please collect more items from the Bathroom set to enhance the effects of the set.

Remarks: Since the host is too lazy to shower, the system has provided a solution. Please maintain a high standard of hygiene.

Despite being used to the system, and despite ascending to a higher level, giving him complete and total control of his body, Lex could not stop his lip from twitching as he read the remarks. He was an extremely clean person! No one had ever complained to him about body odor! If the system were a person, Lex would kick its behind!

Still, the set seemed extremely useful, especially considering there was no restriction on taking it out of the Inn. The original Butter Knife, now known as the Fruit knife, despite its amazing ability could not be taken out of the Inn. This would be useful to him when he was out exploring other worlds if he ever got into a precarious situation.

Slightly curious, Lex equipped the Bathroom set to see how it feels. The robe, warm and soft as it was, released a gentle energy that Lex felt wash over his body and pass through him. It was like being massaged by the hand of a hundred angels, and when the energy disappeared, Lex felt extremely refreshed and... lighter - both mentally and physically. It took less than a second for him to recall the set also cleansed him in case he was... constipated... and now he suddenly felt physically lighter...

"System, you are a goddamn pervert," Lex said loudly before he removed the robe and moved on to his next task. He could not help but stop to notice that he smelled like Lavender.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 190: Protector Token

Putting everything aside, Lex focused on the Protector token. There was no use in waiting to use it, as every moment he didn't was a moment he was left without protection. Without any further hesitation, Lex crushed the token.

Immediately, a display appeared before him with a few lines of instructions, which read:

Please wait while the system scans for suitable protectors of SSS rank. Please note, you may only select one of the displayed protectors. Please note, to protect the identity of the protectors, their names will not be displayed. Please note, the protector selected will be a real existing entity in the universe, and not a newly created AI. Any loyalty displayed by the protector will be a result of his/her/its particular circumstances, as the system will not influence or manipulate the mind of a preexisting being. Please note that while the protector will be subject to certain restrictions by the system as an employee, should the difference between cultivation realms between the host and protector be too vast, the system will not be able to prevent the protector from betraying the host in case the intention to do so should arise.

Lex could not help but chuckle. He should have known things were never so straightforward. Originally, he was looking forward to picking the strongest protector for his Inn, but now the situation had taken a dire turn. What should he do? It would depend on his options. Of course, it was more realistic this way as well. How convenient would it be if a Dao Lord directly agreed to be his protector?

But at the same time, even with the immense power of the system, how was it possible to restrict someone at that level? Even if not necessarily at the Dao Lord realm, any strong entity that realized that Lex depended on them for security might develop thoughts about gaining Lex's power. Even if they did not know about the system, it would not stop a greedy person from attacking an interrogating Lex. This was why choosing a protector suddenly became a lot more difficult.

Finally, the writing on the display changed, and five options showed up.

Protector A

Cultivation: ???

History: A lone warrior on a mission of vengeance, Protector A was left alone from the tender age of 8 when his family was killed by assassins. Escaping only due to the sacrifice of his siblings, this protector spent his life raising his skill and strength. He was eventually able to defeat his enemies and retook his place as rightful king. Once he became King, he gave rise to the most glorious Kingdom in the history of his planet, but even that could not escape from the sands of time. The King's cultivation rose endlessly due to his limitless potential, but only resulted in him having to watch as his new family died, and his once glorious kingdom eventually fell to ruin in the hands of his descendants. Defeated not by any enemy, but from the sorrow of his own heart, he roams the lands, searching for something that will not

fade before his eyes, and can accompany him on his endless journey of cultivation. Inviting him to the Inn, an entity even beyond his own strength, may invigorate his beat heart and plant the seeds of wanting to protect it in his soul

Protector B

Cultivation: Nascent

History: Once a valiant warrior with endless potential, this protector suffered a grave wound that nearly destroyed his cultivation and took his life. With the loss of his talent and potential, he fell into depression and has spent 100 years in bed. If his talent were restored, he could cultivate back to his peak and beyond on his own, and his gratitude would be endless.

Protector C

Cultivation: None

History: A protection formation array that gained sentience, but awoke only to discover that the sect it once protected had long since perished. A protection array without anything to protect, the array feels like its existence is pointless. Although unable to move, the array has endless potential and can grow limitlessly as it has a deep understanding of how to grow the strength of its own array endlessly. The only thing it lacks is resources. By inviting it to the Inn and providing it a place to protect, you could give its life purpose.

Protector D

Cultivation: Mortal

History: A pup that has just been born a few minutes ago. It has no cultivation, but has a bloodline that will allow it to grow extremely quickly, with the only limits to its potential being the kind of resources it can absorb. It was put to sleep the instant it was born, and so its personality is unknown, but could easily be trained.

Protector E

Cultivation: ???

History: The sun and the moon are her food, and her very existence defies fate. Her glory is boundless and her supremacy is without question. She was trapped by her Father on a planet in a deadzone known as Earth where she protected a village of humans who worshiped her for thousands of years, but eventually escaped due to her own ingenuity. Now free, the Protector sought to roam the universe freely, but her escape alerted her father quicker than anticipated. This Goddess of pleasure and prosperity is searching for a place where she may hide from her father, without losing her freedom. If allowed to hide in the Inn, she will be extremely grateful. Probably. As long as she is worshiped properly.

Lex read through all the descriptions and had several thoughts. The first of them being, in the entire universe, were these the only qualified protectors?

When he asked Mary, she gave him an answer he should have expected.

"No, these are not the only ones available, but the limit you have on options is only 5. It's similar to when you only received 5 options for your previous rewards from which you picked Regal Embrace. So, when the system discovers any 5 that fall into the qualification category, it stops the search and presents you with the information. So these aren't the only ones in the universe, but the first 5 the system encountered.

"Since you have raised your authority sufficiently, I can tell you that in the future, once your authority rises even more, you can enter the search parameters for such rewards on your own. Of course, the premise for that is to once again receive an award at this level. I'm going to be honest, I never expected you to receive such an award even once, let alone twice, and it'll only get harder in the future."

"Teh, lazy system. Okay, now that I understand that much... look at Protector E and tell me that isn't Bastet. That's definitely her, right?"

Mary read the description and... based on what she knew... it did seem like it. But how was that possible? This was too much of a coincidence, right? One may think it made sense, as she was probably somewhere close to Earth, and any scan performed by the system would find her first, but the system

did not work that way. The concept of space was vastly different from how mortals or lower leveled cultivators perceived it. The only thing she could chalk this up to was fate.

"Anyway, it doesn't matter if she is or isn't. She's not amongst the ones I was considering."

Lex's considerations were Protector C, the formation, and D, the pup. They both came with their pros and cons.

First, the formation. Since its primary purpose was defense and protection, using it to protect the Inn was perfect. Furthermore, as the formation was sentient, it could help guide Lex in letting him know how to strengthen and grow the formation. But for all the good it brought him, the sentience also presented him with a problem. Since the system could not guarantee loyalty, Lex felt hesitant about hiring it. He did not know what kind of personality the formation would have, and how effectively his orders would be. Lex was extremely vulnerable right now, and had to make a decision before any incidents could take place, after all, his Inn had garnered a lot more attention now, and from various groups of people. Lex was confident that he could continue to put on a performance so that the array would never realize how weak and dependent on it Lex truly was. Yet at the same time, a single slip up was all it would take to reveal that Lex was relying on the formation for protection. Of course, none of this truly even mattered if a random security incident ended up killing Lex while he was busy pretending to be strong in the first place.

If he showed any kind of weakness... well, Lex did not need to imagine what would happen to him. It was too dreadful.

Then he turned his attention to the pup. The system said it could grow quickly, depending on the kind of resources it was fed. Resources, with a bit of imagination on Lex's part, could easily be arranged. He rubbed his hands together like an evil villain in a movie.